

32nd Australasian Humour Studies Network Conference



Difficult Conversations

11-13 February 2026

Rutherford House, 33 Bunny Street, Pipitea
Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington
Aotearoa New Zealand



Kia ora koutou - welcome!

Welcome to the 32nd Australasian Humour Studies Network Conference! The theme of the conference is **Difficult Conversations**, which first sparked to life during the after-conference drinks at the AHSN 2024 conference in Brisbane. This spark was nurtured and fanned during AHSN 2025 in Adelaide, with two panels dedicated to cross-disciplinary (and cross-generational!) points of tension in humour studies. With a return to Aotearoa in 2026, we nurture spark into flame. Our call for papers challenged contributors to “address the frictions and fault lines” they perceive in humour studies. We are delighted to see that many of you have risen to the call and incorporated the theme into your papers. The theme is also resonant through the two keynotes and two special sessions we have organised for you. Across these three days the flame shall burn bright, then soften into embers, warming the future of humour studies in Australasia and beyond. Welcome to Aotearoa and to Wellington!

Your 2026 Conference Committee

Dr. Stephen Skalicky
Associate Professor Nicholas Holm
PhD Candidate Lydia N.C. Chan



32nd Australasian Humour Studies
Network Conference
“Difficult **C**onversations”

11-13 February 2026 | Aotearoa New Zealand

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32nd Australasian Humour Studies
Network Conference
“Difficult Conversations”

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Bespoke map of Wellington

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Network Conference
“Difficult C♥versations”

11-13 February 2026 | Aotearoa New Zealand

Schedule at-a-glance

Day 1 (11 February 2026)

10:00-11:00	Registration & Welcome morning tea
11:00-11:30	Opening ceremony
11:30-12:30	Keynote 1
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-15:00	Concurrent session 1
15:00-15:30	Afternoon tea
15:30-17:00	Panel 1
17:00-19:00	Welcome reception

Day 2 (12 February 2026)

09:00-10:30	Panel 2
10:30-11:00	Morning tea
11:00-12:30	Concurrent session 2
12:30-13:30	Lunch & Book launch
13:30-15:00	Concurrent session 3
15:00-15:30	Afternoon tea
15:30-16:30	Keynote 2
16:30-17:30	AHSN Review meeting
18:30-Late	Conference dinner

Day 3 (13 February 2026)

09:00-10:30	Concurrent session 4
10:30-11:00	Morning tea
11:00-12:30	Concurrent session 5
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-14:30	Closing ceremony
14:30-15:00	Farewell afternoon tea



Schedule

Day 1

WEDNESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2026

Venue: Rutherford House, Victoria University of Wellington, 33 Bunny Street, Pipitea

Time

Activity

10:00-11:00

Registration and welcome morning tea *Mezzanine*

11:00-11:30

LT 3

Official opening

Kerry Mullan (Chair of AHSN Board)

Stephen Skalicky (Conference Convenor)

Delegates from Victoria University of Wellington

11:30-12:30

LT 3

Keynote 1

Words, words, words and difficult conversations

Jessica Milner Davis (The University of Sydney)

Introduced by Nicholas Holm

12:30-13:30

Lunch *Mezzanine*

Day 1 (cont.)

13:30-15:00

Concurrent sessions

MZ 1

(TEAM)WORK

Chair: Meredith Marra

Humour in the police workplace: Discursive practices, collective identity, and negotiating boundaries

Marie Carlier (*UCLouvain [Iacchos]*, *University of Canterbury [visiting scholar]*, *Victoria University of Wellington [visiting scholar]*)

30 years and still laughing: Humour and the Language in the Workplace project

Bernadette Vine (*Victoria University of Wellington*), Janet Holmes (*Victoria University of Wellington*), & Meredith Marra (*University of Canterbury*)

Team pranks as a form of ridicule

Maren Rawlings (*Independent scholar*)

MZ 2

DEAL WITH IT

Chair: Kerry Mullan

The sociopragmatics of objectionable humour

Lara Weinglass (*The University of Queensland*) & Michael Haugh (*The University of Queensland*)

“It’s just banter”: Examining banter and its role in conducting research in sport

Stephanie Foxton (*University of Canterbury*)

“Check on your mates:” Encouraging difficult conversations as a byproduct of comedy about suicidality

Til Knowles (*Monash University*)

MZ 3

PSYCH!

Chair: Angus McLachlan

Were Gothic gargoyles funny? Integrating historical and psychological data

David Rawlings (*University of Melbourne*)

Direct and reported sarcasm: When self-perception does not match conversation

Gniewko Toruj (*Catholic University of Lublin*), Agnieszka Fanslau (*University of Gdańsk*), Piotr Kałowski (*University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw*), Julia Kuczmierowska (*Independent researcher*), Aleksandra Siemienuk (*University of Warsaw*), & Natalia Banasik-Jemielniak (*The Maria Grzegorzewska University*)

Fast Forward and the High Broadcast Moment: Television Sketch Comedy and the Conditions for Democratic Nationalism

Steve Vizard (*Monash University*), Mark Gibson (*RMIT University*), & Tony Moore (*Monash University*)

Day 1 (cont.)

15:00-15:30	Afternoon tea <i>Mezzanine</i>
15:30-17:00	<i>LT 3</i> Comedy in difficult times Panelists: Samantha Hannah, Lesa MacLeod-Whiting, & Daniel Vernon <i>Chaired by Nicholas Holm</i>
17:00-19:00	Welcome reception <i>Mezzanine</i>

Day 2

THURSDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2026

Venue: Rutherford House, Victoria University of Wellington, 33 Bunny Street, Pipitea

Time	Activity
09:00-10:30	LT 3 Constructing (? or construing) humour in Australian texts: Voice, character and narrative Robert Phiddian (<i>Flinders University</i>), Michael Haugh (<i>The University of Queensland</i>), & Jessica Milner Davis (<i>The University of Sydney</i>) <i>Chaired by Debra Aarons</i>
10:30-11:00	Morning tea Mezzanine
11:00-12:30	Concurrent sessions (see next page)

Day 2 (cont.)

11:00-12:30

Concurrent sessions

MZ 1

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Chair: Jessica Milner Davis

Advisable, inadvisable and inadvertent humour: Humour in the cross-cultural diplomatic workplace

Jocelyn Chey (*Western Sydney University*)

When the best translation is none: Cross-lingual meme humour on a China-based social platform (Xiaohongshu/RED)

Hanyue Qi (*Independent scholar*)

Understanding sarcasm in Polish: Factor structure and measurement invariance of the Sarcasm Self-Report Scale

Michalina Marczewska (*Catholic University of Lublin*), Gniewko Toruj (*Catholic University of Lublin*), Katarzyna Branowska (*University of Warsaw*), Agnieszka Fanslau (*University of Gdańsk*), Piotr Kałowski (*University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw*), & Natalia Banasik-Jemielniak (*The Maria Grzegorzewska University*)

MZ 2

I OBJECT

Chair: Peter Kirkpatrick

Has workplace humour been cancelled? A difficult conversation about constraint, ethics, and psychological safety

Barbara Plester (*University of Auckland Business School*)

The (meta)ethics of objectionable humour

Michael Haugh (*The University of Queensland*) & Lara Weinglass (*The University of Queensland*)

Bad impressions, difficult conversations: Nathan Fielder's The Rehearsal and "Autistic Comedy"

Bradley J. Dixon (*RMIT University*)

MZ 3

STANDUP OR SITDOWN

Chair: Benjamin Nickl

Show, don't tell: Adapting comic stage personas for the small screen

Alexander Sparrow (*Falmouth University*)

Interviewing Australian stand-up comedians on their creative processes and controversial material

Alex Cothren (*Flinders University*)

Rough chuckles: Laughter that rescinds comic licence

Mitchell Alexander (*Monash University*)

Day 2 (cont.)

<p>12:30-13:30 Lunch <i>Mezzanine</i></p>		
<p><i>MZ 1</i></p> <p>13:00-13:20 Book launch: <i>The Coloniality of Language in Digital Humour</i> by Beatriz Carbajal-Carrear <i>Introduced by Kerry Mullan</i></p>		
<p>13:30-15:00 Concurrent sessions</p>		
<p><i>MZ 1</i></p> <p>BLEEP BLOOP Chair: Beatriz Carbajal-Carrera</p> <p>When the punchline is non-human: AI, improvisational comedy, and the difficult conversations of humour studies Anqi (Angel) Wen (<i>The University of Sydney</i>)</p> <p>It just gets me! Facts, feelings, and device intimacy Benjamin Nickl (<i>The University of Sydney</i>)</p>	<p><i>MZ 2</i></p> <p>DEFINING THINGS Chair: Alex Cothran</p> <p>Revisiting the term ‘gallows humour’ Carmen Moran (<i>Charles Sturt University</i>)</p> <p>One book to rule them all: Will the Handbook of Humour Studies save us? Moirra Marsh (<i>Indiana University</i>)</p> <p>Extricating laughter from humour Angus McLachlan (<i>Federation University Australia</i>)</p>	<p><i>MZ 3</i></p> <p>EDUMACATION Chair: Lydia Chan</p> <p>Examining L2 learners’ ability to respond to humour online Caleb Prichard (<i>Okayama University</i>) & John Rucynski (<i>Okayama University</i>)</p> <p>Humour as pedagogy: Facilitating Chinese language education for ethnically diverse learners in Hong Kong Catherine Shee-hei Wong (Hong Kong Metropolitan University)</p> <p>The role of humour in the language classroom: Differing views from instructors Peter Neff (<i>Doshisha University</i>) & John Rucynski (<i>Okayama University</i>)</p>

Day 2 (cont.)

15:00-15:30	Afternoon tea <i>Mezzanine</i>
15:30-16:30	<i>LT 3</i> Keynote 2 Telling the audience who they are: A weak theory of comedy Sarah Balkin (<i>University of Melbourne</i>) <i>Introduced by Stephen Skalicky</i>
16:30-17:30	AHSN Review Meeting (Board and Review Panel members and conference organising committee only) <i>MZ 1</i>
18:30-late	Optional conference dinner: Waitoa, 175 Victoria Street, Te Aro, Wellington 6011 (see Bespoke map of Wellington)

Day 3

FRIDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2026

Venue: Rutherford House, Victoria University of Wellington, 33 Bunny Street, Pipitea

Time Activity

09:00-10:30 Concurrent sessions

MZ 1

LAUGHTIVISM

Chair: Michael Haugh

Non-seriousness in Ukrainian war-time Tweets – a reflection on how Geolinguual Studies and Humour Studies could work together

Kerry Mullan (*RMIT University*) & Carolin Biewer (*University of Würzburg*)

From meme to meaning: How Thai queer humour plays with rights in the “Nong” online community

Tinnaphop (Tintin) Sinsomboonthong (*National University of Singapore*)

Fighting like a woman: Humour and taboo language in response to the Equal Pay Amendment Act

Meredith Marra (*University of Canterbury*)

MZ 2

DECOLONIZING HUMOUR

Chair: Debra Aarons

Rethinking the difficulty of Humour Studies through a Blak lens

Angelina Hurley (*Griffith University*)

Conversations between linguistic and decolonial approaches to reconceptualize attention

Beatriz Carbajal-Carrear (*The University of Sydney*)

Māori humour as postcolonial critique

Daniel Burgess (*Massey University*)

MZ 3

TOON TOWN

Chair: Robert Phiddian

Capitalist perversions in Futurama

Holly Randell-Moon (*Charles Surt University*)

Artistic autonomy and ‘No-Go Zones’: Shifting freedom in the field of Western political cartooning.

Alena Radina (*University of Technology Sydney*) & Jack Cameron Stanton (*University of Technology Sydney*)

Survival tools or political weapons?: How icons travel and transform

Marina Hamanaka (*The University of Tokyo*)

Day 3 (cont.)

10:30-11:00	Morning tea <i>Mezzanine</i>	
11:00-12:30	Concurrent sessions	
MZ 1 (DIS)INFORMATION Chair: Stephen Skalicky The Right Amount of Funny: Humour, Risk, and Responsibility in Public Service Advertising Daniel Fastnedge (<i>Auckland University of Technology</i>) “Experts warn we have only 12 years left until they change the timeline on global warming again”: The harm of right-wing humour in climate change discourse Olli Hellmann (<i>The University of Waikato</i>) “Biden appointed Zelensky to ruin Russia”: Accidental humour in confrontational dialogues with Putin supporters Ludmilla A'Beckett (<i>University of the Free State</i>)	MZ 2 ID, PLEASE Chair: Nicholas Holm Ambiguous laughter: The visibility paradox of sexual humour in Chinese gay vlogs Hanwei (Mateo) Wu (<i>Massey University</i>) The jokes tell themselves: A preliminary investigation into humour within political live streaming content Geoffrey Lee (<i>The University of Sydney</i>) Mocking looks: A reading of jokes deriding physical appearance within the Indian comedy scene Suchi Chowdhury (<i>RMIT University</i>)	MZ 3 AHH! GROSS! Chair: Barbara Plester Dangerous animals: The changing face of Australian horror Peter Kirkpatrick (<i>The University of Sydney</i>) The gag reflex Debra Aarons (<i>University of New South Wales</i>)

Day 3 (cont.)

12:30-13:30	Lunch <i>Mezzanine</i>
13:30-14:30	<i>LT 3</i> Awards and closing ceremony Scholarships & Jessters Chair: Kerry Mullan
14:30-15:00	Farewell afternoon tea <i>Mezzanine</i>

Abstracts

Keynote 1

Words, words, words and difficult conversations

Jessica Milner Davis, *The University of Sydney*

“The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’

‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’”
(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 1871).

Definitions are always fraught, and when a term is used by several different disciplines, it is indeed a question of who will be master. Humour studies is quintessentially a multi-disciplinary field of studies. Whenever it aspires to cross those disciplines, the terminological fight is on. Even with good will (not a guaranteed ingredient), reaching agreement can be difficult.

In 2023, Jenny Hofmann, a cognitive psychologist, and I, a literary scholar by training, published a theoretical schema of what we called the humour transaction. It took us seven years to achieve this, and we learned a lot along the way. We presented our draft at several different AHSN and ISHS conferences as well as a European Summer School on Humour and Laughter, and gradually we bridged the conceptual and terminological gaps between us. Our conversations were difficult but respectful. In fact, we discovered we were co-authoring not just a paper but also a ‘Glossary of Humour-Related Research Terms’ (published as an online Appendix to the main article).

This address will focus on some key glossary entries to explain how over time usage in social science on the one hand and cultural and literary studies on the other has come to differ and/or clash in meaning. When psychologists say ‘style’ for example, they focus on patterns of personal behaviour, whereas for humanities scholars, style describes aspects of genre or specific examples of humour. Such terminological differences are rarely acknowledged by either side, with consequences that lead to what Humpty Dumpty would call the moral of the story: in humour research, always define your terms -- and consider paying them extra for meaning what you want them to mean.

Reference

Milner Davis, Jessica and Jennifer Hofmann. 2023. Glossary to the Humor Transaction Schema. Appendix A, J. Milner Davis and J. Hofmann (2023), 'The humor transaction schema: A conceptual framework for researching the nature and effects of humor', in *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 36(2): 323-353. Open access: <https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2020-0143>

Jessica Milner Davis is an Honorary Associate at The University of Sydney in the School of Art, Communication and English, and co-ordinator of the Australasian Humour Studies Network. A Member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and Research Affiliate with Brunel University's Centre for Comedy Studies Research, she has held Visiting Scholarships at Bristol, Stanford, Hofstra and Bologna Universities and taught regularly at the European Summer Schools on Humour and Laughter. In 2017 she was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales in recognition of her interdisciplinary work, and in 2018 received a Lifetime Achievement Award for Humour Research from the International Society for Humor Studies. She is an editorial board member for leading humour research journals and book-series. Her books include *Farce* (Routledge, 1978, 2003), *Satire and Politics: The Interplay of Tradition and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), *Understanding Humor in Japan* (2011), *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters and Humour in Chinese Life and Culture* (with Jocelyn Chey, Hong Kong UP 2013 and 2015), and *Judges, Judging and Humour* (with Sharyn Roach Anleu, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Her latest book is *Humour in Asian Cultures: Tradition and Context* (Routledge, 2022).

Keynote 2

Telling the audience who they are: A weak theory of comedy

Sarah Balkin, *University of Melbourne*

In their introduction to a 2017 special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, cultural theorists Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai suggest that comedy creates “critical rigidity” in a way other genres do not.¹ This rigidity, which results from people’s strong reactions to the feeling that their pleasures have been disrespected, can take different forms. For example, Berlant and Ngai argue that two respected comedy theorists, Simon Critchley and Alenka Zupančič, are guilty of category errors when they map common distinctions—funny/not funny; subversive/conservative—onto ideas of “true” and “false” comedy. Berlant invokes critical rigidity in another way in an essay on humorlessness, where they observe that “virtually all comedy theorists are structuralists” for whom “the comic encounter is defined by who is up and who is down; what’s repressed and expressed; known and disavowed; hidden and surprising; free and unfree; functioning and malfunctioning.”²

In this talk I suggest a different approach to the politics of comedy grounded in the comedian’s direct and indirect address to audiences across media. Drawing on historical and contemporary examples of how a comedian constitutes and negotiates with their audience, I argue that we can better understand comedy’s transformative potential through the ways it co-creates what an audience shares. This “weak” approach to the politics of comedy helps address the critical rigidity of comedy theory by locating comedy’s meanings and effects at the juncture of performance and reception.

References

1. Berlant, Lauren, and Sianne Ngai. “Comedy Has Issues.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2017, pp. 233–49.
2. Berlant, Lauren. “Humorlessness (Three Monologues and a Hairpiece).” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2017, pp. 305–40.

Sarah Balkin is a Senior Lecturer in English and Theatre Studies at the University of Melbourne. She earned her BA (Honours, 2004) at the University of California, Los Angeles and her MA (2009) and PhD (2012) at Rutgers University. She has published widely on comedy, theatre, performance, genre, and literature from the nineteenth century to the present.

She is the author of *Spectral Characters: Genre and Materiality on the Modern Stage* (University of Michigan Press, 2019) and the co-author (with Marc Mierowsky) of *Comedy and Controversy: Scripting Public Speech* (Cambridge University Press, 2024). *“Deadpan” and the Nineteenth-Century Emergence of a Comic Style* is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press in 2026. Her articles on contemporary stand-up appear in *Theatre Research International* and *Comedy Studies*. In 2025 she guest-edited an issue of *Comedy Studies* on “The Comic Audience.” Other current research examines the contract between performer and audience in contemporary stand-up.

Plenary sessions

Comedy in difficult times

Samantha Hannah, Lesa MacLeod-Whiting, & Daniel Vernon

Join three Wellington practitioners of comedy and satire for a conversation about what they think about the difficult conversations and challenges of making comedy in confronting times. How do they navigate controversy in comedy? Do they think there should be limits on humour? And what's their opinion on people who study humour for a job?

Samantha Hannah is a Scottish comedian based in Wellington, currently nominated for the Billy T Award. Her debut solo show 'How to Find a Husband in a Year' documented a dating experiment that led her to New Zealand. Her follow-up 'How to Find Happiness (in a Year)' sold out at Edinburgh Fringe, was a Funny Women finalist, and filmed for NextUp Comedy. In New Zealand, she's had sold-out NZICF runs with 'Female Lady Women Comedians', been nominated for multiple Wellington Comedy Awards, and launched podcasts 'Are We Pals?' (Best Online Production winner, NZ Comedy Guild Awards 2024) and 'Myternity Leave'. Her comedy blends storytelling, stand-up and high-concept themes.

Lesa MacLead-Whiting is an award-winning comedian, writer, improviser, and co-founder of Shut Up & Dance from Wellington. Starting stand-up in 2020, she quickly made her mark at the National Raw Comedy Quest Final. Co-founder of the improv company Tiny Dog, Lesa debuted her solo show On-Brand at the 2023 NZ International Comedy Festival, earning a nomination for Best Newcomer. In 2025 her second solo hour, Rebellina, was nominated for the Billy T Award. She's the co-host of the Are We Pals? podcast with Samantha Hannah and made her debut in the Best Foods Comedy Gala in Wellington. Audiences love her absurd characters, political satire, and fast-paced audience interactions.

Daniel Vernon (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Te Wairoa) is the creator behind the hugely popular yeehawtheboys comics, known across social media for their sharp political satire, warm humour, and affectionate digs at Aotearoa's quirks, culture, and institutions. Vernon is also the frontman of DARTZ - an Aotearoa Music Award-winning post-pub rock band whose chart-topping releases are similarly rooted in humour and political satire. His work across both mediums is united by a distinctly Kiwi comedic voice and a deep love for the communities that inspire it.

Plenary sessions

Constructing (? or construing) humour in Australian texts: Voice, character and narrative

Robert Phiddian, *Flinders University*, **Michael Haugh**, *The University of Queensland*, & **Jessica Milner Davis**, *The University of Sydney*

When we approach unfamiliar texts, how is it possible to identify that someone's behaviour or something said is intended as humour? Linguists have one way to do this, literary scholars another. The general reader does it by intuitive means: but is this good enough in scholarly terms? Humour scholars from several different disciplines will contribute their own perspectives on these questions, seeking answers. Robert Phiddian (Flinders University) will address the issues of narrative versus authorial voice, the use of irony and satire, Michael Haugh (University of Queensland) will apply pragmatics to analysis of teasing and humorous utterance, and Jessica Milner Davis (University of Sydney) will explore the co-construction between writer and reader of character and how that contributes to our understanding of narrative and dramatic humour.

Robert Phiddian is a Professor of English at Flinders University, Adelaide. He trained in 18th century literary satire, especially Swift and his contemporaries. His interests (and publications) have since branched out to include political cartoons, the theory of parody and satire, Australian satire, and some elements of performed and screen satire. In 2021-2, he was the Ross Steele Fellow, State Library of New South Wales and made a detailed study of early Australian magazines and journals and their humour. In 2023, he is the Charles J. Cole Fellow at Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. He is CI, with Richard Scully and Stephanie Brookes, on the ARC Discovery Grant “Cartoon Nation: Australian Editorial Cartooning – Past, Present, and Future” (2023-26).

Michael Haugh is Professor of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Queensland. His research interests include pragmatics, conversation analysis, intercultural communication and Humour Studies, with a particular focus on the role of language in social interaction. He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and is currently leading the establishment of the Language Data Commons of Australia (LDaCA) (<https://www.ldaca.edu.au/>) and the Australian Text Analytics Platform (ATAP) (<https://www.ataap.edu.au/>), along with being co-director of the Language Technology and Data Analysis Laboratory (LADAL) (<http://ladal.edu.au>) at the University of Queensland.

Jessica Milner Davis is an Honorary Associate at The University of Sydney in the School of Art, Communication and English, and co-ordinator of the Australasian Humour Studies Network. A Member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and Research Affiliate with Brunel University’s Centre for Comedy Studies Research, she has held Visiting Scholarships at Bristol, Stanford, Hofstra and Bologna Universities and taught regularly at the European Summer Schools on Humour and Laughter. In 2017 she was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales in recognition of her interdisciplinary work, and in 2018 received a Lifetime Achievement Award for Humour Research from the International Society for Humor Studies. She is an editorial board member for leading humour research journals and book-series. Her books include *Farce* (Routledge, 1978, 2003), *Satire and Politics: The Interplay of Tradition and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), *Understanding Humor in Japan* (2011), *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters and Humour in Chinese Life and Culture* (with Jocelyn Chey, Hong Kong UP 2013 and 2015), and *Judges, Judging and Humour* (with Sharyn Roach Anleu, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Her latest book is *Humour in Asian Cultures: Tradition and Context* (Routledge, 2022).

Presentations

The gag reflex

Debra Aarons, *University of New South Wales*

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I present some of my joint work on *Playing with Food: Language, Humour, and Disgust*. I focus specifically on disgust as displayed in relation to food and the body, and dwell on how and why disgust and humour are so closely connected. Aside from the obvious and near universal human amusement at the sound and smell of flatulence, starting in infancy, there appear to be some phenomena that engender visceral responses at all ages. I look first at the highly charged responses to the smell, taste and look of the products of bodily functions and consider whether it is feasible to claim that some visceral responses are culturally conditioned. As a case in point, I examine disgust at different kinds of foods and investigate the linguistic and physical expression of disgust. Finally, I highlight the extent to which disgust and the language of disgust implicate and evoke humour.

“Biden appointed Zelensky to ruin Russia”: Accidental humour in confrontational dialogues with Putin supporters

Ludmilla A’Beckett, *University of the Free State*

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This paper examines the humorous aspects of communication with Putin supporters on charity websites that are raising money for Ukraine. The data were collected during the second year of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and consist of three threads from online dialogues of Ukrainian supporters with pro-Russian conspiracists. The investigation draws upon studies of conspiracy theory discourses (Demata et al., 2022) and the sociopragmatics of online humour in virtual dialogues (Tsakona, 2024; Dynell, 2009). It focuses on “accidentally humorous” narratives constructed by conspiracists in an attempt to delegitimise the verifiable claims of their opponents. The study targets contradictions in the claims of pro-Russian commentators, including clashes between facts and constructed reality and mismatches between the constructed and revealed identities of the conspiracist (Breeze, 2022).

Analysis of dialogue dynamics shows that the conspiracists pepper their virtual dialogues with claims about their privileged and exceptional knowledge, and their regrets about the lack of understanding displayed by their opponents. At the same time, the humour episodes reveal the unfamiliarity of these self-proclaimed experts with the Russia-Ukraine conflict. They also contradict their own beliefs. The accidentally humorous narratives emerge unintentionally when the conspiracists, in response to their interlocutors (Ilie, 2022), elaborate on the correlation between their fundamental ideological viewpoints and the structure of landmark events.

The accidentally humorous narratives could be placed somewhere between jokes and irony as they incorporate incongruous components similar to jokes and negate previously made claims, similarly to echoic irony (Wilson & Sperber, 2007). These dialogic developments could be understood as an unintentional self-parody.

Rough chuckles: Laughter that rescinds comic licence

Mitchell Alexander, *Monash University*

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In performing stand-up, a “comic licence” is granted by an audience, which allows comedians to broach controversial topics on the proviso that doing so is funny (Ships & Trusolino, p.4). Scholars contend this licence is granted by laughter, and rescinded through acts like heckling, silence, or leaving (Balkin & Mierowsky, p.27, Wilson, p.287). This paper argues that there are different types of laughter a crowd can make, and that one of those types can rescind or challenge the comic licence.

Sometimes during a performance, controversial, offensive or unacceptable material elicits a deep, scoffing laughter from a crowd, what I am terming a “rough chuckle.” Rough chuckles complicate the existing simplistic view of laughter being a binary means of an audience providing comic licence. In eliciting a rough chuckle, I argue the audience momentarily rescinds the comic licence before returning it in the same act, allowing the performance to continue mostly without disruption, but castigating the comedian with a visceral warning as to the limits of their licence. The rough chuckle thus has a chastising effect on comedians.

The literature currently does not conceive of types of laughter an audience can elicit when considering the comic licence (Aarons & Mierowsky 2017, Balkin 2023, Harbridge, 2011), something this paper challenges comedy scholars to engage in. Doing so will allow for a reimagining of potential audience actions, beyond homogeneous laughter as affirmative, and heckling, silence, or leaving as negation. To argue this, I use live audience ethnography and performance analysis of recorded performance, alongside interviews with comedians and audiences, to demonstrate that the rough chuckle is a substantively different audience act than regular laughter, and to evidence the notion that it performs a different role regarding the comic licence.

By analysing types of crowd laughter, we can further understand audiences’ roles in constructing, granting, challenging and rescinding comic licence and how it reflects audiences’ willingness to engage with difficult conversations.

Māori humour as postcolonial critique

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On Billy T. James' (Waikato-Tainui/Ngāi Te Rangi/Ngāti Ranginui) influence on Aotearoa New Zealand's comedy, Josh Thomson remarks "the ghost of Billy T haunted every comedian, and even now, holy smokes" (NZOnScreen). Not only is James Aotearoa's most-beloved comedian, but also an enduring representation of Māori in popular media. James' platform was especially important for a postcolonial Aotearoa; where, as a comedy-hybrid of multiple cultural influences, his comedy often spoke to colonialism and race with a large Māori and Pākehā audience.

While some viewers of *The Billy T. James Show* (1981-1988) may have heard what they wanted to from James' controversial comedy (i.e. racial stereotypes) or deemed it offensive, within Aotearoa's historical context, I conceptualise James' comic treatment of colonisation and race as a form of postcolonial (but not decolonial) critique. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity and mimicry, with assistance from Dustin Bradley Goltz' "comic performativities," I will explore how identity can change comedy's potential meanings. Concerning this, I will textually analyse James' sketch-series "A History of New Zealand," with close attention to its cultural, societal, and political aesthetics and their related contemporary contexts and postcolonial histories (Holm 12-15). Importantly, this intervention does not suggest James' comedy is then somehow innately positive; quite the opposite, his comedy still has the potential to be offensive and harmful. Instead, it is on this precipice of potential humour and offense where Billy T. James' comic hybridity and colonial mimicry can be most effective as a site of negotiation (Billig 2005)—and thus, a postcolonial critique.

Through this presentation, I therefore seek to contribute to the underrepresented Indigenous perspectives within the historically Western project of Humour Studies, while exploring the boundaries and complexities within Māori comedy and humour as a potential negotiatory space for postcolonial critique.

Conversations between linguistic and decolonial approaches to reconceptualize attention

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Traditional pragmatic theories have mainly attributed the success of communication, including humour instances, to cooperation and relevance principles. Such theories have shown an emphasis on intentional processes while neglecting attentional processes. Against this body of theories, the Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) to Pragmatics proposed by Kecskés demonstrates a dual emphasis on cooperative intention and egocentric attention as dimensions of communication. This framework pays balanced attention to the tensions between intention and attention, cooperation and egocentrism in communicative exchanges. And yet, despite its contributions, the Socio-Cognitive Approach presents limitations in its ability to explain power relations. First, the framework does not account for the broader sociocultural spheres where egocentrism is inserted and how this may affect attentional processes. In addition, the Socio-Cognitive Approach could benefit from introducing important concepts from decolonial, raciolinguistic and sociological research, such as the notion of white gaze.

As a response, in this presentation I offer a reconceptualization of attention as outlined in the Socio-Cognitive Approach to Pragmatics by establishing a conversation between the linguistic notion of attention and concepts from the Latin American decolonial turn. The presentation starts by introducing the challenges derived from canonical linguistic theories exclusively centred around attention. Next, the strengths and weaknesses of the Socio-Cognitive Approach to Pragmatics are outlined. As a result, the need to establish interdisciplinary conversations with frameworks that can shed light on power relations is emphasized as a condition to advance the conceptualization of attention in a more historically and socially situated manner than conventional pragmatic theories. From this interdisciplinary perspective, I propose the decolonial subdimensions of attention: Eurocentric attention and Pluriversal attention. Their distinctive definitions, components and areas of emphasis are described as a novel framework for the study of responses to humour.

Humour in the police workplace: Discursive practices, collective Identity, and negotiating boundaries

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Humour fulfils a variety of different social functions (Holmes, 2000; Schnurr & Plester, 2017). Specifically in occupations marked by frequent exposure to violence, humour has been observed to function as a “collective defense mechanism” (Dejours, 2000; Emirbayer, 2025), helping professionals cope with demanding tasks (Nielsen, 2011). Yet humour can also be dysfunctional, perpetuating power dynamics (D. L. Collinson, 1988; M. Collinson & Collinson, 1996; Holmes & Marra, 2002).

This research explores how humour is practiced among police officers in a Belgian station, with particular attention to its gendered dimensions. As a historically maledominated institution, the police force is undergoing demographic shifts, with increasing numbers of younger female officers entering the profession. These changes are reshaping gendered dynamics, newer generations challenging previously accepted joking practices, leading to renegotiations of what is considered appropriate. The research also examines how specific jokes are received in light of these shifts, revealing both resistance and adaptation.

I will focus on the concept of “boundaries”: examining when humour ceases to be humorous, and how these boundaries are negotiated in everyday interactions (Goffman, 1974), and investigates how individuals self-regulate their humour, and what informal or institutional strategies emerge when boundaries are crossed.

Drawn from my ongoing PhD research, and over two years of ethnographic fieldwork – including shadowing, i.e. a “way of studying the work and life of people who move often and quickly from place to place” (Czarniawska, 2014, p. 92) and semi-structured interviews (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004), this study reflects on how officers use and interpret humour in their everyday professional interaction. Grounded in an interdisciplinary framework that bridges sociolinguistics, sociology, gender studies, and the psychodynamics of work, this research hopes to offer a nuanced perspective on the interplay between humour and power relations, gender norms, and professional identities within policing.

Advisable, inadvisable and inadvertent humour laughter: Humour in the cross-cultural diplomatic workplace

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Some personal experiences of humour in high-level cross-cultural workplaces within the context of Australian diplomacy in China, Hong Kong and Canberra are reflected upon as examples of proposing, sharing and reacting to humour in both formal and informal cross-cultural exchange. Case studies include the inept use of humour by senior representatives unaware of cross-cultural sensitivities and translation pitfalls; the proposal of jokes to reduce or prevent escalation of tension; and the insertion of hidden messages in jokes to evade censorship and other barriers to effective communication. The author was engaged in Australia-China trade and cultural relations for more than two decades and since retirement has researched humour in Chinese cultures and languages.

This topic relates directly to the theme of the conference, which is *Difficult Conversations*. By referring to conversations in an Asian or cross-cultural setting, it will enlarge the perspectives of Humour Studies researchers beyond the common Anglosphere setting.

Mocking looks: A reading of jokes deriding physical appearance in the Indian comedy scene

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Joking about individuals not considered attractive by conventional standards is not new. I present a reading of two jokes made by two stand-up comedians in India targeted at mocking looks. One—which was tweeted—is premised upon the populist agenda of statue-building targeted at a Dalit political leader. The other—which was told at a stand-up comedy “roast” event—is premised upon Catholic clergy abuse targeted at one comedian by another.

In scholarship (Ambade, 2023; Das, 2024), the statue joke has been criticised as casteist, sexist, and misogynist. In other scholarship (Parthasarathy, 2017), the clergy joke has been interpreted as “cool”. The first was made by Abish Mathew, a Catholic comedian, targeted at Mayawati, a Dalit (low caste) woman. Mayawati, who was chief minister of an Indian state, is known for commissioning multiple statues of herself and other iconic Dalit figures, in high-visibility public spaces in her state. In his joke, Mathew draws links between Mayawati’s appearance and her statue-building commissions underscoring her supposed unattractiveness. The other joke was made by upper-caste Hindu comedian Ashish Shakya targeting Mathew, at a high-profile event, in which a panel of comedians “roasted” Bollywood figures as well as each other. Shakya mocked Mathew’s supposed unattractiveness drawing links between Mathew’s childhood involvement in church activities and clergy abuse.

I compare and contrast the jokes in the contexts they were made. The statue joke was unwelcome. The clergy joke, likely not so, given it was made at a “roast”. I explore their common themes of cruelty and their different fallouts reflecting upon their ethical implications within stand-up as a relatively new cultural form in India and their broader political ramifications in the nation.

Interviewing Australian stand-up comedians on their creative processes and controversial material

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This presentation reports on the findings of an interview-based study on stand-up comedians' creative processes when dealing with controversial material.

Since at least the rise of political correctness in the 1990s, there have been claims that the creative potential of comedy is being hampered by increased audience sensitivity to topics such as race and gender (Saper 1995; Khorsandi 2021). This debate has flared up again in recent years on the back of various high-profile controversies, such as the backlash to Ricky Gervais' and Dave Chappelle's jokes about trans people (Goktas 2023). Comedians such as John Cleese (in Bergeson 2022) have described how fear over severe audience backlash can hamper the creative process. In response, other comedians have claimed that increased audience sensitivity only improves the creative process, challenging artists to move beyond stale topics and joke structures (Shaw 2018). Increasingly, this debate is being pulled away from good-faith discussions about artistic craft into a wider culture war (Nicolai & Maesele 2024).

This study aims to intervene in an increasingly partisan debate by injecting scholarly rigour into the analysis of how changing audience expectations and/or sensitivities are affecting the creative processes of stand-up comedians. It interviews 12 Australian comedians, asking them a) what they perceive to be the current topics that might generate controversy; b) what their creative process is when navigating these topics in their stand-up writing and performances; and c) whether this process has changed in recent years due to audience expectations or pressures.

To ensure the findings reflect the experiences of current, working comedians, the participant pool was drawn from Australian stand-up comedians with a full show at the 2025 Melbourne International Comedy, with three spots each for male, female, queer & non-binary and POC identifying comedians. Interviewees include Andrew Hansen, Bridget Hasted, and Anna Piper Scott.

Bad impressions, difficult conversations: Nathan Fielder's *The Rehearsal* and "Autistic Comedy"

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This paper proposes that comedian and performer Nathan Fielder practices a distinct form of comedy that could be described as "Autistic comedy". In the parodic reality series *Nathan for You* (2013–2017), and its spiritual follow-up *The Rehearsal* (2022–), Fielder plays a highly fictionalised version of himself as host, staging interactions with "real" people not in on the joke of his persona. He generates cringe humour by failing to follow the rules of interpersonal interaction, subjecting his participants to abject awkwardness and embarrassment. Characterised by deadpan expression, an inability to follow social norms, and an apparently muted sense of empathy, Fielder's on-screen persona has long been embraced by neurodivergent viewers as resonant with the experience of being on the Autism spectrum. Although he has never publicly disclosed a diagnosis or claimed a neurodivergent identity, Fielder has spoken of researching Autism to inform his behaviour when in "character" as himself. This is most evident in *The Rehearsal*, which explores neurodivergent themes through heightened, comedic depictions of common Autistic traits including masking and rehearsing social interactions. In "Washington", an episode from the show's recently completed second season, Fielder finally addresses the subject of his own neurodivergence directly, visiting an Autism advocacy organisation and attempting a diagnostic test with results indicating the strong possibility of neurodivergence. But this is not a straightforward claiming of identity: Nathan, at least on-screen, rejects the label. *The Rehearsal*, like much of Fielder's comedy, represents the Autistic experience in a way that feels authentic and validating to neurodivergent viewers while simultaneously rendering its complexities understandable to the neurotypical. Whether Fielder is Autistic is impossible to determine from the vantage point of the viewer. However, building on concepts of parafictional persona, parareality, and the scholarship of neurodivergent phenomenology, this paper asks: can Fielder's comedy itself be described as Autistic?

The Right Amount of Funny: Humour, Risk, and Responsibility in Public Service Advertising

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Humour is often a valuable tool in public service advertising (PSAs), where campaigns must cut through the clutter, capture attention, and prompt meaningful reflection - often on limited budgets. Yet humour also carries risk: it can confuse, trivialise, or overshadow the seriousness of the social issues it seeks to illuminate. This paper explores the idea of the “right amount” of humour in PSAs, where the balance between levity and gravity is especially delicate.

Drawing on my research into New Zealand’s Keep It Real Online campaign, I examine how humour was used to address sensitive topics such as pornography, online grooming, and privacy without resorting to shame or moral panic. The campaign’s awkward, playful tone encouraged open, intergenerational conversations, using humour not to distract but to disarm - enabling audiences to laugh, reflect, and engage.

By contrasting this approach with examples where humour in PSAs has gone too far, or not far enough, I consider how communicators might recognise and measure an effective balance. From a perspective grounded in advertising, public engagement, and social change, I ask what constitutes “the right amount” of humour, who gets to decide, and how cultural context shapes those judgements. While this discussion is situated within the PSA domain, it invites a broader interdisciplinary dialogue about where humour works, where it fails, and how it can make difficult conversations possible.

“It’s just banter”: Examining banter and its role in conducting research in sport

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Humour can perform multiple functions and is a key resource for the construction and maintenance of good workplace relationships (Plester & Hutchison, 2016; Holmes, 2006). Within the context of male-dominated professions, like sports organisations, banter has been found to foster inclusion amongst members (O’Dwyer, 2023) but it is also used as a communication strategy to exclude female colleagues (Watts, 2007). Despite multiple studies, banter remains complex terrain. Within sport, it is often considered part of the culture (Abell et al., 2024). This often results in all forms of banter, both inclusionary and exclusionary (Lawless & Magrath, 2023), being accepted without question. Addressing the conference theme, this paper aims to reflect on methodological approaches, namely the relationship between the researcher, participants, and banter when conducting ethnographic research.

Using approaches from Linguistic Ethnography and working in collaboration with a cricket organisation over a period of five months, analysis draws on a dataset comprised of ethnographic fieldnotes and ca. 25 hours of audio-visual recordings of naturally occurring workplace interactions (e.g. office small talk and team meetings) and follow up interviews. Previous research indicates that banter is often considered an inevitable part of male-dominated workplaces (Wright, 2016). Therefore, it is unsurprising that it forms an integral part of the linguistic repertoire established by group members within the data.

For the present study, bantering with participants played a key role in achieving in-group membership. However, by engaging in group banter with participants, did the researcher unintentionally condone exclusionary behaviour? Analysis of the data demonstrates how banter (and other forms of jocular abuse) is used to gain and maintain acceptance into the in-group, and while it may not always be negatively intentioned, it often (re)produces exclusionary discourse.

Survival tools or political weapons?: How icons travel and transform

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This study explores the derivative forms of Handala, the iconic character created by Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali (1936–1987), to examine how visual culture negotiates the divisions between local and global contexts. Since October 2023, following the escalation in Gaza, Handala has re-emerged as a prominent icon in global protest and solidarity movements, particularly across social media, extending beyond the local context of Palestine. While Palestinian history and memory have long been examined through literature, history, and anthropology, visual media such as photography and film have received increasing scholarly attention, yet graphic art and political cartooning remain marginalised and are seldom considered within the framework of Humour Studies. This study addresses the gap by focusing on Handala's contemporary significance and its derivative forms, contributing to existing scholarship in three respects: (1) reassessing the role of visual media, (2) rethinking methodological frameworks, and (3) challenging dominant narratives with an emphasis on marginalised expressions. This study analyzes derivative forms of Handala that have emerged since the 2000s—in graffiti, protest banners, and digital media—illustrating how the character circulates across borders and acquires new meanings. It argues that Handala not only visualizes the fractures within Palestinian society but also serves as a bridge between local and global contexts, thereby contributing to the formation of a transnational political culture. Using the concept of adaptation (Hutcheon, 2006) and drawing on the perspective of symbolic struggles (Sato, 1992), alongside recent discussions on adaptation in literary and visual studies (e.g., *Literature and Adaptation II*, Ogawa and Yoshimura, eds., 2021), the study examines how the political icon is re-appropriated across diverse media and transnational movements. In doing so, Handala challenges Humour Studies to move beyond the paradigm of laughter, urging consideration of how visual culture can express silence, resistance, and the possibility of dialogue. Ultimately, the contemporary reinterpretations of Handala demonstrate how a political icon—originally conceived in the context of Third World solidarity during the Cold War—has survived across time. As such, Handala exemplifies how Palestinian humour can transcend historical moments, mediating between local Palestinian struggles and broader global solidarities.

The (meta)ethics of objectionable humour

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Humour has long been used to push boundaries, with instigators deliberately trying to shock or offend by joking and laughing about topics that some would find offensive. However, while the ethics of humour have long been the subject of discussion by scholars (Smith 1995), in recent times it has been increasingly argued that some forms of conversational humour are not merely offensive, but constitute moral wrongdoings that should be called out and opposed as such (Hale & Lam 2024; Horisk 2024; cf. Morreall 2020). In this paper, we consider the (meta)ethics of what we are broadly terming ‘objectionable humour’: conversational humour that not only causes offence, but arouses such disgust that many observers actively oppose its very practice and existence, even in private, consensual settings. Ethics broadly encompasses the study of what is morally good and bad, right and wrong, and so on, while metaethics concerns how we go about making such judgments. Our aim in this paper is to consider what makes objectionable humour objectionable from an ethical standpoint, as well as to engage in a reflexive metaethical consideration of whether studying objectionable humour is an ethical thing to be doing as researchers in the first place.

We begin by first briefly touching upon three major normative traditions in (western) philosophy that offer competing views on why objectionable humour counts as morally transgressive (virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and consequentialism), and how scholars have drawn upon these in arguing that such forms of humour are not merely offensive, but their very practice should be opposed. We propose that underpinning these views are arguments that objectionable humour should be called out and opposed because it is a form of doxastic wrongdoing in its own right (Basu & Schroeder 2019), or because it leads to the circulation of harmful beliefs and ideas (Horisk 2024). We then move to consider whether researching objectionable humour may contribute to the circulation of harmful beliefs and ideas, and so may itself constitute a form of doxastic wrongdoing. We suggest that an ethical approach to studying objectionable humour thus requires more than researchers making positionality statements, no matter how well intended such statements might be. We conclude by considering the implications of these (meta)ethical reflections for studies of conversational humour more generally.

“Experts warn we have only 12 years left until they change the timeline on global warming again”: The harm of right-wing humour in climate change discourse

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Research on climate humour has typically emphasised its potential to raise awareness and foster engagement, but far less attention has been paid to humour’s harmful effects on public discourse. This paper examines how right-wing satire contributes to climate change denialism by analysing 196 articles published on the conservative satire site The Babylon Bee between 2016 and 2024. The analysis shows that climate denialist humour closely tracks the news cycle, spiking around high-profile events such as the Green New Deal or Greta Thunberg’s UN address. Rather than contesting evidence directly, the satire predominantly targets climate messengers: politicians, activists, and scientists. These figures are ridiculed through ad hominem attacks, straw man arguments, misrepresentation, and false analogies, while proposed climate solutions are often dismissed via slippery slope exaggerations and oversimplification. To probe how jokes work at a rhetorical level, the paper applies the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) to a subset of articles. This reveals how script oppositions and logical mechanisms generate laughter by aligning with conservative worldviews. Humour thus functions as more than entertainment: it affirms group identity and fuels disbelief in climate change. By demonstrating how denialist satire spreads through ridicule and distortion, this study highlights the darker side of humour in contemporary politics. It extends Humour Studies beyond pro-climate satire and reveals its capacity to harm democratic debate. In doing so, the paper speaks directly to the conference theme of “difficult conversations”: humour is implicated not only in playful critique but also in the polarisation and denial that make constructive conversations about climate change harder to sustain.

Rethinking the difficulty of Humour Studies through a Blak lens

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Researching Aboriginal Australian humour presents unique challenges because Blak Humour is relational, contextual, and rooted in lived experiences of sovereignty, survival, and colonisation. As a Gooreng Gooreng, Mununjali, Birriah, and Gamilaraay writer and researcher, I write from an insider position within these cultural contexts. This perspective grounds my approach to Humour Studies, where conventional Western theories of incongruity, superiority, and relief often fail to account for humour that functions as resilience, resistance, and truth-telling within Indigenous communities.

This paper explores these “difficult conversations” in Humour Studies, asking: how can the discipline decolonise its methods, and what happens when Indigenous epistemologies of humour unsettle and challenge Eurocentric frameworks? Drawing on my creative-led doctoral project, *Reconciliation Rescue: An Original Blak Comedy Series and Aboriginal Cultural Perspectives on Humour* (Hurley 2024), I examine humour not merely as text but as performance, knowledge, and cultural practice. The series is a scripted television situational comedy (sitcom) that satirises reconciliation politics, while also embedding Aboriginal storytelling and cultural knowledge. I will analyse excerpts from *Reconciliation Rescue* alongside selected works of other Aboriginal comedians and writers to consider how generic conventions (such as sitcom and sketch comedy) operate when re-framed through Indigenous perspectives.

Engaging with both Western humour theories and Aboriginal epistemologies, this work highlights the methodological and ethical complexities of studying Blak Humour, demonstrating the necessity of decolonising Humour Studies by centering Aboriginal voices, knowledge systems, and practices. The research shows the limits of current frameworks, underscores the importance of Indigenous-led approaches in cross-disciplinary work, and points to more respectful and reciprocal ways of engaging with Humour Studies.

This essay directly engages with the conference theme, addressing the tensions that arise when Aboriginal humour epistemologies intersect with, challenge, and enrich established Eurocentric approaches.

Dangerous animals: The changing face of Australian horror

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Noël Carroll has suggested that horror is connected to humour through incongruity, ‘the transgression of a category, a concept, a norm, or a commonplace expectation’. This is a space that monsters can readily inhabit. This also perhaps explains why, within its settler culture, Australian cryptids tend to be droll creatures, objects of curiosity and humour rather than of genuine terror: the bunyip and yowie (decontextualised from their Indigenous roots), phantom big cats, or the preposterous ‘drop bear’. Yet the outback monsters of Australian horror films are mostly serious beasts: the giant feral pig in *Razorback* (1984), for instance, or the colossal crocs of *Dark Age* (1987) and *Rogue* (2007), or the remnant marsupial ‘lion’ in *Carnifex* (2022). Although these reflect the influence of Hollywood creature features like *Jaws* (1975), such cryptids are also increasingly aligned with uncanny evocations of Indigenous presence and enchantment. This trend is fully realised in First Nations filmmaker Jon Bell’s *The Moogai* (2024), which features an evil – and notably white – child-abducting spirit from Bundjalung lore.

Concomitantly, the most abominable Aussie monsters now hold a mirror up to White Australia itself, with the figure of the heroic frontiersman metastasising into the toxic masculinity of *Wake in Fright* (1971) and *Wolf Creek* (2005), for whom the newcomer unfamiliar with the landscape is easy prey. The title of *Dangerous Animals* from 2025, about a roughneck shark tour operator who feeds his clients to his main attraction, implies this affinity with the mythical predators of old. Still, like all good larrikins, the men in these films can present a humorous face and they all enjoy a good laugh—especially at their victims’ expense.

This paper begins a study of the dark humour of Australian gothic by initiating a difficult conversation between fear and laughter in the depiction of its monsters.

“Check on your mates:” Encouraging difficult conversations as a byproduct of comedy about suicidality

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Talking about suicidal feelings is the first step in seeking support. However, there is a strong cultural sense of shame, stigma and taboo in discussing suicide and mental health, heightened by the risk of talking about it in ways which reinforce negative stereotypes or could lead to copycat incidents. Psychologists, not-for-profit organisations, awareness raising campaigns, governments are all looking for ways to encourage people to seek help and talk about suicide while minimising risk.

Risk seems to matter a little less to stand-up comedians. Comedians love a taboo, to push at the boundaries of what is deemed permissible to talk about publicly, flirting with the possibility of offense. This includes exploring their own experiences with mental health, addiction, and suicide on stage. As stand-up comedians mine their own experiences with suicidality for comedy, they often do so in ways which represent their own difficult conversations with their loved ones. This presentation builds on research about the co-occurrence of stand-up and mental health (Oppliger and Shouse 2020; Krefting 2024) and the potential destigmatising influence of stand-up comedy on health matters (Viña 2023; Johnson 2025) to explore the under-researched area of comedy about suicide.

In this presentation, I use performance studies methodologies common in comedy studies (Goltz 2024; Balkin and Mierowsky 2025) to analyse the performance of suicide jokes by two Australian comedians, Ben Russell and Greg Larsen, supported by interview material. As detailed in Russell’s 2024 Melbourne International Comedy Festival show Ben Russell, Larsen and another friend and comedian Mark Samuel Bonanno, intervened in Russell’s suicide attempt and saved his life. This method of analysis considers comic persona, negotiation of comic licence with the audience, and performance contexts to show how comedians perform these conversations humorously, while also potentially opening up ways for audiences to consider how to have their own conversations, and adding to a growing public discourse which encourages difficult, yet potentially life-saving, conversations.

The jokes tell themselves: A preliminary investigation into humour within political live streaming content

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In recent years live streaming has become increasingly popular as a media form, with platforms such as Twitch recording around 2 million (see <https://twitchtracker.com/>) concurrent users daily. Common to almost, if not all live streamers, is their use of comedy: research has observed how streamers and their viewers will create jokes based on game experiences (Johnson, 2022), with there even being a pressure to develop a unique sense of humour in order to stand out. This presentation expands on such initial examinations, presenting early findings on the role of comedy within the content of the political live streamer HasanAbi. I draw on a dataset of (at the time of writing) ten hours of observation across six separate live streams over the course of a month, arguing that HasanAbi uses humour to expose his audience to global audiences in a way similar to the political humour within late night shows (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Feldman, 2007; Niven et al., 2003). By conducting a performance analysis centred around the perception, memory and articulation of experiences (see Fischer-Lichte, 2014), this presentation argues that HasanAbi's jokes frame critical attitudes in an entertaining (and by extension, appealing) manner. The methodology combines experience of the performance (phenomenology) with the construction of meaning within it (semiotics) to examine how HasanAbi transforms politics into content. While such an approach has garnered HasanAbi significant viewership and mainstream media attention, it also risks developing into performative activism (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022; Shefer, 2019; Thimsen, 2022). Difficult conversations must therefore be had about the consequences of the rise of performative activism as political communication is increasingly co-opted for entertainment. Through an initial example of this phenomenon, this presentation intends to prompt further questioning and potential frictions regarding how these developments in humour should best be investigated.

Understanding sarcasm in Polish: Factor structure and measurement invariance of the Sarcasm Self-Report Scale

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The Sarcasm Self-Report Scale (SSS; Ivanko et al., 2004) has recently been used in Polish research as a method for examining the use of a specific type of indirect speech, often associated with humor (sarcasm), as opposed to more broadly defined humor styles. Recent multicultural PCA analyses by Kuczmierowska et al. (2024) provided evidence for robustness of the four-factor structure across cultures, while also indicating non-trivial Polish-specific differences. However, to date no confirmatory factor analyses have been published for the Polish version. Addressing this gap strengthens the interpretation of previous results and provides a firmer basis for future research.

We analyzed a combined sample of 948 participants from three independent studies (Mage = 33.58, SDage = 15.42, 66% women). We tested the original four-factor structure, a second-order factor model, a one-factor model, and an alternative structure found in Kuczmierowska et al (2024). Convergent validity was examined using the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) and Comic Style Markers (CSM).

The original four-factor model demonstrated acceptable fit; however, Item 10 showed a low loading on General Sarcasm ($R^2 = 0.14$), replicating the instability reported by Ivanko et al. (2004). Reassigning Item 10 to the Frustration Diffusion factor was theoretically justified and improved model fit. A second-order factor - overall intensity of sarcasm use - further enhanced interpretability. The final model showed good fit indices: $\chi^2(100) = 554.81$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 5.55$; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.069 (90% CI [0.064, 0.075]); SRMR = 0.060. Measurement invariance across gender was supported at the configural, metric, and scalar levels, allowing meaningful group comparisons. Correlations with the HSQ and CSM confirmed convergent validity.

Overall, these findings provide strong evidence for the validity and practical utility of the Polish SSS as a psychometrically sound tool for assessing sarcasm use.

Fighting like a woman: Humour and taboo language in response to the Equal Pay Amendment Act

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The role of gendered discourse and gendered norms, as well as the intersection of these with humour, has long been an interest of workplace discourse analysts, especially those researching in New Zealand. The surprise introduction and passing (under urgency) of New Zealand's Equal Pay Amendment Act in May 2025 quickly brought conversations about gender equality at work to the fore. Changes to processes, the cancelling of existing claims, and reduced remedies for discrimination were met with protests and strong negative responses from the media and public alike. These reached peak visibility when the use of "c***" in an editorial on the topic (Andrea Vance, *The Post*) was cited on the floor in parliament.

While a supposedly taboo language choice attracted attention, we might normally expect humour to be part of the public response due to its subversive and plausible 'off record' quality. Interestingly, at least in the immediate period following the passing of the Act, overt humour on protest placards and in commentary was noticeably absent. As time progresses, sarcasm has begun to appear, but much of the humour we might expect in other political contexts seems to be missing.

This paper explores the ways in which linguistic resistance is constructed in the face of challenges to democracy and accepted human rights in our local context, with a particular interest in the use, and lack of use, of humour. The analysis draws on media (online news) and public responses (online comments) to the Act, and examines the ideologies and identity work which underpin the reactions. In keeping with the theme of the conference, there is reflection on the disciplinary affordances offered by approaches beyond linguistics, especially the practices of those scholars who work with media texts, on humour in politics, and who draw on the concept of gallows humour.

One book to rule them all: Will the Handbook of Humor Studies save us?

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The interdisciplinary field of Humor Studies is indeed well-established, approaching 50 years since the first conference on humor and laughter was held in Cardiff in July 1976 (Chapman & Foot, 2013 [1977]). Despite many subsequent conferences, the establishment of multiple scholarly societies, not to mention several journals devoted to the topic, it remains a fact that humor scholars usually remain in their disciplinary silos, talking past each other rather than engaging with each other. Over time they have developed an enormous array of terminology and concepts to study the topic, not infrequently using the same terms to refer to different things (Davis & Hofmann, 2023). Different disciplines use different methods and ask different questions; crucially, they also rely on different base assumptions.

In 2024, the editors of the De Gruyter Handbook of Humor Studies addressed this problem with an extensive compilation of cross-disciplinary papers (Ford et al. 2024). The Handbook editors aimed to synthesize contributions from a wide array of disciplines and also highlight the areas of interdisciplinary interest. A notable contribution of this work was that all contributors were required to include a segment outlining possible interdisciplinary connections for future research. This project examines the results of this massive effort to discover the overarching common themes among the different disciplinary lenses applied to humor as well as any remaining significant differences between them. Finally, my examination will find out what important perspectives were overlooked in the De Gruyter Handbook.

Extricating laughter from humour

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Developing a coherent concept of laughter per se is not easy. As Condren (2023) amply demonstrates, discussions of laughter are regularly subsumed within accounts of humour (e.g., Billig, 2005), itself a contentious, historically and culturally bound concept unsuited to clarifying notions of the universal act of laughter. In a closely analogous fashion, the first instances of laughter during infancy are typically explained in terms of benign humour (e.g., Mireault & Reddy, 2016). Not surprisingly, such accounts of early laughter are not readily adapted to explain the range of circumstances in which adult laughter actually occurs, many of which could not be designated as humorous (see Provine, 1993), most obviously those occasions in which people are laughed at. The current paper will seek to outline a concept of laughter that is entirely independent of notions of humour using examples of adult infant interaction (e.g., Bruner, 1975). It will be argued that, as a “social” reflex action, infant laughter may originate as a natural signal to the other to continue to do what they are doing. This laughing act is characterised by adults as an intended vocalization in which the infant affirms the adult’s acts as playful. In line with this adult attribution, the infant quickly learns to use laughter as a paralinguistic token of phatic, consummatory, or non-sensical interaction signifying that the object of laughter, the verbal or nonverbal acts of the other or, in time, the infant herself, has no implications for the interactors’ future conduct. The exchange of acts of this type forms the basis of a playful event. It is concluded that by establishing an adequate concept of laughter as we use it in interaction, the field is cleared of a major impediment to our understanding of the modern concept of humour.

Revisiting the term 'gallows humour'

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The term 'gallows humour' originally referred to joking by the condemned man on the gallows, with authors usually referencing Freud (1927). Nilson and Nilson (2014) have more recently allowed for other origins. Others have extended the usage to include the person who, if not actually on the gallows, is in potentially threatening or awful circumstances with various examples. For example Moran (2003a, 2003b, 1999) analysed humour from WW2 sources and emergency service workers such as firefighters and medical staff. More recently Tokariuk (2023) discussed gallows humour in the context of those experiencing suffering in the Ukrainian War. In contrast 'sick humour' involves jokes about people in awful circumstances rather than joking by people in those circumstance. It often describes an imagined situation although it can also include jokes about real situations including disasters or real people such as public celebrities. Despite this putative difference, several scholars have been using the terms 'gallows' and 'sick' humour more or less interchangeably, for example Potter (2023). I look at gallows humour and the psychological functions it may serve and contrast those with hypothesised functions of sick humour. I argue there is an important set of differences. I also consider similarities.

Non-seriousness in Ukrainian war-time Tweets – a reflection on how Geolinguistic Studies and Humour Studies could work together

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The aim of this presentation is to illustrate how Geolinguistic and Humour Studies scholars can work together to establish methodologies that lend themselves to comprehensive fine-detailed analyses of humorous language in large digital data sets, in this case Twitter data from war-torn Ukraine.

Geolinguistic Studies is a new research field in which theories and methodologies from linguistics are combined with suitable counterparts from geography and digital humanities to gain a sense of the interdependence between space as built environment, and social constructions of this space as place. For example, Lemoine-Rodríguez et al. (2024) used geolocated social media data to show the changing topics and perceptions in the Tweets of Ukrainians who left home during the first seven months of the war. When examining individual Tweets, it became apparent that an impressive number were non-serious, demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity. Combining Geolinguistic and Humour Studies provides an opportunity to use big data to better understand the forms and functions of non-seriousness in this war-ridden space. But how easy and/or fruitful is it to combine qualitative and computational approaches to humour analysis in large data sets?

For this project, the presenters worked with a dataset of 4,000 geolocated English Tweets posted by Ukrainians in the first seven months of the war. As a first step, we used two different approaches to retrieve the non-serious Tweets: (a) manually analysing a subset of 1,500 Tweets; (b) computationally identifying and retrieving Tweets with potentially humorous hashtags and emojis from the whole dataset. In a second stage, we classified the Tweets identified as non-serious by key theme, key function, humour style and humour type (cf. Kolar & Wattanacharoensil 2023). Finally, we assessed the methods we employed to identify the non-serious comments, and how these might be useful to computational linguists wanting to improve automated humour detection.

By engaging with the conference theme of 'Difficult Conversations', we hope to prompt reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of combining these different scholarly methods and approaches to studying humour, while showing the extent and limits of what can be achieved.

The role of humor in the language classroom: Differing views from instructors

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Humor is a potentially powerful yet widely misunderstood tool in English language teaching. While a growing body of language education researchers (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Wulf, 2010) advocate the use of humor in teaching, there remains a lack of research on individual instructor views of the role of humor in their classroom. This is further complicated by the fact that there is little consensus as to what constitutes “appropriate” classroom humor (Wanzer et al., 2006). While evidence points towards the beneficial effect that humor can have on educational aspects such as teacher immediacy (Berk & Nanda, 1998), learner memory enhancement (Schmidt & Williams, 2001; Ziv, 1988), and cross-cultural understanding (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016), in the specific context of English language teaching, even humor use by instructors with positive intentions can instead be “unperceived, misunderstood, or offensive” (Reimann, 2010, p. 23).

This presentation will report on the results of a mixed methods study into English language educators’ perceptions of the role of humor in the language classroom. Quantitative results of the study derive from a Likert-scale survey given to 62 university instructors from across Japan that covered such variables as the role of humor in the classroom, humor as a component of instructors’ repertoire, and its value in increasing cross-cultural understanding. Responses to qualitative survey questions focusing on deeper issues, including the potential negative effects of classroom humor and the challenges of considering learner proficiency, will also be discussed. Finally, extended, semi-structured interviews with select instructors were undertaken. Results indicate a great degree of variance in terms of how instructors see the role of humor in their classrooms, with some finding it a vital component reflecting their core personality and pedagogical approach while others perceived it to be an amusing diversion at best.

It just gets me! Facts, feelings, and device intimacy

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Online, humour is not just a way of “getting” a joke, it is a way of being “gotten”. For younger audiences in particular, laughter circulates digitally as a sensibility that outpaces fact, sits alongside analogue perception, and adds an extra experiential layer to navigating the virtual world. To “get it” online is less about comprehension than about feeling what resonates: experiencing the ecospheric ‘vibe’, aligning with its humour, and signalling belonging through varied expressions of laughter. In this sense, online humour acts as a boundary-blurring force, weaving together facts, feelings, and perceptions into the lived experience of the internet as an extension of the physical world.

The emerging role of agentic AI systems, AI entities that act with apparent initiative, from socialbots like Alexa to conversational agents, pushes this dynamic further, making laughter not only a medium of participation but also a programmed strategy of affective engagement. This can fast-track a sensorial bond, creating what I term ‘device intimacy’, where users quickly feel “gotten”, meaning understood and emotionally resonant with the machine. In varied forms and guises, synthetic laughter operates thus as a form of calculated authenticity. It signals spontaneity and warmth where none may exist, guiding users to perceive exchanges as playful, trustworthy, or socially real. Here, laughter functions both as mood-maker, shaping how users feel in the moment, and mood-marker, establishing affective consensus about what counts as “authentic” in digitally situated interactions.

This paper argues that Humour Studies requires an expanded authenticity–humour framework that treats laughter as more than a reaction or expression. Instead, it is a relational and technologically mediated practice, an agentic device in itself, that shapes how users increasingly feel “gotten” and perceive the digital sphere as part of everyday life. Rather than asking whether laughter is genuine or artificial, we must examine how it works as a feeling-fact hybrid that guides, and is guided by, digital participation. By analysing laughter as a prism for understanding the affective economies of algorithmic culture, this paper highlights how humour builds consensus, blurs boundaries between online and offline, and structures how we now live, feel, and know together in the laugh-o-sphere—an environment where, sometimes, it just gets us.

Has workplace humour been cancelled? A difficult conversation about constraint, ethics, and psychological safety

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Freud (1905) argued that humour lets us say the ‘unsayable’ offering relief from tension and constraints, but the relief of humour may not be available in some modern workplaces. Drawing from in-depth ethnographic research in two self-proclaimed ‘fun companies’ this paper argues that humour at work is becoming a serious concern for both managers and workers. Critical discourse analysis reveals significant constraint and concerns for propriety and psychological safety at work when humour and/or fun is enacted. Discourses about humour are rife with tension and ambiguity as participants grapple with the desire for humour and fun at work conflicting with considerations of care, ethics, and organisational norms.

Analyses suggested that workplace humour constraints resulted in humour that was light, silly, and somewhat ‘childlike’ -generating only mild amusement. Such safe forms of humour appeared to operate at the expense of humour that elicited hearty amusement and the restorative laughter outlined by Freud. Participants raised serious concerns about risky humour that may offend, and psychological safety was prioritised as more important to workers than humour that could transgress organizational norms and managerial protocols (Plester & Lloyd, 2023). Simply put, it was safer to be serious than funny (de Beauvoir, 1947) even in a ‘fun culture’.

Global considerations of political correctness also guide humour enactments, because being serious rather than humorous creates ‘cognitive ease’ (Kramer, 2015: 3) that does not threaten political correctness or workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Managers seemed to experience greater tensions as they monitored their own humour use and managed that of their subordinates, while trying to avoid becoming the ‘fun police’. Fostering psychological safety, ensuring political correctness, addressing equity and ethics may have somewhat cancelled all but the safest workplace humour.

Examining L2 learners' ability to respond to humor online

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Responding to humor by playing along and adding humor (comedic convergence; Coolidge et al., 2023), is considered the most frustrating aspect of L2 humor competence (Bell & Attardo, 2010). However, as it is believed to lead to affiliation, ability to converge to humor could help learners form bonds with target language speakers. Therefore, instruction aiming to increase learners' willingness and ability to converge to L2 humor may be worthwhile. Research suggests instruction can improve learners' ability to recognize and produce humor (e.g., Prichard et al., 2024), but whether instruction can improve learners' humor responses has not been examined.

Before instruction on humor responses is designed, however, it needs to be considered whether convergence is appropriate for all kinds of humor. Comedic convergence may be considered rude or disrespectful in response to incomprehensible (Bell, 2013), offensive (Bell 2009), or self-deprecating humor (Hay, 2001). As humor responses are complex, researchers and educators need to carefully consider nuances.

To address the research gap, the presenters discuss two studies. The first, involving French learners at a Dutch university, examined the relationship between convergence levels and effectiveness ratings based on different kinds of humor (e.g., self-deprecating humor). The second, involving English learners in Japan, used a pre- posttest, control group design to examine whether instruction improved participants' ability to respond to humor. Participants in each test responded in writing to 18 mock online humor attempts in the target language. Blinded responses were coded for humor convergence and ranked for effectiveness by three researchers.

The first study revealed that convergence and its effectiveness varied greatly based on humor type. The second study, informed by the first, suggested instruction yielded fewer gains than expected, highlighting the difficulty in responding effectively to L2 humor. Implications and challenges for humor researchers and L2 educators will be discussed.

When the best translation is none: Cross-lingual meme humour on a China-based social platform (Xiaohongshu/RED)

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“Nothing beats a Jet2 holiday...” a UK travel jingle, has spread on Chinese platforms as an audio meme, often without subtitles. This shows that English-source humour can travel without translation. It raises a basic question: where does the punchline reside? Across translation studies, pragmatics and platform research, answers often diverge. This study asks when text should be translated and when visuals, editing and sound already suffice on Xiaohongshu (RED). It draws on Venuti’s visibility stance to model a continuum from non-translation (Label-only) to mild foreignisation (For plus Gloss) (Venuti 2017). It weighs audience effects against processing effort (Sperber and Wilson 1995) and considers offence risk near boundaries (McGraw and Warren 2010). Platform-native cues, such as POV tags, templates and sound motifs, may already carry the punchline. Together these elements yield a testable Translate-Gloss-Label-Leave (TGLL) decision aid and open a “difficult conversation” between translation, pragmatics and platform perspectives.

Using 12 overseas-origin Xiaohongshu memes across text, image, audio and narrative humour, the study compares Label-only and For plus Gloss with visuals and timing held constant. Viewers from Chinese-only and bilingual backgrounds provide simple audience ratings via a brief questionnaire. The comparison shows when non-translation is sufficient and when a brief gloss helps. The study expects Label-only to be comparable to For plus Gloss for image- or audio-led items and to lower offence in near-boundary cases, while a gloss benefits text-led wordplay; when non-text channels dominate, timing outweighs added words. Beyond these patterns, TGLL serves as a shared, practical workflow that turns disciplinary disagreement about where the punchline sits and whether to translate into actionable choices. It sets concise criteria for captioning and subtitling, for creator decisions, and for scholars as common ground, thereby advancing the difficult conversation and supporting the cross-lingual circulation and creative reuse of meme humour.

Artistic autonomy and ‘No-Go Zones’: Shifting freedom in the field of Western political cartooning

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Satire is a ‘mixed dish’ of entertainment and aggression, laughter and indignation, simplification and exaggeration, reality and fiction (Boukes et al., 2015). As ‘boundary objects’ between journalism and art (Brookes et al, 2025), satirical cartoons exist in states of tension: political dialogue and critique, participation and provocation. They share democracy-supporting and anti-authoritarian aims (Higgie, 2017; Prendergast, 2019) but rely on compression, metaphor, and ridicule. They invite cartoonists and audiences to become ‘co-despisers,’ release ‘unpleasure,’ and reduce distress (Freud, 1960).

Editorial cartoonists work in a system of institutional power relations (Foucault, 1980), where certain caricatures and satirical portrayals are allowed and demanded, while some are considered ‘no-go zones.’ Additionally, the range of artistic styles, ideological positions, modes of satire (Juvenalian—Horatian), and visual cues (usage of colour, body language, gaze, and metaphors) produce a ‘spectrum of likeability’ whereby some political leaders are presented as more acceptable than others (Radina & Durrani, 2026). Artistic autonomy is not a romantic ideal; it is negotiated, and each legal-cultural system resolves the ethical dilemma between conviction and responsibility differently (Weston Vauclair, 2025; Boskin, 1997; Gamper, 2022; Godioli et al, 2022; Pedrazzini & Royaards, 2022). By artistic autonomy we mean the individual cartoonist’s creative freedom to choose subjects, express ideas, and have control over methods and the ‘how-to’ of the work. But editors, briefs, laws, digital platforms, audience expectations, and self-censorship all shape what gets drawn and what gets ‘killed’ (Best, 1986; Riffe et al., 1985; Ashfaq & Russomanno, 2021; Gilbert, 2021; Phiddian & Stewart, 2024). Therefore, the fundamental problem persists: where power feels threatened or polarisation spikes, autonomy narrows.

This study thematically analyses (Braun and Clarke 2021) semi-structured interviews conducted in 2021 and 2025 with prominent political cartoonists from the US, the UK, France, Italy, Switzerland, and Australia. It fills a gap in longitudinal understanding of how artistic autonomy has shifted in response to political and editorial pressures, newsroom restructuring, and technological dynamics. The interviews reveal differing levels of artistic autonomy under intensifying constraints and highlight the growing complexity and urgency of protecting cartoonists as vital voices within a functioning democracy.

Capitalist perversions in Futurama

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The animated television program *Futurama* (1999-2013) stages a parody of 'future-ness' through its depiction of urban life in New New York in the 31st century. *Futurama's* protagonist, Philip J. Fry, is cryogenically frozen at the end of the 21st century and wakes up in the year 3000. As a result, future developments in the economy, food and transport are refracted through a contemporary lens lending the program a retro-futurist aesthetic. Such an aesthetic is parodic because it uses a contemporary popular culture vocabulary (familiar to Fry and viewers) to find humour in future developments whilst simulatenously highlighting how 'new-ness' is premised on 'old-ness'. For example, the series' antagonist is MomCorp, a biotechnology company that is framed as an exaggerated version of capitalist excess in its development of the eyePhone (similar to Google Glass but inserted directly into the eye) and robots with short battery life that require constant re-charging. MomCorp is subtly modeled on tech-companies such as Apple and the humour dervied from former's tech-developments and its constant thwarting of Fry and friends' space adventures, relies on the audience's ability to see similarities between the program and contemporary techno-economic developments as amusing but menacing. In presenting a future that looks similar to the present, *Futurama* is implicitly suggesting that capitalism's engine is fuelled by the retroactive recycling of the past. In his book *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai argues that in Western capitalist societies, "postindustrial cultural productions have entered a postnostalgic phase" (1996, p. 31). "[T]he peculiar chronicities of late capitalism" (p. 30) enable a condition wherein "your own past can be made to appear as simply a normalized modality of your present" (p. 31). Through an analysis of MomCorp, I want to argue that *Futurama* heightens the absurdity of contemporary capitalism by setting its perverse logic for new markets, labour-free commodities and territorial accumulation against the backdrop of a retro-futurist New New York. By relying on a reading of 'new-ness' as parodically 'old-ness', *Futurama* unmasks the perversions and excesses of contemporary capitalism in a futurist urban setting.

Were Gothic gargoyles funny? Integrating historical and psychological data

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Rafal Boryslawski (2020) argues for essential similarities in the mechanisms underlying the humour, and the terror, dread and fear, potentially elicited by medieval monsters. In a separate article, Boryslawski (2011) links monstrous anthropomorphic medieval creatures to the (sometimes grotesque and shocking) art of the Young British Art (yBA) movement, suggesting that both may be associated with playfulness and humorousness. I compare the model implied by these articles with a dimension of human individual difference, developed within empirical psychology, which is pertinent to both humour appreciation and aesthetic preference, and which points towards the connection of certain aspects of humour appreciation with enjoyment of the aesthetically grotesque (Ruch and Malcherek, 2009). While no single explanation can be given for all Gothic gargoyles, several classes of gargoyles exemplify the monstrous creatures discussed by Boryslawski which, he suggests, may potentially be understood within the frameworks provided by the three broad contemporary approaches to humour. I note reasons for caution in interpreting the parallels between the historical and psychological accounts.

Team pranks as a form of ridicule

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Billig's (2005, acknowledgements) bold statement "A conventional sense of humour often calls for an element of malice," was the inspiration for research into team pranks. Plester (2016) observed first-hand the effects of pranks and practical jokes in the workplace and remarked that there were positive but also negative outcomes. She suggested (pp.1-2) that some functions of humour were to release tension and reveal hidden feelings, to help negotiate shared realities, to make a point without causing offence, to safely challenge hierarchy and power holders, to illuminate cultural dynamics and to reflect cultural values and norms. Because most practical jokes and pranks require more than one perpetrator, notions of exercising power (Bain, 1859) and of expressing ridicule (Billig) were added to the functions above.

The present research examined published Humour Studies, biographies and recorded experiences to identify the above functions of humour in practical jokes and pranks. It was concluded that the successful prank had particular characteristics: a clear target of sufficient prestige to suppress any notions of "punching down" (or harassment); cooperative actions among the pranksters that ensured secret planning and successful execution of the joke, and diffusion of responsibility in the aftermath, so that consequences were shared (that is, there was not just a single scape-goat). Less successful pranks, usually perpetrated against someone of lower status, were also examined. It was suggested that the Tall Poppy Syndrome (Haslam & Haghani, 2025) might usefully explain the motivation behind team pranks.

From meme to meaning: How Thai queer humor plays with rights in the “Nong” online community

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This research examines queer humor’s role in reimagining rights discourse and political engagement within the Thai online community of “Nong,” an LGBTQ-centric space known for satirical content, irreverent humor, and parody-infused critiques of both state authority and liberal political norms. Against Thailand’s turbulent political backdrop—marked by recurrent coups, restricted civil liberties, and sustained authoritarian rule—“Nong” is positioned as a cultural response to political suppression. Since the 2014 coup, Thai citizens have faced intensified censorship, legal harassment, and repeated human rights violations. In response, digital spaces have become crucial arenas for resistance, enabling new forms of collective action, critique, and identity-making. Within this climate, “Nong” emerged as a Facebook-based community deploying parody, memes, and dark humor to challenge conservative nationalism and, paradoxically, the emerging culture of political correctness.

Methodologically, the study combines online/offline ethnography and in-depth interviews with multimodal discourse analysis of digital artifacts to explore how humor is produced, circulated, and interpreted, and how it influences both digital and embodied activism. Theoretically informed by the sociology of humor, queer theory, and critical human rights scholarship, it draws on Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, Butler’s performativity, and Scott’s “weapons of the weak” to examine humor’s paradox—laughter as subversive yet exclusionary, liberatory yet contentious. The study examines how queer humor challenges normative gender ideologies, critiques liberal rights discourse, and fosters collective identities.

This research contributes to debates on social movements, digital activism, and queer politics in Southeast Asia. First, it shows humor as a vehicle for collective action and social change in repressive contexts. Second, it highlights the transformative power of digital technologies in shaping activism and community building. Third, it highlights tensions within the LGBTQ+ movement between political correctness and satirical expression. Ultimately, it repositions digital humor as a queer form of rights talk, reshaping political engagement in contemporary Thailand.

Show, don't tell: Adapting comic stage personas for the small screen

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Comedians have stage personas, i.e. a personality adopted for performance that doesn't perfectly overlap with their everyday behaviour and attitudes (Bloom 2023). These personas are exaggerated, certain character traits are emphasised, and comedians devote extensive stage time to examining and joking about the world from these singular adopted perspectives. Sometimes, those personas are used as the basis for a self-titled character in a sitcom: think Seinfeld in *Seinfeld*, Louis C.K. in *Louie*, Brett and Jemaine in *Flight of the Conchords*, and Brendhan Lovegrove in *A Night at The Classic*; all of whom play themselves as comedians onscreen. When those stage personas move to the small screen in sitcoms, changes take place: the comedian's world grows to include visual depictions of other people and places, but their time with the audience is shortened (to make room for other characters), and their perspective is simplified (to allow for predictable character flaws to be exposed and then drawn on for laughs) (Horan and Matthews 2019). What does this mean for writers moving comedian personas from the stage to the screen?

This paper is under the discipline of Drama, and draws on literature review and an extended interview with comedian and actor Brendhan Lovegrove for analysis. In parts, I also use autoethnography to record my own process of adapting my stage persona into a character for a television tragicomedy pilot - and how the research just mentioned informed my creative practice.

In this paper, I use *A Night at The Classic* (Anderson 2010-2012) as a case study and explain that adaptation takes several steps. Firstly, writers must streamline the stage persona, deciding what parts must be preserved, and what can be sacrificed. Secondly, the comedian must decide whether there is a metatheatrical element to the sitcom storyline, where their onscreen-stage persona does not align with their onscreen-offstage persona. Thirdly, the onscreen-offstage personas must butt heads with situations and other characters that draw on the comedian's screen flaws for comedic purposes. Finally, the comedian's onscreen-onstage and onscreen-offstage performances must tell a story, rather than simply make a point, e.g. if the comedian wants their sitcom character to make the kind of political point they would typically make onstage, it will be best portrayed through their own actions, or as a response to another character's actions, rather than through speech alone. In short, stand up comedians looking to take their persona from the stage to TV can expect a push to show, not tell - a direct reversal of their usual comic writing and performance style.

Direct and reported sarcasm: When self-perception does not match conversation

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In many cultures, sarcasm signals wit, humor, a nonchalant attitude, and a sense of shared common ground. Sarcasm is often measured using self-report scales. However, this approach is vulnerable to biases such as self-enhancement and social desirability. Our study aimed to explore the nature of self-reported sarcasm by including peer ratings and natural behavior. We asked two research questions: 1) Is self-reported sarcasm correlated with natural sarcasm use? 2) Are self- and peer perspectives convergent?

We recruited 48 pairs of friends (N = 96). Each pair was prompted to talk about an irony-inducing topic (e.g., "Why is the driving test the most enjoyable exam in life?") for 15 minutes in a recorded Zoom conversation. Then, each person completed the self- and peer-rating versions of the Sarcasm Self-Report Scale (SSS, Ivanko et al., 2004), as well as a demographic questionnaire. Each conversation was transcribed, and the number of utterances and sarcastic utterances was counted according to the Verbal Irony Procedure (Burgers et al., 2011).

We did not find a statistically significant association between natural sarcasm use and self- or peer-rated sarcasm use. However, the lack of a strong relationship between sarcasm use and the psychological sarcasm scale must be understood within the study's limitations. One exception was a weak correlation of peer rating of general sarcasm with sarcasm use. Thus, we constructed a moderation model that takes into account the peer perspective of both partners. When both partners rate each other as sarcastic, there were more sarcastic utterances in the conversation. This finding underscores the importance of a shared understanding of sarcasm. Self- and peer perspectives were somewhat convergent. Due to the small sample size and the brief, prompted nature of the conversations, our study should be considered an invitation to research further.

30 years and still laughing: Humour and the Language in the Workplace project

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In 1996 Janet Holmes established the Language in the Workplace project to explore effective workplace communication. One noticeable feature of interaction in our data from the beginning was the use of humour. No matter the industry or the workplace, the type of interaction or its specific goals, humour has been a consistent and salient feature of the data. In this paper we reflect back on 30 years of analysing humour in workplace data and explore some of our findings from the over 30 publications we have written on humour, and the at least 30 more where it is not the sole focus but still relevant. We explore types, functions, styles, and different settings, presenting some of our favourite examples.

The corpus we draw on comprises over 2000 interactions from which more than two million words have been transcribed, ranging from white collar meetings, interactions in a factory team and talk between nurses and patients, to service encounters where someone orders a taco or a coffee. Overall, approximately one thousand people have contributed their voices to the dataset which has been recorded by over 45 different New Zealand workplace teams.

We adopt an Interactional Sociolinguistics approach to analysis with a social constructionist view of language as the means through which we construct our social world. Using this approach humour is viewed as a strategy which allows workplace participants to manage difficult conversations at times while constructing various aspects of their identity. Humour also allows them to build, maintain and sometimes challenge rapport and power as they achieve their workplace goals. We emphasise the constantly changing and developing nature of social identities, social categories and group boundaries, processes in which humour plays an essential part in workplace interaction in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Fast forward and the high broadcast moment: Television sketch comedy and the conditions for democratic nationalism

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The paper presents a study of *Fast Forward*, the highest rating and most awarded Australian television sketch comedy show of the late 1980s and early 1990s. We argue that *Fast Forward* made exemplary use of a fertile three-way relationship at the time between broadcast media, a democratic form of nationalism and comedy as an artform. The paper proceeds in four steps. First, we situate the ‘high broadcast moment’ as a historically specific media ecology of shared address. Second, we reconstruct the commissioning context and industrial environment that made a prime-time, nationally scaled sketch format both possible and valuable. Third, we analyse *Fast Forward*’s formal devices and recurring characters as civic mechanisms - how parody, satire, interruption, and typology convert political strain into collectively intelligible recognition. Finally, we use the example of *Fast Forward* to raise questions about comedy in the post-broadcast environment, where it is more difficult to identify durable spaces of shared address in which disagreement can remain intelligible as part of a common conversation.

The key texts addressed in the paper are examples of *Fast Forward*, many of which remain available on video sharing sites such as YouTube – as well as articles from the press and other ephemera relating to the show. The argument is theorised through the tradition, from Benedict Anderson’s (1983) *Imagined Communities*, which has grounded the conditions for public life in forms of media. It further draws on scholars of Australian television comedy such as Sue Turnbull (2004), Felicity Collins (2010) and Susan Bye (2007, 2010) – as well as international scholars such as Nick Marx (2019). It has implications for humour studies in raising questions about the conditions for comedy in post-broadcast media ecologies, such as those discussed, in a pessimistic register, in Christopher Gilbert’s (2025) recent *Comedy Gone Wrong*.

The sociopragmatics of objectionable humour

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Humour has long been used to push boundaries, with instigators deliberately trying to shock or offend by joking and laughing about topics that some would consider offensive. Other times, a person might claim that their joke was not intended to cause offence. Regardless of speaker intentions, some jokes do cause offence to either other interlocutors themselves or third-parties (Elder, Kapogianni & Baxter-Webb 2025; Haugh & Márquez Reiter 2025). In this paper, we investigate the sociopragmatics of what we are terming ‘objectionable humour’: conversational humour that not only causes offence, but arouses such disgust that many observers actively oppose its very practice (Hale & Lam 2024; Horisk 2024), even in private, consensual settings. Objectionable humour can encompass instances of overtly racist, sexist, misogynistic or homophobic humour that is intended to be strongly derogatory of its target, although it is not limited to such cases.

The collection of putative instances of objectionable humour we assembled for this study was identified in 218 minutes of audio and video recordings of Australian tradesmen (‘tradies’) interacting in a residential setting in which objectionable humour was found to be pervasive throughout. The participants in these interactions included seven young Australian men aged from 18-28 years, three of whom are brothers and the remaining four are their flatmates or friends. We examine sequences of objectionable humour through an interactional pragmatics lens to determine what makes the humour objectionable and how objectionable humour is accomplished across the group. Our analysis was driven by three main research questions:

1. Who are the primary instigators of objectionable humour, and how do co-participants respond?
2. Is the target of objectionable humour co-present, or is it primarily an absent third party?
3. What is the purpose of objectionable humour?

Preliminary analysis suggests that while a bystander or overhearer might find the humour objectionable, the participants themselves seemingly have no qualms about the content of their humour, with detailed analysis indicating no interactional troubles or disaffiliation by others with such cases. Similarly, the pervasiveness of objectionable humour in the data suggests that among these participants, it is not marked and instead appears to be the norm.

When the punchline is non-human: AI, improvisational comedy, and the difficult conversations of Humour Studies

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As generative artificial intelligence (AI) moves from the lab into the comedy clubs, it provokes us to rethink how humour, performance, and technologies intersect across disciplines. Echoing the foundational work of anthropologist Richard Bauman, Tim Fitzpatrick has argued that “performance involves the performer taking on a role, and assuming with that role a responsibility to the audience to display performative skill (1995, p. 51).” While the technical skills are rapidly developing, can an AI bot ever really assume this kind of responsibility to an audience?

This research is structured around three ‘difficult conversations’: (1) Are we confident that comedy will remain funny — or perhaps even become funnier — when AI joins the performance, and could it even be better than a human performer? (2) How do audiences negotiate their laughter when they know the punchline is non-human — do they laugh with, at, or against the machine? (3) Who is responsible when AI humour reproduces stereotypes, unsettles authenticity, or raises questions of authorship and ethics?

The study draws on practice-based research — the staging of an AI-assisted improv comedy show — to explore these tensions. Improvisational comedy is understood here as live, unscripted performance built from spontaneity, collaboration, and audience interaction, rather than scripted stand-up routines. With these qualities, improvisational comedy provides an ideal site to examine the underlying tensions between human and machine in creative performance, while comedy more broadly — with its features of failure, ‘offense’, and laughter — offers a productive stage for Humour Studies to address critical debates and to reimagine interdisciplinary dialogue in the age of AI.

Humour as pedagogy: Facilitating Chinese language education for ethnically diverse learners in Hong Kong

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This research critically explores humour, especially instructional humor, as a pedagogical strategy for facilitating Chinese language education for ethnically diverse learners in Hong Kong. Grounded in the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework and the Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students, which emphasize inclusion, communicative competence, differentiation, and curriculum flexibility, this study addresses current policy guidance and the Applied Learning Chinese (ApL(C)) curriculum as an alternative pathway for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students (Curriculum Development Council, 2021; Education Bureau, 2024, 2025; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2025).

Applying frameworks for instructional humor and humour pedagogy (Zhou & Lee, 2025; Ngai et al., 2025; Tong & Tsung, 2020), the study uses mixed qualitative methods: classroom observations, teacher interviews (n=20), and student surveys (n=40) in primary and secondary schools following the ApL(C) curriculum. Instructional humor, including contextually relevant jokes, language play, and comical teaching materials, is found to lower affective barriers, motivate students, foster psychological safety, and encourage engagement (Zhou & Lee, 2025; Tong & Tsung, 2020; Ngai et al., 2025; Jiang & Leong, 2021). Recent research demonstrates that instructional humor, when related to lesson content, scaffolds concepts, contextualizes new vocabulary, and is more effective than self-disparaging humor in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms (Zhou & Lee, 2024, 2025; Ngai et al., 2025).

Preliminary results of this study indicate that integrating instructional humor empowers “prosumption” - student production of humorous content, fostering inclusion and ownership during sensitive discussions. The findings underscore the necessity of systematic frameworks and differentiated resources, as set out in official policy, to promote effective, inclusive Chinese language teaching for ethnically diverse learners. These implications challenge conventional pedagogy and inform future directions in Humor Studies and multicultural language education.

Ambiguous laughter: The visibility paradox of sexual humour in Chinese gay vlogs

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As platform-state governance and content moderation in China become increasingly stringent, short videos and vlogs on social media platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili have emerged as vital spaces for gay men to express and negotiate their identity. Humour, as a culturally embedded and context-specific practice (Critchley, 2002; Ge & He, 2019; Holm, 2017; Holm, 2022), provides Chinese gay vloggers with a flexible means to perform and construct identity under the dual constraints of platform-state regulations and traditional Chinese values. Among various comic strategies, sexual humour is particularly prevalent and inventive, often presented through innuendo, metaphorical suggestion, and playful teasing.

This paper focuses on the case of a Chinese gay vlogger on Bilibili and Douyin, known by the account name Liu HangDe. In his vlogs, he often deliberately employs sexual humour to express and negotiate gay identity. Analysis of his vlogs and associated audience comments shows that sexual humour generates a visibility paradox: on the one hand, sexual humour is employed to enhance vlog visibility, express gay identity and foster a sense of recognition with audiences; on the other hand, such visibility may lead to the reproduction of stereotypes, provoke ridicule, or potentially attract additional content moderation within the framework of platform-state governance. In this sense, Liu HangDe's sexual humour, like other communicative resources, is strategically mobilised in Chinese gay vlogs, and its effects persistently shift between recognition and vulnerability under digital governance. These findings not only illuminate humour's dual functions but also contribute a new perspective for understanding the complexities of gay identity politics under digital governance in China.