AHSN Digest – May 2023

Message from the AHSN Board Chair

Dear AHSN-ers,

Welcome to another packed AHSN Digest! First and foremost, thanks must go to Digest Editor Lucien Leon and AHSN Coordinator Jessica Milner Davis for collating and editing this issue. Thanks also to all contributors of news items, conferences, calls for papers, new books, other publications, and book reviews (especially Beatriz Carbajal-Carrera, our new Book Review Editor for compiling everything - also see her item below).

As well as these contributions, the headliner item for this issue is news of our 30th annual conference - spoiler alert!! Huge thanks go to Michael Haugh, Valeria Sinkeviciute and Melody Chang and the rest of the team at The University of Queensland who have offered to host us in February 2024. Please put these dates in your diary now and see below for further details. Having personally missed this year's conference, and as someone who jumps at any chance to go to Brisbane, I am delighted with this news. Watch this space for the Call for Papers!

I look forward to seeing you all there, and possibly at some additional online and face to face events we are planning this year. Keep reading the Digests ...

Kerry

Assoc. Prof. Kerry Mullan
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RMIT University, Australia
Chair, Australasian Humour Studies Network Board
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HOLD THE DATES

ANNOUNCING AHSN2024!

The AHSN2024 Convenors are pleased to announce that the **30th Conference of the Australasian Humour Studies Network** will take place from **7-9 February 2024,** hosted at the **University of Queensland's St Lucia Campus**, Brisbane, Queensland.

The Conference will begin early afternoon on Wednesday 7 February, enabling delegates from Aotearoa/New Zealand and interstate to travel to Brisbane in the morning if they wish to do so. It will close at the end of the afternoon, Friday 9 February with the usual plenary ceremonial session and thank you's.

The UQ St Lucia Campus is ideally suited to host an AHSN conference. It has all the facilities and support services that are required and is located in close proximity to the Brisbane CBD with great public transport and accommodation for all budgets. Brisbane and the broader South East Queensland region also have many sites for pre- or post-conference travel which will be of interest to AHSN delegates.

The Conference theme will be: **"The Language of Humour".** However, potential delegates should note that, as usual with AHSN, papers focusing on any aspect of humour will also be considered for acceptance. The **Call for Papers** is likely to be issued around mid-June 2023 and the normal review processes of the AHSN will apply to all submissions (see the AHSN website for details of the AHSN Review Panel and guidelines). Five scholarships/fee-waivers will be available for the most outstanding proposals (as judged by reviewers and the Conference Committee) submitted by research students enrolled at Australian or New Zealand universities.

Conference Committee

Convenors:
- Dr Wei-Lin Melody Chang, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ
- Professor Michael Haugh, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ
- Dr Valeria Sinkeviciute, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ

Additional Members
- Nick Hugman, PhD candidate, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ
- Amir Sheikhan, PhD candidate, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ / Senior Research Assistant, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, UQ
- Chantima Wangsomchok, PhD candidate, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ
- Lara Weinglass, PhD candidate, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ / Research Fellow, School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education, QUT

Introducing the Convenors

Wei-Lin Melody Chang is Lecturer in Chinese at The University of Queensland. Her research interests lie in pragmatics, intercultural communication and business negotiation, with a focus on studying face, (im)politeness and humour. Her current research focuses on initial interactions in inter/intra-cultural settings and the role of humour in Australia-Chinese intercultural interactions. She has assisted with organising several national and international conferences, including most recently the 9th International Conference on Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication (INPRA-9) (21-23 June 2022, The University of Queensland).

Michael Haugh is Professor of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at The University of Queensland and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. His research interests lie in pragmatics, conversation analysis and humour studies. He has been involved in the organisation of a number of national and international conferences, including most recently the 9th International Conference on Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication (INPRA-9) (21-23 June 2022, The University of Queensland), and the upcoming International Conference on Conversation Analysis (ICCA-23) (26 June-2 July 2023, The University of Queensland). Michael is a long-standing member of the AHSN Review Panel.
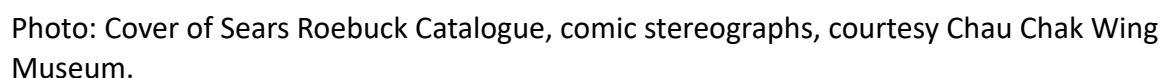
Valeria Sinkeviciute is Lecturer in Applied Linguistics in the School of Languages and Cultures at The University of Queensland, Australia. Her main research interests lie in the field of pragmatics of social interaction in face-to-face and online settings with a focus on identity construction, membership categorisation, family talk, conversational humour and linguistic (im)politeness. She is the author of numerous papers on these topics in journals and edited volumes, and her monograph *Conversational Humour and (Im)politeness: A Pragmatic Analysis of Social Interaction* (John Benjamins). She is Associate Editor at the *Journal of Pragmatics*. She has been involved in the organisation of various international conferences and events, including IPrA conferences in 2013 and 2015, and INPRA-9 in 2022.

Please feel free to share this announcement with colleagues and friends and WATCH THE AHSN DIGEST and EMAILS FOR MORE DETAILS.

AHSN-sponsored Event

Chau Chak Wing Museum (CCWM), The University of Sydney

Panel and Discussion of Comic Stereographs

Bringing the Laughter Home: Comic Stereographs in the Early 20th Century

What: Panel on the exhibition of comic stereographs and their viewing equipment at the Chau Chak Wing Museum, The University of Sydney (CCWM)

Where: Chau Chak Wing Museum, The University of Sydney

When: 3 August 2023, 6.30-7.30pm, followed by pop-up bar

Who: Free InPerson attendance (register online at: https://www.sydney.edu.au/museum/whats-on/talks-and-events.html

Photo: Cover of Sears Roebuck Catalogue, comic stereographs, courtesy Chau Chak Wing Museum.

Program

Introduction: Jan Brazier (CCWM); **Chair:** Jessica Milner Davis, The University of Sydney

Robert Phiddian, Flinders University: The Australian magazine and cartoon context: Technology and the availability of visual imagery in the home

Mark Rolfe, UNSW: The American-Australian context: Topics and social messages for entertainment

Will Visconti, UTS: Music-hall and the performative context: References, characters and scenes for the family

Q&A

Speakers' Bionotes

Robert Phiddian is Professor of English at Flinders University. He studies and writes about political satire, particularly the satire in Australian political cartoons and in 18th century writers like Jonathan Swift. He has been the Ross Steele AM Fellow at the State Library of NSW, and is presently working on a history of Australian editorial cartooning (contracted to Melbourne University Publishing). Robert is a member of the Australasian Humour Studies Network Review Panel,

Dr Will Visconti coordinates the Italian Major at the University of Technology, Sydney. An expert on music hall and burlesque, his first book was *Beyond the Moulin Rouge: The Life & Legacy of La Goulue* (2022, University of Virginia Press). Forthcoming publications include "The Monstrousness of Mae West" in *Post-Moral Humour in a World of New Gods and Old Monsters* (Tampere University Press), "The Myth of the Moulin Rouge" (in Routledge's *History of Paris since 1789*) and, with Matthew Kaiser, four edited volumes on 19th century humour and comedy (Routledge's Historical Resources series).

Dr Mark Rolfe is an honorary lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales where he taught for many years. He researches and publishes on Australian and American politics, satire, rhetoric, populism and the process of Americanisation. His publications appear in *The Conversation* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* as well as in academic presses and he is co-editing a book on post-morality and humour (with Benjamin Nickl, Tampere University Press). Mark is a member of the Australasian Humour Studies Network Board.

Dr Jessica Milner Davis FRSN is an honorary research associate at The University of Sydney and at Brunel University's Centre for Comedy Studies Research. A member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, she has twice served as president of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS). Her many books deal with farce, satire, the European comic tradition and cross-cultural studies of humour in Australia, the UK, Japan and China. Jessica co-ordinates the Australasian Humour Studies Network.

Speakers' Abstracts

Robert Phiddian
The existence of stereographs speaks of a world of relative scarcity of visual images in the home. I will link this history to the parallel story of weekly magazines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In these, hand-drawn illustrations and cartoons remained dominant until the gradual introduction of better technological means for reproducing photographs in newsprint. Until that happened, stereographs remained rare and remarkable things in domestic environments, giving them an exciting aura and creating a ready market.

Mark Rolfe
Nineteenth century stereographs may seem to be artefacts that are antiquated or mundane when compared to the sophisticated technology of our society. However, they can be understood as evidence of processes of Americanization that have always been part of the Australian story. I will demonstrate this by locating stereographs in the context of popular entertainment of the time and by examining their images, humour and catchphrases. These facets also give us important clues to how these simple devices tapped into popular culture of the time: they did this in ways that still exist in contemporary society.

Will Visconti
Throughout the late 19th and into the 20th century, some of the most prolific users of photography were performers, who recognised the medium as a means of publicising themselves or their performances. From the legitimate stage through to vaudeville, dance-halls and burlesque, *artistes* used photographs as merchandising and as marketing. Looking at examples from the collections held in the Chau Chak Wing Museum alongside examples produced in Britain, the United States and France, I will examine how performers and their fans engaged with each other through photography. This also raises questions about the implications for increased accessibility to public figures and the consumption of texts representing them.

Call For Papers: Ghent, November 2023

Conference on Humor and Conflict in the Digital Age

Humor and Conflict in the Digital Age (HACIDA), an ENLIGHT Scientific Research Network at Ghent University, welcomes proposals for 20-minute presentations as part of a two-day conference in Ghent, Belgium (29-30 November 2023).

The HACIDA conference will focus on the intersection of two complicated issues: the nature of and interpretive difficulties presented by humor across different media (such as memes, cartoons, and stand-up comedy); and how the Digital Revolution has exacerbated these already difficult interpretive issues, often through the decontextualized circulation of humorous images and statements outside of their original national and linguistic borders.

The Digital Revolution has therefore driven two forms of conflict:

1. *Interpretive conflict*: that is, the ambiguity inherent to humorous forms of speech, which often presuppose at least two levels of signification: the surface and intended meaning of, for instance, an ironic statement or image; and

2. *Social and societal conflict*: that is, when different and relative cultural norms, standards, mores, and sensitivities have been directly or accidentally challenged by humorous works that have been circulated online often outside of local contexts and frequently through the borderless world of the Internet.

We welcome both theoretical analyses and case studies of specific past or ongoing controversies and how the increasing interconnectedness of the world has driven interpretive misunderstanding and especially cultural conflict. Though this conference will focus on many negative conflicts, we also understand humor as a potentially positive force in online speech. Humor can be a vehicle for cross-cultural or communitarian understanding (i.e., a way to bring people together in communal laughter); and a tool of resistance or means of challenging power. Humor can thus bring about a positive conflict in this way, one extended through digital media.

Our confirmed **keynote speakers** are Chi-Hé Elder (University of East Anglia) and Eleni Kapogianni (University of Kent); Giselinde Kuipers (KU Leuven); and Raúl Pérez (La Verne University). The conference will also feature **a public-facing roundtable with humor practitioners**, including stand-up comedian Shazia Mirza, writer and producer Annie Julia Wyman (co-creator of *The Chair* on Netflix and *Welcome to Chippendales* on Hulu), cartoonist Tjeerd Royaards, and Mike Gillis (head writer at *The Onion*).

Proposals (of 300-500 words) and short bios (100-200 words) should be sent in one email (subject line: "HACIDA Conference") to both conference organizers: Andrew Bricker (andrew.bricker@ugent.be), Ghent University; and Alberto Godioli (a.godioli@rug.nl), Groningen University, by 15 April 2023. The conference organizers will respond with final decisions by early May 2023.

Note that this is an onsite-only event (meaning no remote presentations, for instance). Some financial support is available to early career researchers whose proposals are accepted for presentation. Those who cannot obtain a full reimbursement for conference-related travel should note in their email to the conference organizers that they are seeking some degree of financial support from HACIDA and, if possible, signal roughly how much.

About the city of Ghent (https://visit.gent.be/en): Ghent is a bustling medieval city of about 250,000 people situated less than 45 minutes by train to either Antwerp or Brussels (Airport: BRU) or 25 minutes by train to Bruges. There are also fast and easy train connections to Paris (1h15m), London (2h), Amsterdam (2h) and Cologne (2h).

Conference Organizers:

Andrew Bricker (Assoc. Prof. English Literature, Ghent University)

Alberto Godioli (Assoc. Prof. European Culture and Literature, University of Groningen)

For more info on HACIDA: www.hacida.ugent.be

From: https://www.forhum.org/blog/cfp-humor-and-conflict-in-the-digital-age/

Call for Papers, International Conference on Humour

Tasting Funny? International Conference on Humour and Taste

14-15-16 September 2023, University of Basel

https://slw-comicverse.dslw.unibas.ch/tastingfunny.php

Image: Nils Couturier

Keynote lecture: Sophie Quirk (University of Kent) on The Politics of Taste: Challenges for the Comedy Industry

Call for papers

Characterising humour in its different flavours gives rise to a variety of sensory metaphors, many of them food-related. Jokes can be tasty, cheesy, crusty, corny, sour, saucy, stale, canned, elaborate. Moreover, palatability is a common metaphor of a cultural production's acceptability, and humour can demonstrate good or bad taste, sometimes depending at which end of an aggressive joke one stands.

What is there to understand from this affinity between humour and food metaphors? Is it linked to the element of pleasure, of enjoyment? Has it to do with the comfort we retrieve from both laughing and eating? Is it our societies' way of labelling humour as something more essential, an ingredient indispensable to human life? Humour and food trigger similar responses in us, partly sensory and immediate, with memories vividly brought back or the risk of eliciting disgust, partly cognitive, delayed, with sometimes a disgusting or delicious aftertaste?

Can humour be tasteful without being dull? Does humour have to create some degree of unease? Does it have to address taboo subjects? Where is the line between transgressive and offensive humour, between progressivist contestation and reactionary rhetoric? And is humour appropriate as long as it matches an audience's sensitivity? If we reduced the notion of sick joke solely to Veatch's [N+V] theory, then a racist joke delivered to a racist audience would lose its offensiveness, with recipients perceiving the violation as sufficiently minor.

What are the criteria used to define tasteful and tasteless humour, and what is there to see behind this distinction? Can we discriminate between voluntarily and accidentally tasteless humour? Off-colour jokes are commonly offensive ones, yet may also serve a different purpose: addressing themes wholly outside of good taste, themes triggering a reaction of horror (rapes or genocides for instance), not to mock the victims but to attack the abusers, and upturn the meaning of bad taste. Such practices point to bad taste as a tool for protest, and to good taste as an instrument for silencing the powerless, an extension of their oppression. On the deeply political terrain that is humour, we must distinguish between the bad taste of a rancid discourse and that of a painful or taboo topic.

There is a kinship between good taste and social norms, so that bad taste raises issues of cohesion and belonging. Is a bad taste in humour a cause for exclusion from the in-group, or can bad taste also - paradoxically - bring people together (around a liking for "kitsch" for instance)? At what point does a tasteless transgression start forming a new norm? And how does this circulation of taste norms through shared ethical and aesthetic values relate to the construction of class identities?

Pushing the food metaphor towards the culinary terrain, one can wonder whether there exist palatable, funny for all, fail proof joke recipes, as well as sure pitfalls, guaranteed to be frowned upon, across languages, cultures and time periods. Or is humour so utterly embedded within a geographical, social, and temporal space that it is essentially barred from any universality? One can wonder whether the bad taste of a failed joke is similar to that of a failed dish, whether a pinch of salt can make everything tastier, and whether the right preparation can elevate mediocre ingredients. Or explore the development of humorous productions in children, from the clumsy mixing of incompatible ingredients towards more expert elaborations.

Possible topics for presentations may include but are not limited to:

- good and bad taste as categorisations of humour
- varieties of bad taste humour: kitsch, dark, gory, showy, bawdy, cringeworthy, etc.
- good or bad taste as strategies for producing humour
- taste and social norms
- good or bad taste of humorous topics
- good or bad taste in the choice of joke targets
- culinary metaphors of humour
- bland humour
- disgust
- the taste of the audience
- the development of humorous expertise in children
- …

We welcome papers on any humorous cultural production (literature, music, film, graphic arts, sculpture, architecture, design, fashion, advertisement, etc.), from any time period or language area. We also welcome papers on the translatability of jokes, whether food-related jokes or ones that would be unequally tasteful in different cultures.

Presentations of 20 minutes can be delivered in English (preferred) or French, the subsequent exchanges will be conducted in English.

Abstracts of approximately 300 words in English or French are to be submitted by 1st June, 2023 via this form.

Deadline: 1st June 2023

Organisers:

Anne-Sophie Bories (Universität Basel), a.bories@unibas.ch
Lara Nugues (Universität Basel), lara.nugues@unibas.ch
Nils Couturier (Universität Basel), nils.couturier@unibas.ch

Scientific Committee:

Camille Bloomfield (Université Paris-Cité)
Anne-Sophie Bories (Universität Basel)
Nils Couturier (Universität Basel)
Richard Hibbit (University of Leeds)
Jérôme Laubner (Universität Basel)
Isabelle Marc (Universidad Complutense)
Thomas Messerli (Universität Basel)
Lara Nugues (Universität Basel)
Alain Vaillant (Université Paris Nanterre)
Tony Veale (University College Dublin)

Timeline: Deadline for submission of abstracts: 1st June, 2023
Notification from committee: 16th June, 2023
Conference: 14-15-16 September, 2023
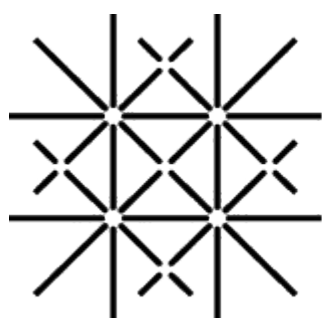
Member's New Publication on Hannah Gadsby

Balkin, Sarah. 2023. On Quitting: Dave Chappelle's *The Closer* and Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette*. *TDR*, 67 (1): 149–166. doi:10.1017/S105420432200958

Note on this article and on Sarah's on-going research on contemporary humour

Like Hannah Gadsby, Dave Chappelle understands the art of quitting. At the end of his 2021 Netflix special *The Closer*, a show full of jokes about LGBTQ people, Chappelle announces that he is "done" making such jokes "until we are both sure that we are laughing together." Chappelle's performance of quitting inverts the politics and structure of Gadsby's *Nanette* (2017), in which she infamously quit comedy because it reinforced her marginalization as a gender-nonconforming lesbian.

This article is a follow-up to "The Killjoy Comedian: Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette*" (*Theatre Research International*, 2020), which Sarah presented at the 2019 AHSN conference held at RMIT University, Melbourne. The paper on Zoe Coombs Marr's "Dave" persona, which she recently presented at the 2023 AHSN conference, is part of the same project, leading to a book in progress on contemporary comedy and humourlessness.
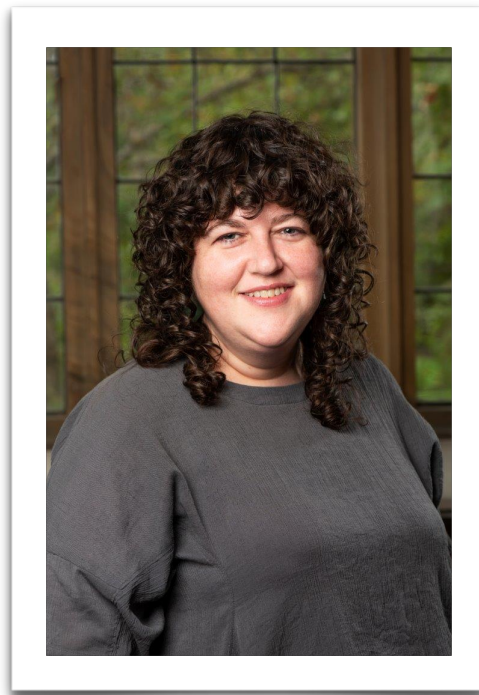
Bionote

Dr Sarah Balkin is a [Senior Lecturer in English and Theatre Studies at the University of Melbourne](#) and the Director of Research Training for the School of Culture and Communication. Her current research focus is on the historical emergence of deadpan performance styles (1830-1930) and contemporary comedy's relationship to humorlessness. Her monograph, *Spectral Characters: Genre and Materiality on the Modern Stage*, was published by the University of Michigan Press in 2019. Her work appears in journals such as *Modern Drama*, *TDR/The Drama Review*, *Performance Research*, and *Textual Practice*. For three years she was the Assistant Editor of *Theatre Research International*. Her article in this journal, "The Killjoy Comedian: Hannah Gadsby's Nanette," won the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies' Marlies Thiersch Prize for research excellence. With Dr Marc Mierowsky (University of Melbourne), she is co-writing *Comedy and Controversy: Scripting Public Speech*, (under contract in Cambridge University Press's *Elements in Contemporary Performance Texts* series).

Members' New Publications

Richard Scully. 2022. Cartooning as 'epitheatre': The case of Victorian and Edwardian London. *Ridiculosa*, 29, Special Issue on 'Caricature et théâtre'.

Ying Cao, 2023. Book review: Xiaodong, Yue (2018). *Humor in Asian Culture: A Psychological Perspective.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge. *European Journal of Humour Research,* 11 (1): 212-215.

Jessica Milner Davis and Jennifer Hoffman. 2023. The Humor Transaction Schema: A Conceptual framework for researching the nature and effects of humor. In Tracey Platt, Sonja Heinz and Jennifer Hoffman, eds., 'Festschrift for Willibald Ruch', Special Issue of *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research, 36* (2). Open access. https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2020-0143

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

Robert Phiddian. 2023. Petty's golden thread**:** The brilliant cartoonist illuminated Australia as it is, and as it could be. *Inside Story,* 12 April 2023. At: https://insidestory.org.au/pettys-golden-thread/

Iveta Žákovská, Carmen Maíz-Arévalo and Ying Cao. 2023. 'Are we laughing at the same?': a contrastive analysis of Covid-related memes in Czech, Chinese and Spanish. *European Journal of Humour Research,* 11 (1): 143-167.

Massih Zekavat. 2023. The ambivalent affordances of humour in capitalist organizations. *European Journal of Humour Research,* 11 (1): 184-200.

Eds: Please send in your recent publications so they can be listed in future Digests. Simply email Jessica Milner Davis at Jessica.davis@sydney.edu.au or our Book Review Editor, Dr Beatriz Carbajal, at: beatriz.carbajal@sydney.edu.au

A Tribute to Barry Humphries (1934-2023)

Anne Pender. 2023. Remembering Barry Humphries, the man who enriched the culture, reimagined the one man show and upended the cultural cringe. _The Conversation._

Published: April 22, 2023 10.45pm AEST

At: https://theconversation.com/remembering-barry-humphries-the-man-who-enriched-the-culture-reimagined-the-one-man-show-and-upended-the-cultural-cringe-188719 (accessed 25 April 2023)

AAP Image/VBPR

Barry Humphries began his career as a Dadaist. His street performances around Melbourne in the early 1950s foreshadowed performance art in Australia. He was the most daring student prankster Melbourne University had ever known.

Years later, academic Peter Conrad accurately described Humphries' adolescence as a "one man modern movement".

The young man secured his first paid acting role after a number of complaints from various women about a Dadaist event called Call Me Madman!, staged at the University of Melbourne's Union Theatre in 1953. It was anarchic, just like the early Dada shows of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich several decades earlier.

Call Me Madman! opened with a single musical phrase played on a violin over and over again, then a pianist sitting out of view of the audience sounded the same chords and notes in repetition, and ended in a ferocious food fight, with Humphries hiding in a cupboard from the outraged students who stormed the stage.

This parody taught him how to provoke his audience, securing their complicit and violent participation in his act. It also gave him his first taste of the power of an audience to determine what happens in the theatre. It was both risky and intoxicating.

When John Sumner, founder of the burgeoning Union Theatre Repertory Company (which would go on to become Melbourne Theatre Company), heard the complaints about the revue, he offered the young man a job.

The birth of Edna

On a tour of country Victoria with the company, Humphries performed a spidery Orsino in Twelfth Night, directed by Ray Lawler with Zoe Caldwell as Viola.

Humphries entertained the cast on the long bus rides, with falsetto speeches in cruel but hilarious parody of the predictable words of thanks given in every town by ladies of the Country Women's Association over tea. The character invented to pass the time on the bus made her debut in Lawler's Christmas revue in 1955.

Edna was a composite portrait of various women whose mannerisms had imprinted themselves in his brain as a boy, growing up in staid Camberwell.

With his new character, Humphries summoned a whole new world to the stage and created a comedy of ordinariness that had never been presented before.

This Mrs Average took on a life of her own and shone as the centrepiece of Humphries' theatrical world for the next 60 years, becoming Dame Edna Everage – elevated by the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam himself – in [Barry McKenzie Holds His Own](#) in 1974.

Just two years later, Humphries' extravaganza [Housewife Superstar!](#) charmed the West End. Wearing a massive hat sculpted to resemble the Sydney Opera House, Edna stopped the crowds at Royal Ascot that year.

The image of her in that sumptuous creation (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum) launched Edna and Humphries around the world.

Conquering the world

Edna hosted a series of chat shows on British television, watched every week by an audience of eight million. She skewered dozens of politicians, pop stars, singers and actors who graced the program every week.

Her appearance with Jerry Hall singing Stand by your Man remains one of the most hilarious television moments of that time.

Humphries' success on British television in the 1980s and 1990s were among the major achievements of his career. He created his very own theatre of the absurd with his reinvention of the chat show. The me-generation could not get enough.

After that, Edna conquered Broadway.

Humphries' theatrical magic also included dozens of other characters, all of them parodic and sharply satirical, such as the hard-drinking diplomat Sir Les Patterson.

He delighted audiences and prosecuted his satirical attacks on Australian life. On stage and on television, his ingenuity as a performer derived from his instinct for improvisation. At his best, the audience was treated to exceptional satirical theatre.

The early years

John Barry Humphries was born February 17 1934, the oldest child of Eric and Louisa Humphries. Eric ran a flourishing building business (he might be called a developer nowadays) and Louisa was a homemaker. As a child, Barry was close to his sister, Barbara. Barry also enjoyed adult company. He loved dressing up and accompanying his mother on trips to the city or out for lunch with other ladies.

At Melbourne Grammar, Humphries found the boys who excelled in sports rewarded and praised for their achievements. Everyone else was a second-class citizen. An interest in art or music was considered by the headmaster to be suspicious, a disappointment for Humphries, passionate about art.

In time, Humphries found a way to survive Melbourne Grammar – through provocation. When he was reprimanded for failing to cut his hair to regulation length, he stared coolly at the headmaster and said, "There's one man in the chapel with hair that is longer than mine. His name is Jesus".

Humphries' comment was not punished. Before long everyone had heard of his audacious retort.

On icy winter afternoons at the MCG – compelled to watch the titans of the school wrestle in the mud – Humphries found an ingenious way of expressing his view of proceedings. He positioned himself in a chair with his back to the football field, facing the spectators.

Slowly he drew out of his specially made Gladstone bag a set of large knitting needles and ball of wool; he would sit for the duration of the match calmly knitting a cardigan.

A transformational artist

Humphries was resilient and indomitable. He defeated alcoholism. He was generous, competitive and single minded.

With his mask off he was as witty as when he wore it. He married four times and raised two daughters and two sons.

He is survived by his wife Lizzie Spender, and children Tessa, Emily, Oscar and Rupert.

Humphries transformed Australian comedy, bringing an astringent and anarchic Australian theatre to the world. Manning Clark called him one of the "mythmakers and prophets of Australia [...] enriching the culture which had been dominated by the straiteners".

He certainly enriched the culture, reimagined the one man show and upended the cultural cringe. Bravo Barry. Farewell.

Bionote

Professor Anne Pender holds the Kidman Chair in Australian Studies in the Faculty of Arts, Business, Economics and Law at the University of Adelaide and is the Director of the JM Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice. Anne is a long-standing member of the AHSN and has contributed to many of its seminars and conferences. E: anne.pender@adelaide.edu.au

Editors' note: The 15th conference of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS), held at the University of New South Wales in July 1996, and co-chaired by Jessica Milner Davis (then ISHS President) and John McCallum (UNSW), led to the foundation of the Australasian Humour Studies Network the following year (https://ahsnhumourstudies.org/). Among many other events, the Conference honoured four leading Australian practitioners of the comic arts: Ernie Dingo, Ruth Cracknell, Campbell McComas and Barrie Humphries. Being in London, Humphries was unable to attend in person like the others, but a representative received his award for him. Sadly, the only artist still with us is Ernie but it's good to know that the international humour studies community honoured them all when they were still actively creating comedy and laughter.

In Memory of Gifted Australian Cartoonist
Bruce Leslie Petty (1929-2023)

By Lindsay Foyle, former AHSN Review Panel member

One day in 1960 Bruce Petty (1928-2023) walked into the office of Les Tanner (1927-2001) at *The Bulletin*. He was back in Australia after working in London and New York and brought with him some roughs that had been rejected by *Punch* and *The New Yorker*, as well as some already published cartoons. Some roughs were selected and ran in *The Bulletin*.

Born in Doncaster, Melbourne, in 1927, Bruce went to Box Hill High School. After he left school, he worked for a few years on the family orchard but also studied art at night at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.[1] At 19 he took a job at a Box Hill animation studio and from there moved to the Colour Gravure studio at *The Herald*. Petty said, "I went to work on a motorbike. I just left it on the kerb. Great, great joy. I think motorbikes are weirdly, impressively seductive. I didn't wear a helmet, drove around like a loony. Awfully dangerous - but then that was possible in those days."

Studying at RMIT, Petty came across some illustrations by Felix Topolski (1907-1989) in a book he picked up. "I had never seen anything like it," he said. "Just scribble. A child of 10 could do it . . . except that it was stunningly evocative. I'd been struggling away at RMIT with anatomy, and here was a man who didn't bother about it, who got it right. He obviously knew anatomy. You couldn't shortcut it. I did a lot of scribbling, sort of parodies of Topolski."

At the age of 26 Petty decided he wanted to travel and headed off to London ("which everybody did in 1954"). There he got enough work to survive: "I did a lot of crummy stuff I didn't believe in, but I was a sort of number two Topolski. If they couldn't afford Topolski, they could afford me."[2]

In 1955, Petty did a few funny drawings and sent them to *Punch* where Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990) was then editor, directing a redesign of the magazine and looking for something a bit different. "My drawings were certainly different," said Petty: his style was described as "a bit weird" and he was told if he shifted the eyes to the right place, they would think about him. So he got busy and shifted a few eyes around and submitted some more cartoons. *Punch* published three cartoons of the original ones and paid him £12. "Every week I tried to submit 10 drawings," he said. "They might take one or might take none, or might take three." Other work in London included theatre design which allowed him to get backstage at the theatre and opera.

Homesick, he decided to return to Melbourne, travelling via New York where he sold some drawings to *Esquire*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The New Yorker*. He was given a room to work in at *The New Yorker*: it was the one used by James Thurber (1894-1961) which was free on Thursdays and Fridays, so that's where Petty worked during his two months in NYC.

Returning to Australia, Petty shared a studio with Wendy Tamlyn (1934-2016), who later said, "Petty was doing marvellous cartoons. He was sending stuff to *Punch* and *The New Yorker* magazines, and doing marvellous concepts for television and whacky illustrations that nobody wanted."[3] His next job was at Melbourne advertising agency Robertson, Walker and McGuire and

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[1] *The Petty Age*, Wild & Wooley, 1978, p.2.

[2] *In the Making*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), 1969, p.26.

[3] Geoffrey Caban, *A Fine Line*, Hale & Iremonger, 1983, p.121.

it was not until 1960-61 that he began to contribute cartoons to *The Bulletin* and *The Australian Woman's Weekly*. After being turned down for a job on *The Age*, Petty moved to Sydney where Les Tanner had alerted him to a cartooning job at *The Daily Mirror*. Petty recalled: "Rupert Murdoch (1931-) was in charge, but *The Daily Mirror* had an extraordinary editor, Doug Brass (1910-1994). He was erudite and academic, knew Europe and understood my jokes. It was a relevant paper, a mix of popular news and ideas."[4]

Petty moved on to *The Australian* when Murdoch launched it in 1964 with Maxwell Newton (1929-1990) as editor. Petty recalled: "We all went to Canberra like a big wagon train. We were there to enlighten the world. I was pretty much allowed to choose what to draw, but it would be the story of the day or yesterdays. Neither Rupert nor the editors tried to influence what I drew."[5] In those days, *The Australian* was seen to be left of centre but, as Petty said, "This did not reflect Murdoch's personal political taste. He was a pragmatist. In the 60s, it was politically expedient to have a cartoonist with my point of view of the world" (interview, 1989).

Of his own politics, Petty said, "I find it difficult to explain. . . I'm for intervention: for justice, fair goes, prevention of man's cruelty to man. If that's socialism, I'm a socialist. I don't think you can rely on people's humanitarianism; there has to be government controls. It makes old words like freedom and liberty meaningless. The problem is how justly or fairly the controls can be administered. I wouldn't like to see the attitudes that exist among this Canberra mob becoming more powerful. The trouble is once you have done the barricades bit the rest of socialism would have to be very mathematical and unattractive, and that's the big thing against it."[6] The result was exciting and iconoclastic in a very hide-bound era.

Petty was always interested in animation and in 1976 he "devised and directed" *Leisure*, a 13-minute short film made for the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Housing and Community Development. It won the 1977 Academy Award for Best Animated Short, but the Oscar statuette went of course to the producer of the film, Suzanne Baker. Petty got a picture of it: "A very nice gold-framed picture" he said.

When Larry Pickering (1942-2018) arrived at News Limited in 1976 to work on *The Australian*, his politics were possibly more to the liking of Murdoch than Petty's were. "Murdoch," said Petty, "is a smart man who knows newspapers, and as the political climate began to change, he hired Larry Pickering. He was lampooning everything at a time when I was still hanging on to profit redistribution." Petty resigned from *The Australian* in 1977 and worked for *The Age* from his home in Balmain, Sydney, occasionally visiting *The Age* office in Melbourne. There, as fellow cartoonist John Spooner (1946-) wrote, "You could always tell that Bruce had been by the pile of words and scraps of imagery scattered across the desk. He didn't use inkwells or nibs. His favourite tool was a simple felt tipped pen. His favourite paper seemed to be plain layout pads. Bruce never seemed to worry about his archival legacy." [7] He produced a weekly cartoon in *The Age* with the main source of inspiration as, he said, being that he always saw "an enormous economic joke and I find that interesting".

In 2002, Petty received the Graham Perkin Australian Journalist of the Year award and was inducted into the Melbourne Press Club Hall of Fame in 2013 and the Australian Cartoonists' Association Hall of Fame in 2014. In 2016 he received the Walkley Award for most outstanding contribution to journalism.

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[4] Bruce Petty, *Petty's Parallel Worlds*, High Horse, 2008, p.2.

[5] Phillip Adams and Ann Turner, *In Their Image: Contemporary Australian* Cartoonists, National Library of Australia, 2002.

[6] *In the Making*, p.26.

[7] John Spooner, *Bruce Petty*, Melbourne Press Club, 2013. And see report below by Jessica Milner Davis.

Upon retiring in 2016 after a 55-year career of drawing political cartoons, Petty left a vast, characteristically scrawled mark on Australian cartooning. Beloved by his peers and by the broader public, he has been published in some of the world's most prestigious newspapers and magazines, and in 11 books of his own. His work as an artist spans animation and film directing as well as a series of beautiful intaglio etchings and drypoints for the Chrysalis Gallery, besides his cartooning.

Petty was not one for staying within the lines. "His newspaper work pushed the boundaries of what a cartoon could look like in this country," said illustrator Reg Lynch (1960-). "Bruce is more than a mere unique and brilliant cartoonist — he is a visual communication planet."[8] As his editor at *The Age*, Creighton Burns (1925-2008), said: "Petty's the only bloke in the world who can draw the global economy in one frame. His work heavily influenced his peers. And he gave help and advice to younger cartoonists."

After some years of declining health, Bruce Petty died on 6 April 2023. But his long-time friend Les Tanner had long ago summed Bruce up: "The two worst things a cartoonist can become is a crying drunk, or a guru. Bruce Petty has become a bloody great guru."[9] And his work will survive him.

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[8] Reg Lynch, interview 2016.

[9] *In the Making*, p. 24.

Bruce Petty (1929 - 2023)

Bruce Petty receiving his Walkley Award in 2016
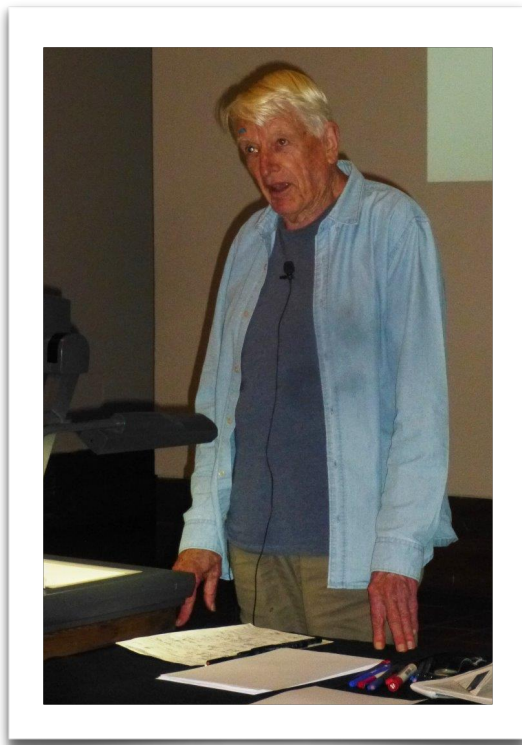
Bruce Petty presenting at AHSN2015
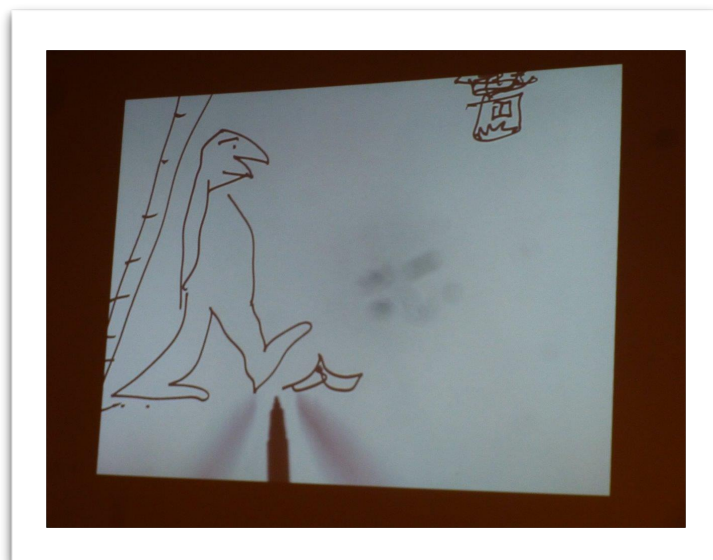
The emerging cartoon at AHSN2015 Part 1
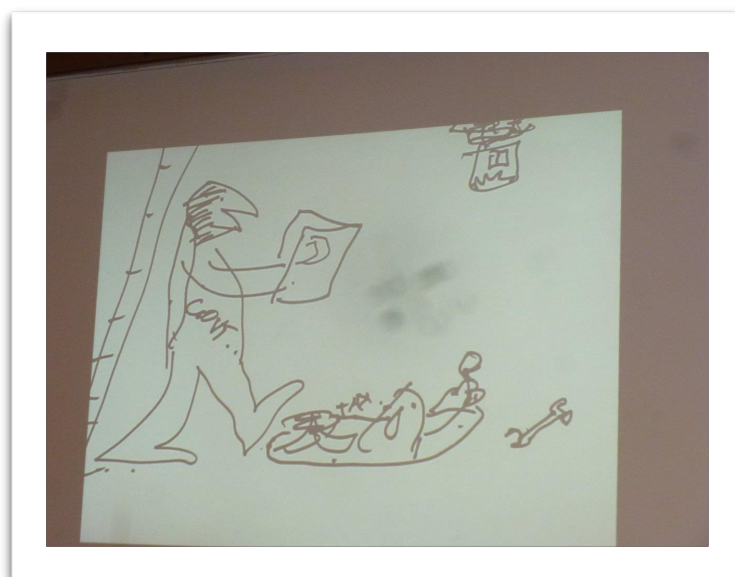
The emerging cartoon at AHSN2015 Part 2

More Tributes to Bruce Petty

AHSN Chair, Kerry Mullan, recalls:

I heard Bruce Petty's keynote speech at the AHSN 2015 conference at Flinders University. That was my first AHSN conference and I still use the conference bag with Bruce's design on it almost every day. I can see and hear Bruce's keynote now—I was absolutely fascinated with him demonstrating how he drew his cartoons. He chatted and drew at the same time, showing the audience how his cartoons came together as this was projected onto the screen for us to follow. That was my first brush with cartooning, and I was riveted and in total admiration of such talent.

AHSN Co-ordinator, Jessica Milner Davis, recalls:

I first met Bruce Petty in 1970. I was home in Sydney from Boston for my wedding and wanted a suitable wedding present for my husband-to-be who was a business consultant and "lapsed economist" as he called himself. Bruce's trenchant cartoons of Australia's economic and political performance at that time rang very true to me and I thought that framed copies of some would be just the right answer. So, greatly daring, I contacted the cartoonist at *The Australian* and asked if I could have copies: "Come in and get them", said the great man. I went and he pressed originals carelessly into my hand and said to keep them! "I can't do that, they're valuable", I said and insisted on returning them to him when I had had them carefully photographed and mounted. When I saw Bruce at our AHSN 2015 Conference, I asked if he remembered this and he told me that when he left *The Australian*, all his originals were thrown out in the garbage. I wish I had done as he said and kept them . . .

Robert Phiddian recalls:

I grew up reading Bruce Petty's cartoons in the *Age* in its glory days of the 70s and 80s. Others in the extraordinary group of cartoonists the paper could afford back then days often struck faster, especially the genius of the pocket cartoon, Ron Tandberg, but none worked deeper. You sometimes needed a second cup of tea to work through the full satirical ramifications on one of Petty's Saturday panel cartoons. From 1963 to 2016 his work appeared regularly in Australian newspapers – work that was in equal measure funny and analytical. He was endlessly searching and inquisitive, always on the side of the disadvantaged, but never in an ideological rut. It's a pretty remarkable achievement, and it offers a unique (the word used in its literal sense for once) critical map of Australia in the decades after Menzies.

Eds: The 2015 AHSN Conference was hosted by Robert Phiddian of Flinders University, who invited Bruce to present what turned out to be a memorable keynote: see the pictures – and envy Kerry her conference bag adorned with Bruce's cartoon drawn specially for the Conference.

New Book on Humour and Politics
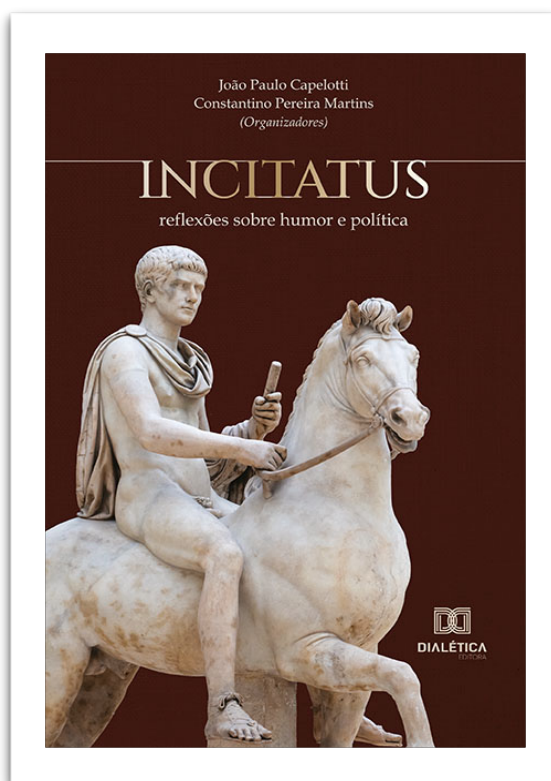
João Paulo Capelotti and Constantino Pereira Martins (Eds.) 2023. *Incitatus: reflexões sobre humor e política* (*Incitatus: Reflections on humour and politics*). **Sao Paulo, Brazil:** <u>Dialética</u> **Editora. ISBN: 9786525285955. 232 pp.**

<u>https://loja.editoradialetica.com/loja/produto.php?</u>
<u>loja=791959&IdProd=1244249117&iniSession=1&644adc7c036c9</u>

About this book

Incitatus, the horse turned into a consul by order of the Roman Emperor Caligula, is presented here as a symbol of the deep (but still open to further exploration) relation between humour and politics. The articles that are part of this collection, originally presented in an international on-line symposium that took place in May 2021, bring together reflections from scholars from Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Argentina and England on topics including humour and the public sphere, memes, utopias and literary allegories.

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Editors' bionotes

Constantino Pereira Martins' academic interests cover research at the intersection of Theology, Political Philosophy, Sports and Aesthetics. He has his first degree and Mastesr in Philosophy and is currently completing his PhD at Nova University of Lisbon with the support of the FCT Foundation. He is a collaborator in the Philosophy research group IEF at Coimbra University, a member of the European Network of Japanese Philosophy and the IAPS. His present investigations are focused on humour and comedy and he has been a Visiting Research Student at USP, São Paulo and at Concordia University, Montreal.

João Paulo Capelotti received his degrees of Master (2012) and Doctor of Laws (2016) from the Universidade Federal do Paraná (Federal University of Paraná, UFPR) in Brazil. He is a member of the International Society for Humor Studies, the International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies, the group of research Humor e História (Humor and History, Universidade de São Paulo) and the Núcleo de Direito Privado Comparado (Research Group on Private Comparative Law) at UFPR. He is the author of *O humor e os limites da liberdade de expressão* [*Humor and the limits of freedom of expression*], published in 2022 by Editora Dialética.
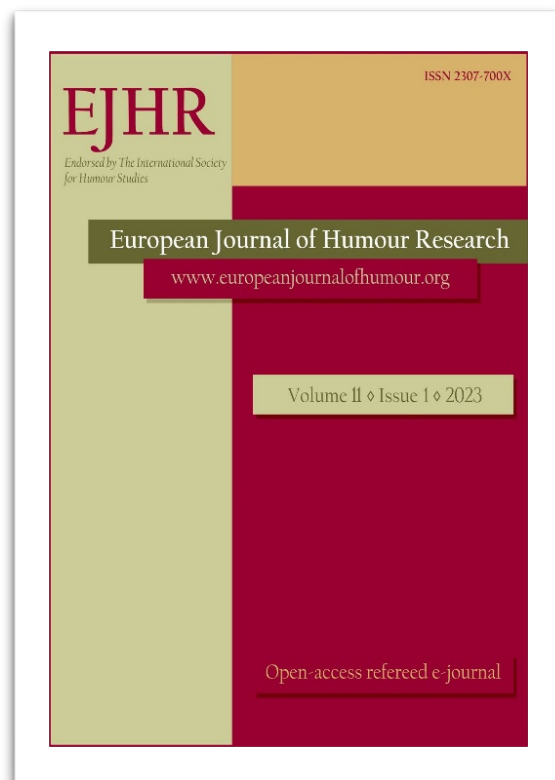
New Book on US Sitcom Humour
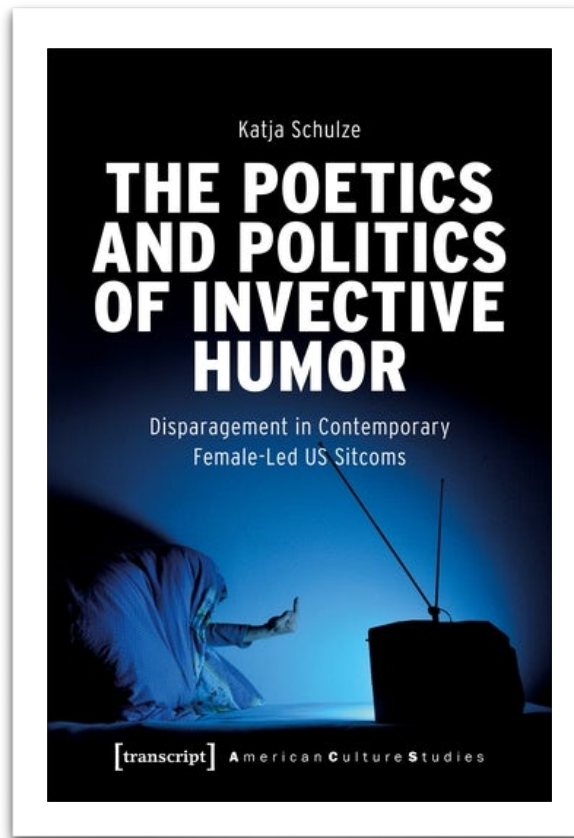
Katja Schulze. 2023. *The Poetics and Politics of Invective Humor: Disparagement in Contemporary Female-Led US Sitcoms.* American Culture Studies, Vol. 39. **Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. 264pp. ISBN: 9783837662603** https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839462607

Publisher's description

Vituperation, disparagement, and debasement seem to have become part of the mainstream discourse in contemporary US-American media culture. Zooming in on a distinct televisual comedy genre, Katja Schulze explores the formal principles, media-specific realizations, and the cultural work of disparagement in contemporary female-led situation comedies. Subsequently, larger patterns of (gender-based) invective strategies and conventions that define the dynamism of this comedic genre come into view. Her study outlines case studies of popular sitcoms, like Parks and Recreation, Mike & Molly, and the revival of hit-sitcom Roseanne, thereby unearthing how the shows are able to stage humor as mass-mediated deprecation - a signifying practice with its own poetics and politics.

Author's bionote

Katja Schulze, born in 1989, studied American and German Studies at the Universities of Dresden and Nashville (TN, USA). After finishing her Master's degree in American Studies, she received her doctorate at and became a member of TU Dresden and University of Leipzig's Special Research Unit »Invectivity. Constellations and Dynamics of Disparagement« funded by the German Research Foundation. Her research focuses on US American popular culture, especially television studies.

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From: The Editorial Team, The European Journal of Humour Research http://www.europeanjournalofhumour.org/

New E-Book on Humour and the Environment
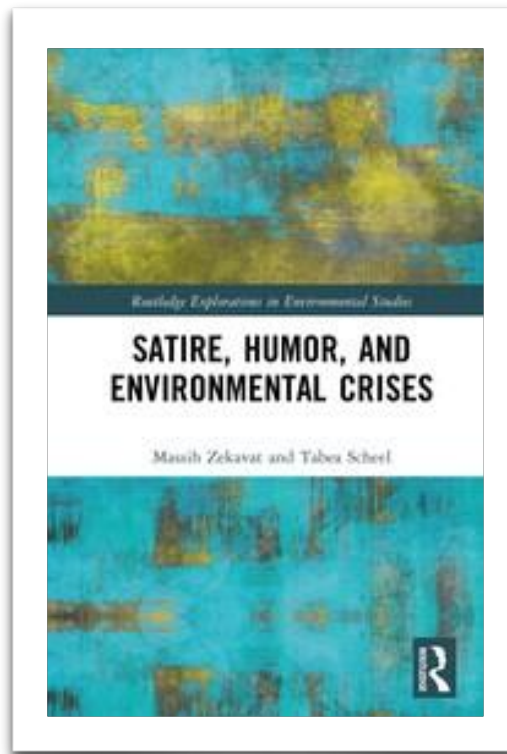
Massih Zekavat and Tabea Scheel. 2023. *Satire, Humor, and Environmental Crises*. London: Routledge. 248pp. eBook ISBN 9781003055143

Publisher's Description

Satire, Humor, and Environmental Crises explores how satire and humor can be employed to address and mitigate ecological crises at individual and collective levels.

Besides scientific and technological endeavors, solutions to ecological crises must entail social and communicative reform to persuade citizens, corporations, organizations, and policymakers to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and policies. This monograph reassesses environmental behavior and messaging and explores the promises of humorous and satiric communication therein. It draws upon a solid and interdisciplinary theoretical foundation to explicate the individual, social, and ecospheric determinants of behavior. Creative works of popular culture across various modes of expression, including *The Simpsons, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, and *The New Yorker* cartoons, are examined to illustrate the strong if underappreciated relationship between humor and the environment. This is followed by a discussion of the instruments and methodological subtleties involved in measuring the impacts of humor and satire in environmental advocacy for the purpose of conducting empirical research. More broadly, the book aspires to participate in urgent cultural and political discussions about how we can evaluate and intervene in the full diversity of environmental crises, engage a broad set of internal and external partners and stakeholders, and develop models for positive social and environmental transformations.

This book will be of great interest to students and scholars interested in environmental humanities, communication science, psychology, and critical humor studies. It can further benefit environmental activists, policymakers, NGOs, and campaign organizers.

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Exciting Collaboration Between AHSN and Leading European Humour Research Journal

From the AHSN Book Review Editor, Dr Beatriz Carbajal-Carrera:

The AHSN has recently started a collaboration with the *European Journal of Humour Research* (*EJHR*) for publishing commissioned book reviews.

As you know, The *European Journal of Humour Research* is an interdisciplinary journal that has rapidly become a reference platform for humour studies scholars across disciplines.

This is a productive collaboration for both the Network and the Journal, where we are joining efforts in the dissemination of humour studies research.

We will update you on any AHSN published book reviews. In the meantime, we invite you to check out the *EJHR* latest issue at: https://europeanjournalofhumour.org/ejhr

Also to visit the AHSN website's Resources page for additional archived reviews from past Digests that you may have missed: https://ahsnhumourstudies.org/book-reviews/

Finally, do not miss the review included in this Digest by AHSN Review Panel member, Dr David Rawlings of Roald Dijkstra and Paul van der Velde, eds., *Humour in the Beginning: Religion, humour and laughter in formative stages of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism* (John Benjamins, 2022).

If you have any questions about books and reviews, please email me at: beatriz.carbajal@sydney.edu.au

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Book Review

Reviewed by Angus McLachlan, Federation University of Australia, Ballarat Campus

Back in the mists of time, Kendon (1967) published a ground breaking paper on patterns of gaze during conversation. Gironzetti (from the University of Maryland) follows in this tradition with a fascinating review of her research on gaze and smiling during a 'getting to know you' interaction. Six pairs of participants volunteered for the study in which their talk, smiling form and intensity, and direction of gaze were all closely recorded. This allowed the words uttered, the nature of the smile, and visual fixation point of both members of the dyad to be examined at intervals of fractions of a second. The format of the interaction was left open with only one particular suggestion being offered, that each participant tell the other a joke, the two jokes, one for each member of the dyad, being supplied by Gironzetti.

The amount of data gathered was impressive and only the barest summaries of the findings is possible. Generally, participants took account of the content of their partners' utterances, their facial expressions, and their direction of gaze in order to achieve an appropriate frame for the utterances. For example, humorous utterances were typically marked by increases in the intensity of smiling by at least one, and usually both, participants. The importance of joint activity was demonstrated by the significantly higher rates of synchronised smiling during humorous utterances. Results also suggested that, during humorous talk, gazing at the listener's mouth by the speaker was significantly higher than gazing by the listener at the speaker's mouth.

The data revealed the high degree of individual variation in smiling and gaze activity, as well as influences attributable to the dyad. Also apparent was the difficulty in collecting reliable data on these actions with data from 16 of 22 pairs failing to meet the criteria for inclusion in the study for a variety of reasons. Despite these problems, the review of the measures provides a rich resource for those interested in the complex interrelationships that exist between the content of talk, smiling, and gaze.

More problematic is what the results reveal about humour. Two significant interrelated issues require resolution before Gironzetti's findings can be integrated into our understanding of conversation, humorous or otherwise: what sort of talk constitutes humour, as opposed to less serious chat; and whether or not a semantically oriented, script-based approach can be stretched to cover the latter. Before fleshing out these issues using two of Gironzetti's examples of failed humour, her application of the semantically oriented account of humour requires a brief mention.

Gironzetti identified three types of humorous text, punch lines, jab lines and irony. Within the verbal context of a joke, punch lines are clearly defensible as instances of humour, but jab lines (... he won't count **your underwear**) and irony (... well we think he is **the best mayor** we've ever had a::nd ..) are not immediately obvious examples of amusing content. The occurrence of laughter after *underwear* and the realisation that the ironic utterance concerning the mayor was a segment of mimicry strongly suggest that Gironzetti was relying heavily on cues beyond the text to pick out her humorous utterances. The principal cue was laughter, a somewhat paradoxical strategy given Gironzetti's admirably concise review of the vexed relationship between humour and laughter. There is nothing inherently flawed with using both verbal and nonverbal cues to inform us of the general nature of the interaction but it surely causes one to wonder about the adequacy of purely semantic criteria in designating humour.

Returning to two of the three examples of failed humour discussed by Gironzetti, the first comprised the utterance (p.159; @ - laughter pulses), "... of course, it costs like 25 bucks to have lunch in @ Palo @ @ Alto @ laughter @ it's really expensive". It is hard to see how the content of this utterance, in and of itself, is humorous according to the tenets of any semantic oriented approach. It is clearly not the punch line of a joke, nor is it ironic and, if it is a jab line, Gironzetti does not describe it as such. We are forced to rely on the speaker laughter as an indicator of humour, which is problematic. As Provine and others have shown, speaker laughter is the commonest form of laughter in dyadic interaction, it rarely accompanies talk that could be classed as humorous, and typically is not followed by laughter by the listener. The patterns of smiling and gaze of the participants identified by Gironzetti remain relevant to the unfolding interaction but unless one is prepared to broaden the idea of humour to include any talk that might be offered by a person "in a good humour", these patterns have nothing to say about humour *per se*.

The second example of failed humour also reveals the curious positions one must adopt through an excessive reliance on a semantically oriented approach to understanding humour. In this case the "humour" failed when neither interlocutor smiled or laughed while telling one of the jokes provided by Gironzetti. One is prompted to ask whether if two people exchange a joke and neither laughs nor smiles, has an instance of humour actually occurred. The answer must surely be no. If the speaker is not telling or 'using' a joke to prompt laughter but rather relating or 'mentioning' one, a possibility that Gironzetti fully acknowledges, then no joke has been offered.

Rather intriguingly, but not pursued by Gironzetti, the recipient of the joke in the above example prompts laughter by the teller with a single utterance of "OK". It seems likely that this phrase was offered with a degree of irony, hence the laughter, but I would be loath to class it as humour despite it satisfying the basic criteria for a humorous utterance within Gironzetti's scheme.

To resolve these intertwined issues would, in my view, require Gironzetti to fully accept the 'constructivist" approach that she dallies with throughout her exposition. The idea that the conversational frame is a product of negotiation of all participants should be applied more broadly to serious, non-serious and humorous content. What is said, how it is said, who says it, and the context of the talk all play their part. Requiring her framing notions to play second fiddle to the content of the utterance severely constrains the value of her contribution to understanding conversation generally. Her concluding remarks would suggest that she would prefer to grant the idea of framing significantly greater theoretical prominence; however, this entails downplaying the semantically oriented ideas on which the study was originally based. Yet Gironzetti's own data would suggest that she could confine the script-based approach to explanations of particular forms of verbal humour. She could then work towards an understanding of both humour and less serious talk that would afford the intentions of the actors their rightful role. As the playwright Jonathan Miller (1972) remarked, following Strawson, "... it is *people* who mean and not *expressions*".

Overall, then, I remain unconvinced by Gironzetti's attempt to relate humour, as she defines it, with smiling and laughter, however, the wealth of data she provides and the theoretical perspectives she adopts are worth grappling with. I have no hesitation in recommending this text as a challenge to all those interested in understanding how verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication fuse to establish the meaning of an utterance in its fullest sense, including instances of humour.

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Reviewer's bionote

Angus McLachlan, who is now retired from Federation University Australia where he taught psychology for some thirty years, continues to potter along the academic highways and byways of laughter and humour, as an Honorary Senior Research Fellow. He is still convinced that tickling is the means by which laughter becomes part of talk, from which all forms of humour develop. In an effort not to get too carried away by his grand theory, he has joined the Victorian CFA as a volunteer firefighter. A long-standing member of the AHSN Review Panel, he served as its Chair from 2018 until February 2023 when he stepped down to become Deputy Chair.

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Book Review

Roald Dijkstra and Paul van der Velde, eds. 2022. *Humour in the Beginning: Religion, humour and laughter in formative stages of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism.* **Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. ISBN (hardcover): 978-90-272-1153-8 ISBN (eBook): 978-90-272-5746-8**

Reviewed by David Rawlings, University of Melbourne

This series of articles resulted from an international conference held in the Soeterbeeck, a former convent in Ravenstein, the Netherlands, in 2019. Four humour scholars participating at the conference were asked to write short essays on the topic summarised by the book's title. The essays were then distributed to writers of the subsequent case studies, which are here organised into the three broad areas of Christianity and Judaism, the Qur'an and early Arabic literature, and Buddhism; They are followed by an integrative concluding chapter.

In the first of the introductory essays, Giselinde Kuipers lists the five ingredients of humour (its connection with laughter, its basis in incongruity, its non-serious nature, its connection with transgression of some kind, the fact that it often has a target). She notes that these elements make humour a risky form of communication and proposes a fourfold division for humour as it applies to religion: humour in religion, religion in humour, religion against humour, and humour against religion. Bernard Schweitzer's second essay notes that humour and religion are "odd bedfellows" which are often in a state of friction but that human societies have worked out ways of reconciling them or pitting them against each other. He suggests that, in Christianity, the temporal change in their relationship may be illustrated by contrasting the gentle ribbing of pious individuals in Dante to the blasphemous mockery of God in the work of David Javerbaum, a contemporary American comic. Schweitzer concedes that this pattern of progressive comic permissiveness does not fit clearly with other religions.

Inger Kuin's essay notes the importance of considering the person or group who appreciate/s a humorous event, as well as the creator and object of the event. She argues that the (unproven) trajectory of increasing liberality proposed by Schweitzer for Christianity may not be applicable in other historical contexts (exemplified by the Homeric epic), and notes the inappropriateness of positing a sharp break between Dante and earlier historical periods. The fourth essay, by Yasmin Amin, briefly summarises the main theories of humour: the classical approach, historical theories (relief, superiority, incongruity) and modern/contemporary theories (response, stimulus, functional). She suggests that the "child-like innocent laughter" reportedly enjoyed by the Prophet Mohammed does not fit easily into any of the above models, and argues for a "more comprehensive, yet simpler, model" which allows for the extraordinary complexity of humorous events across time and culture.

In the first of the case study chapters, established scholar Ingvild Gilhus examines the use of the laughter motif in ancient (probably monastic) Christianity as revealed in six of the Nag Hammadi texts (4th to 5th century CE Egypt). Such laughter is derisive, often strongly so. However, she argues, because it is a serious rhetorical tool which guides the reader towards superior knowledge, it is not inconsistent with the strong antigelastic tendencies of ancient Christianity. Nicole Graham then discusses the views of Clement of Alexandria (150-212CE) on laughter. Influenced by Plato and Aristotle as well as the Christian Scriptures, Clement considered that neither laughing nor smiling is appropriate when it does not serve a rational purpose, or is disorderly or immoderate in degree or frequency. However, laughter which is rational and controlled can be appropriately used as a pedagogical tool, or to mock the views of non-Christians.

Another case-study examines the letters of Gregory of Nazianzus (circa 329-390). Floris Bernard notes that, while Gregory was generally averse to humour, in a letter concerned with desirable epistolary style, he allowed that "jokes and riddles", among other adornments, can be used in moderation to give letters grace and charm, and to maintain friendship. Pierluigi Lanfranchi then discusses the smile of the martyr in Early Christian literature. In line with Greek philosophical tradition, those writers differentiated laughing, often seen as a sign of emotional excess, from smiling, which was seen as indicating self-control and wisdom. The martyr's smile thus not only indicates courage in the face of death, but is also a provocative response, exposing the stupidity and absurdity of violence.=

In the single Judaistic chapter, Reuven Kiperwasser examines the role of humour in expressing theological ideas in the Babylonian Talmud. One story discussed at length involves God Almighty coming in disguise as a joker to converse with, deceive, and scoff at, the Assyrian emperor. In fact, the main objects of this mockery are theological views that the narrator is attempting to highlight.

While theatre was among the forms of mass-entertainment specifically condemned by early church leaders and Christian writers, not all Christians agreed. Roald Dijkstra examines some unusual mime reports from late antiquity, which reveal that a small literary genre originally intended to ridicule Christianity in some cases showed the actor suddenly converting to Christianity and dying as a martyr. Dijkstra suggests these could have been written by Christians wanting to reconcile the entertainment of the theatre with their faith. A further case study is that in which Victor Hunink discusses the *Cena Cypriani* ("Banquet of St Cyprian"), a 4th century Christian curiosum of unknown authorship. It describes a wedding in which many, mostly biblical, characters appear and engage in quite uncharacteristic, and sometimes violent, unexpected, or incredible behaviour. Hunink finds in this work suggestions of postmodernism and even the playful irreverence of Monty Python and reminds readers of the work's crucial role in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose.*

In the first of four Islamic articles, Farooq Hassan reflects on the use of humour in the early Islamic period. Smiling, as well as moderate and balanced laughter, was permissible, but not excessive laughter, though there are clear examples of the Prophet laughing heartily. It was believed sinful to use humour based on lies, or to use it to mock or belittle others, or to arouse fear, whereas virtuous and benign humour was to be encouraged. Next, Yasmin Amin discusses examples in the Sunni Hadith of the Prophet describing instances where God Himself laughs to express His satisfaction and pleasure, and to reassure believers of His mercy and benevolence. She discusses why these depictions are universally rejected in the Shi'ite Hadith corpus on the grounds of veracity and authenticity.=

Geert Jan van Gelder discusses some of the poems of the great Arabic poet, Abu Nuwas (c. 756-813), focusing on both his obscene poems and those which flout or parody the prescripts of Islam. The author notes that the term "normative Islam" tends to refer to a puritanical form of Islam often quite different to the way it is and has been practiced. Humour scholar Ulrich Marzolph discusses the fact that, among the very large repertoire of classical (9th to early 13th century) Arabic jokes and jests, there are a number with corresponding versions in ancient Greek and Buddhist sources. While it is likely that some have been orally transmitted from Greek sources, making a clear connection to Buddhist jokes is more problematic.

Opening the section on Buddhism, Michel Dijkstra contrasts the negative view of humour in early Indian Buddhism with its use as a "skilful means" of gaining enlightenment in the Daoist-influenced Buddhism of China. Zen masters used jokes to open the minds of their students, to cut through illusion, and to attain a liberating connectedness to all things. Arjan Sterken then discusses the humorous figure of the Monkey King, who occurs regularly in the historical discourse concerning the relative superiority of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, in scenes where he steals or is tempted to steal food. Three texts are discussed, including the well-known *The Journey to the West,* in each of which the Monkey King is employed differently. In the third Buddhism case study, Paul van der Velde begins his essay by noting that, in contrast to many later Zen stories, "Ancient Buddhism is not that funny". Using four examples from early Indian writings, he argues that some writings may well have been intended cynically, or as a joke, but have lost their intended meaning once the original context is forgotten.

 Finally, in the concluding chapter, Roald Dijkstra notes the relevance of historical material to the present day and attempts to summarise current knowledge in the areas covered by the earlier chapters. A major section entitled "Approaches and basic principles" briefly explores what is meant by the "beginning" with respect to different religions, the pervasiveness of humour in human history, the connection between humour and laughter, and issues arising from the definition, nature, and functions of humour. Seven aspects of religious humour are then discussed: Differences between religions concerning the nature of the divine, the use of superiority humour, the use of humour didactically, the differential use of humour "for fun", whether humour needs to be moderate ("Not too much, nor too loud"), the difficulty of assessing historically the category of humour *against* religion, and how religious rules (sometimes against humour and laughter) are often quite different to reality.

Dijksta's overall conclusion that "humour is a protean phenomenon" points to the many unanswered questions in the area, suggesting the need for both further relevant case-study material around religious "beginnings", and further exploration of patterns within that material. He notes the pre-eminence of context as the common feature in all the case-studies, using as an example the different political, social, and religious environment of early Christianity compared with early Islam. This general point might help provide direction for future research.

Almost without exception, I found these chapters stimulating and thought provoking. Infrequently, there are statements that require specialist background knowledge, as in occasional allusions or short (untranslated) passages of Latin or German. This is rare, however, and the generalist humour scholar without a background in early religion will find the book accessible and readable. Indeed, such readers might find it useful as an entry point to the understanding of a religion or a religious community, although the seriousness of the topics and the complexity of the discussion demands a graduate readership at least. The volume usefully collects some of the leading scholars who have written on the topic of humour and religion, making it an excellent foray into the complexities of this not very well understood field.
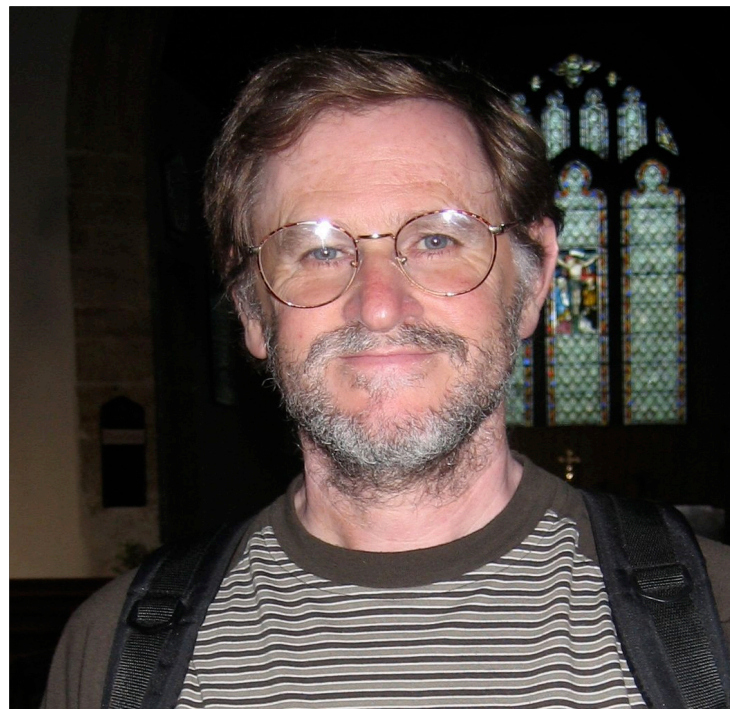
Reviewer's bionote
Following completion of a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Oxford University (Magdalen College, 1983), David Rawlings worked for most of his academic career in the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne, where he is currently an honorary Senior Fellow. In 2016, he completed a Master of Arts (Theology) degree at the University of Divinity, Melbourne. The focus of his research has been personality psychology, particularly the interface between personality and such areas as humour, aesthetic preference and creativity, religious belief and experience, and psychopathology. David is a long-standing member of the AHSN Review Panel.

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