

**2006 COLLOQUIUM OF THE
AUSTRALASIAN HUMOUR SCHOLARS NETWORK**

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**DEPT OF PSYCHOLOGY
FACULTY OF LIFE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
(HAWTHORN, MELBOURNE)**

FINAL PROGRAM

**“STUDYING AND APPLYING
HUMOUR”**

Tuesday 18th and Wednesday 19th April 2006

PROGRAM ENQUIRIES:

Dr Jessica Milner Davis
Hon Research Fellow
School of Media, Film and Theatre
University of NSW
Tel: 02 9958 4758
Fax: 02 9967 2041
E-mail: jmilnerdavis@unsw.edu.au

ATTENDANCE ENQUIRIES:

Dr Bruce Findlay
Dept of Psychology
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn VIC 3122
Tel: 03 9214 8093
Fax: 03 9819 0574
E-mail: bfindlay@swin.edu.au

NB: SEND REGISTRATION FORM (attached at last page) and PAYMENT to:

Ms Jennifer Beale / Ms Julie Miller
School of Media, Film and Theatre
University of NSW
Sydney NSW 2052
Tel: 02 9385 4856/6811 Fax: 02 9385 6812
E-mail: j.beale@unsw.edu.au / j.miller@unsw.edu.au

TIMETABLE

TUESDAY 18 APRIL

9.00 – 9.20 am	Registration; Tea and Coffee
9.30 – 10.00	Dr Carmen Moran, Social Work, UNSW, <i>Mirthful Laughter, Humour Styles, and Asthma Symptoms</i>
10.00 – 10.30	Dr David Rawlings, Psychology, University of Melbourne, <i>Humour Styles and Brain Laterality in Normal People</i>
10.30 – 11.00	Dr Bruce Findlay, Psychology, Swinburne University of Technology, <i>An Exploration of Humour Style Preferences</i>
11.00 – 11.20 am	Morning Refreshments
Parallel Session A:	
11.30 – 12.00	Mr Anton Crouch, Adjunct Research Fellow, Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, UNSW, <i>Humour in the Blues</i>
12.00 – 12.30	Dr John Carmody, Centre for Humanities in Medicine, Sydney University, History and Philosophy of Science, UNSW, <i>Humour and Tragedy: Apollonian and Dionysian: Classical and Modernist – a Conflicting Tradition Sustained in 20th century Music</i>
Parallel Session B:	
11.30 – 12.30	Dr Barbara Joseph, Independent Scholar, Comedy Performer, <i>Workshop: An Experiment in Joke Writing - Testing the Joke Formulations of Judy Carter</i>
12.30 – 1.45 pm	Lunch
Parallel Session A:	
2.00 – 2.30	Ms Allanah Johnston, Research Student, UQ Business School, <i>Working Comedy: Organising and Managing a Comedic Performance</i>
2.30 – 3.00	Mr Stephen Cronk, Research Student, Cultural Studies, ACU, Brisbane, <i>Roy and HG's Embodiment of Established Australian Stereotypes and Themes</i>
Parallel Session B:	
2.00 – 2.30	Ms Maren Rawlings, Research Student, Psychology, Swinburne University of Technology, <i>Evolution and Social Construction as Speculative Explanations of Humour in the Workplace</i>
2.30 – 3.00	Mr Ben Leung, Research Student, Education, Monash University, <i>Towards Developing a Cross-culturally Objective Humour Appreciation Measure (HAM)</i>
3.00 – 3.20 pm	Afternoon Tea
3.30 – 4.00	Ms Mira Crouch, Sociology and Social Anthropology, UNSW, <i>Actually, Jokes about Sex can be Serious</i>
4.00 – 4.30	Dr Carmen Moran, Social Work, UNSW, <i>Humour, Spirituality and, to a lesser extent, Religion</i>
4.30 – 5.30	Prof Philip Bell, Media Film and Theatre, UNSW, <i>Defying the Gravity of the Situation: "Funny Bones" as a Humanistic Theory of Funniness</i>
5.30 pm	Pre-dinner Refreshments and Film-Exhibition – Announcement of Dinner Arrangements

TIMETABLE

WEDNESDAY 19 APRIL

9.00 – 9.30 am	<i>Registration; Tea and Coffee</i>
9.30 – 10.00	Mr Guy Hansen, Curator, National Museum of Australia, <i>From Black and White to Shades of Grey: Collecting Cartoons at the National Museum of Australia</i>
10.00 – 10.30	Dr Haydon Manning, Political and International Studies, Flinders University, <i>Reflections on Election Campaigns – Australian Editorial Cartoons 1983 to 2004</i>
10.30 – 11.00	Dr Jessica Milner Davis, Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW, <i>The Biter Bit: Cautionary Tales of Australian Cartoonists and the Cartoon Wars</i>
11.00 – 11.20	<i>Morning Refreshments</i>
11.30 – 12.30	Prof. John A. Lent, Editor-in-Chief, “International Journal of Comic Art” (<i>IJOCA</i>), Temple University, Pennsylvania, USA, <i>A Winding, Bumpy Road: A History of Comic Art Scholarship</i>
12.30 – 1.45 pm	<i>Lunch</i>
2.00 – 3.00	<i>General Open Discussion on Cartooning</i>
3.00 – 3.20	<i>Afternoon Tea</i>
3.30 – 4.00	Mr Rolf Heimann, Vice President, Australian Cartoonists’ Association, Author/Cartoonist, <i>Wilhelm Busch, Katzenjammer Dad</i>
4.00 – 4.30	Dr Iain Topliss, English, La Trobe University, <i>Saul Steinberg’s War: The Uses of Caricature and Propaganda</i>
4.30 – 5.00	Dr Marguerite Wells, Independent Scholar, Japanese Studies, <i>Taboo-breaking and Humour: “The Tale of Camel Asleep...”</i>
5.00	<i>Departure</i>

ABSTRACTS

Prof. Philip Bell, School of Media, Film and Theatre, UNSW

Ph: (02) 93856811

E-mail: p.bell@unsw.edu.au

Defying the Gravity of the Situation: "Funny Bones" as a Humanistic Theory of Funniness

By pitting mad, grotesque (hence comical) bodies against the commercially witty and tendentious humour of words and satire, the 1995 British/American movie *Funny Bones* presents a complex theory of what makes situations and people funny. The movie inverts conventional social values, undercutting the law and language (one might think of Lacan, here). It celebrates the human body's precarious fragility in the face of death and power; explores national cultural differences in comedy styles; contrasts clowning and carnival with verbal stand-up; and tests the limits of black humour (through dismemberment jokes and morgue routines). It seems to be aware that pain and danger are humour's necessary circumstances. And although it is dead serious about being funny (not just 'telling' funny), it is humanistic to its bones.

Indeed, it might be argued that the movie offers nostalgic humanist resistance to post-modern commercial distraction by valorizing infantile, unselfconscious modes of comedy as play. It celebrates the liberating limitations of the body itself.

Dr John Carmody, Centre for Humanities in Medicine, University of Sydney, School of History and Philosophy of Science, UNSW

Ph: (02) 02 9417 2082

E-mail: john.carmody@unsw.edu.au

Humour and Tragedy: Apollonian and Dionysian, Classical and Modernist – A Conflicting Tradition Sustained in 20th Century Music

Life and art abound in contrasts and tensions: night and day; ice and steam; sleep and wakefulness; joy and sadness. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was concerned with them as the 'Apollonian' and the 'Dionysian' (from what he saw as 'the two art deities of the Greeks'), as 'the separate art-worlds of dreamland and intoxication'. The enduring challenge for art is their accommodation: sometimes their blending, sometimes their frank juxtaposition. Ice and steam can change state to water depending upon the energetic conditions; oil and water remain distinct. In music, the contrast is of dynamics and tempo; it can also be in the depiction of the comic and the tragic, in the key contrasts of 'major' and 'minor'. Art, like life, must move between those circumstances--an average position is not necessarily the solution.

The romantic movement, at least in music, probably saw itself as achieving an ideal--the amalgamation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, with the wildness of dance and passion in the ascendant. It was the reverse in the classical era. What of the twentieth century? After Wagner, especially as the rebellion of *Tristan und Isolde* was understood, the established harmonic language was stretched beyond its limits. An important fork in the rocky road was reached in 1912 with the premieres of the iconic modernist piece, Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, and of Richard Strauss's play-opera amalgam, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the first neo-classical piece.

Strauss and his librettist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, joined Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (with incidental music) to an extended operatic postlude which was a kaleidoscopic intercutting of the Dionysian (a *commedia dell'arte* troupe) and the Apollonian (a classical and exalted love story). The skittish Zerbinetta--a *soubrette* of whom a phenomenal vocal technique is demanded--remorselessly and wittily ridicules the lofty romantic ideals of Ariadne (and the entire Apollonian ethos). Even when they radically recast the opera, its creators retained this stylistic duality (some see it, wrongly, as a failed *mélange*). The spectator's attitude to the opera is, and must be, left entirely open: it will depend fundamentally upon individual dispositions towards the Apollonian or the Dionysian, the humorous or the noble. Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Magic Flute* offer the same intellectual and emotional duality, with a different attitude to their relationship and to how the spectator may deal with them.

Mr Stephen Cronk, Research Student in Cultural Studies, Australian Catholic University, Brisbane

Ph: 0416 190 506

E-mail: stephen.cronk@sacco.com.au

Roy and HG's Embodiment of Established Australian Stereotypes and Themes

Roy and HG have earned their place in Australia's cultural profile. The characters as presented in *The Dream* (2000), *The Ice Dream* (2002) and *The Dream in Athens* (2004) relied on traditional Australian stereotypes and themes to relate to their Australian audiences. Tracing through pre-existing theories of Australian cultural commentators on what elements constitute the 'bushman' and the 'ocker', and themes like 'supporting the underdog' and 'mateship' helps to illustrate these typically 'Australian' elements in examples from the *Dreams*. However, it is not only that Roy and HG embody these conventional stereotypes that contributes to their success: the stereotypical characters are placed in unusual and absurd contexts to create an inversion of the conventional sports commentary. Visual examples from the *Dreams* demonstrate that it is the combination of the adoption of stereotypical traits with the inversion of the situations they are placed in, which has contributed to Roy and HG's humour and success.

Dr Anton Crouch, School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, UNSW

Ph: (02) 9660 2889

E-mail: a.crouch@unsw.edu.au

Humour in the Blues

Traditionally, the Blues is seen as the musical expression of an oppressed people, with suffering and unhappiness as the main subject matters. This view is correct but it conceals the breadth of other material dealt with. The 'other material' includes domestic relationships, violence and the widespread use of double entendre, metaphor and innuendo. The distinction between urban Blues and rural Blues is raised and the function of the Blues as entertainment, together with the role of gramophone records, is discussed. The paper concentrates on the 'other material' of the Blues, with particular attention to the use of humour. The presentation will include musical examples, mainly from the 1920s and 1930s.

Ms Mira Crouch, School of Sociology and Social Anthropology, UNSW

Ph: (02) 9660 2889

E-mail: m.crouch@unsw.edu.au

Actually, Jokes about Sex can be Serious

This paper addresses the epistemological significance of humour concerning sex. It will be proposed that jokes about sex - specifically, stories involving sex that are intended to make us laugh - more often than not contain messages about dimensions of experience which are not at all funny. To make light of weighty matters such as sexuality requires insight into human existence and sensitivity to nuances of expression. The relationship between pathos and comedy will be explored through an analysis of a small (but select) number of 'dirty jokes'.

Dr Jessica Milner Davis, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW

Ph: (02) 9958 4758

E-mail: jmilnerdavis@unsw.edu.au

The Biter Bit: Cautionary Tales of Australian Cartoonists and the Cartoon Wars

1. In 2002 the whimsical Australian cartoonist, Michael Leunig, had one of his cartoons for the Melbourne newspaper, *The Age*, refused publication. It drew a parallel between Arab-Israeli tensions on the Gaza Strip and the Holocaust. The artist's complaints that his meaning and intentions were being misunderstood received sympathetic public hearing at the time. In 2006, however, some public sympathy swung his way for a different reason when the same cartoon (widely published by then) found its way into the competition for Holocaust cartoons organized by the *Hamshari* newspaper in Tehran. Leunig's cartoon had been forwarded indirectly to the organizers with a cover note purporting to be from the artist. The Australian journalist responsible subsequently outed himself and apologized for the fraud.

2. In March 2006, with tensions building between Australia and Indonesia regarding Australia granting asylum to 34 refugees from the Indonesian-administered territory of West Papua north of Australian, a cartoon was published in Jakarta depicting two senior Australian politicians as dogs humping each other over the issue. Almost overnight, a tit-for-tat version was published in The Australian newspaper, leading to mutual recriminations and diplomatic strain between the two countries.

Can comic artists anticipate the likely effects of their work and should they do so? It is true, as Freud theorized in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (trans. James Strachey, London 1960), that given sufficiently high artistic skill, jokes can be constructed to avoid, even on dangerously taboo topics, invoking offence and a sense of personal insult? Are some forms of humour (visual versus verbal, abbreviated rather than elaborated) more prone to offending? Or are some topics unalterably taboo in certain cultural milieux? When a cartoonist consciously inhabits (as Leunig does) the moral status of a popular philosopher, does he forfeit the simple license permitted to a comic entertainer? Can comic artists have it both ways on the question of censorship, insisting on their unfettered rights to address the public but retaining the right to withdraw their work from publication at their discretion?

If public reaction is a guide, Australia's traditionally vaunted freedom of expression and humorous licence are now somewhat more nuanced than is popularly believed –a fact which may benefit the public commonweal of a multi-cultural society.

Dr Bruce Findlay, Dept of Psychology, Swinburne University of Technology, & Dr Jessica Milner Davis, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW
Ph: (03) 9214 8093 E-mail: bfindlay@swin.edu.au

An Exploration of Humour Style Preferences

This paper will describe the results of a survey of 269 university students (208 women, mean age 22 years, std dev = 6.6, and 57 men, M = 27, SD = 10.9) who responded to Jessica Milner Davis' questionnaire about humour preferences. The questionnaire asked respondents about preferences for films in general, types of comedies watched on television, humorous activities engaged in, and the nature of humour that they generally preferred. The paper will report frequencies of these in this sample. The questionnaire also asked for judgments of the nature of 8 specific television comedies and 8 strip cartoons. This paper will present an overview of an analysis of commonalities and differences in this sample's descriptions of these programs and cartoons.

Mr Guy Hansen, Curator, National Museum of Australia, Canberra
Ph: 02 6208 5135 E-mail: g.hansen@nma.gov.au

From Black and White to Shades of Grey: Collecting Cartoons at the National Museum of Australia

We are regularly told by politicians and civic leaders that we need to pay closer attention to the history of Australia's political institutions. Amongst the broader public, however, the question remains are they really interested? Surveys have revealed an astonishing public ignorance of the history of our major political institutions. The National Museum of Australia is one of a number of institutions that presents history to a broad audience. Over the last 15 years the Museum has presented ten major exhibitions of Australian political cartoons. Contrary to the popular perception of political history as dry and boring these exhibitions have proved to be some of the most popular exhibitions presented by the Museum. In this paper, I will review the Museum's cartoon collections and reflect on some of the problems and pleasures of presenting political history to a broad audience.

Mr Rolf Heimann, Vice President, Australian Cartoonists' Association, Author and Cartoonist
Ph: (03) 9699 4858 E-mail: heimann@primus.com.au

Wilhelm Busch, Katzenjammer Dad

Wilhelm Busch's Birthday is on April 15th. He invented an entirely new genre of picture stories which developed into the comic strip. Notably it was his 'Max and Moritz' which was imitated in America and appeared as 'The Katzenjammer Kids'. Some of his work was critical of the church and was banned in several countries. He was also a poet and painter. His influence was enormous, and a century after his death he still is one of Germany's favourite artists.

Ms Allanah Johnston, Research Student, & Prof. Robert Westwood, UQ Business School, University of Queensland

Ph: (07) 3346 9328; (07) 3365 6667 E-mail: a.johnston@business.uq.edu.au

Working Comedy: Organising and Managing a Comedic Performance

The paper reports on an early phase study of working comedians and how they manage and organise themselves and their contexts in order to stage a comedic performance. Within the humour literature there is a surprising dearth of academic studies of comedians. The study is based on intensive interviews with a sample of approximately 20 comedians as well as some ethnographic observational work within comedy clubs. The sample is mostly Australian with a proportion from the UK. The study focuses upon the 'backstage' behaviours and practices that lead to the production and staging of a comic performance and so examines the organization of comedy and humour it self. The analysis focuses on what comedians do to manage themselves, other stakeholders in the business and audiences in an attempt to stage an effective performance. These aspects of self management and organising are considered in relation to the creativity, precariousness and vulnerability of a comedic performance.

Dr Barbara Joseph, Independent Scholar, Stand-up and Sketch Comedy Performer

Ph: 03-87905641 E-mail: barbara.joseph@gmail.com Website: www.thebarbjoseph.com

Workshop: An Experiment in Joke Writing: Testing the Joke Formulations of Judy Carter

Judy Carter has maintained a very successful full time career in the USA as a stand-up performer and comedy trainer. Her joke writing formula has proven successful for numerous comedians who have participated in her workshops and followed the methods in her books. Carter suggests her process enables anyone with a bent for humour to write their own unique view of the world into a joke format suitable for live performance. This workshop will explain Carter's methods and give participants an opportunity to test themselves as joke writers. A brief introductory talk will explain Carter's approach which will then be followed by a participatory joke writing session using the comedy buddy system.

Workshop requirements: check your analytical tendencies at the door, bring pen and paper!

Prof. John A. Lent, Editor-in-Chief, *International Journal of Comic Art (IJOCA)*, Temple University, Pennsylvania, USA

Ph: 0011 1 610 622 3938 E-mail: jlent@temple.edu

A Winding, Bumpy Road: A History of Comic Art Scholarship

There have been different roads (often not smooth or straight) leading to the development of comic art as a field of study. The Japanese studied comics before World War II; in the United States, educationists and psychologists looked at the medium in the 1940s and 1950s as a possible cause of juvenile delinquency and reading disorders; the French and Italians treated *bandes dessinées* and *fumettis* as art forms in the 1960s. Amidst this activity, there were a few other books and dissertations in various countries on comic art, but often, comics faced obstacles in the academy mainly because of snobbery and insularity.

The main period for the development of the field of study has been since the early 1990s, when

regularly-held conferences, associations, book series, periodicals, and university courses were established. This presentation traces the history of comic art scholarship globally; pointing out trends and suggesting future directions.

Mr Ben Leung, Research Student, School of Education, Monash University

Ph: (03) 9905-2129

E-mail: ben.leung@education.monash.edu.au

Towards developing a cross-culturally objective Humour Appreciation Measure (HAM)

Humour appreciation is viewed as a highly desirable human trait, despite its variability in degree and individual preferences. It has attracted scholarly enquiry in many disciplines, including communication, education, linguistics, literature, medicine, philosophy and psychology for centuries. Although a few objective humour appreciation scales were developed in Europe and North America in the 1980's, most of them were dated and they were often constructed and conducted in a mono-cultural environment and population.

Through two separate studies with adults from Australia, Hong Kong and North America (N = 410; N = 753), a Humour Appreciation Measure (HAM) using English as a lingua franca was developed to meet such needs for a cross-culturally appropriate scale. It aimed at bringing in an interdisciplinary and international perspective whilst integrating three major underlying theories of humour, namely the superiority (aggressive humour), relief from tension theory (sex-connoted humour) and incongruity theory (surprising/double meaning) in humour research. This presentation will trace the development of the HAM, report on the psychometric evaluation of it, and briefly propose some implications to future humour research.

Dr Haydon Manning, School of Political and International Studies, Flinders University

Ph: (08) 8201 2426

E-mail: haydon.manning@flinders.edu.au

Reflections on Election Campaigns – Australian Editorial Cartoons 1983 to 2004

Akin to islands set against a sea of words, editorial cartoons frequently capture the essence of an election campaign's ebb and flow. They often contradict their newspaper's editorial line and front page banner headline and, in at least one instance, the national voter mood. For political historians these cartoons are invaluable as sources of chronicle and, for scholars of humour, they present an opportunity to test some theory. The theory worthy of testing is one developed by Robert Phiddian and myself concerning types of political cartoon. We argue there are four essential types of cartoon: 1) descriptive commentary 2) laughing satirical 3) savage indignation and 4) destructive satirical. This paper looks for these types across the spectrum of election campaigns covered by The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age newspapers between 1983 and 2004.

Dr Carmen Moran, School of Social Work, UNSW

Ph: (02) 93851860

E-mail: c.moran@unsw.edu.au

Humour, Spirituality and, to a Lesser Extent, Religion

In the last decade there has been a remarkable increase in the number of papers that deal with the topic of spirituality, and often a link between spirituality and humour is mentioned. This paper explores that link further. The work on spirituality shares some of the methodological problems that have besieged humour scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s. Nevertheless, the case for an increased focus on contemporary spirituality has been made, and the link between humour and spirituality warrants exploration from the perspective of humour scholars, not just those who work in the area of spirituality. This paper argues that contemporary approaches to spirituality share several attributes found in contemporary approaches to humour, including the major difficulty of achieving a satisfactory definition and avoiding ambiguous terminology. There is always the risk of appearing to be speaking about religion rather than spirituality. Religion clearly overlaps spirituality, but factors that distinctively define religion may be seen as antithetical to the notion of humour, at least in some instances. As some examples are discussed, it may seem that the compatibility of humour with

spirituality or with religion depends on what aspect of humour is being discussed, for example personal use of humour as a coping strategy versus the public presentation of humour material such as cartoons.

**Dr Carmen Moran, Social Work, UNSW, Prof. Paul Thomas, Prince of Wales Hospital, UNSW;
& Dr Jessica Milner Davis, Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW**
Ph: (02) 93851860 E-mail: c.moran@unsw.edu.au

Mirthful Laughter, Humour Styles, and Asthma Symptoms

Humour research tends to be biased towards a positive view of humour and its influence on health and illness. This study examined negative and positive features of humour, and was grounded in the observation that laughter can be a precipitating factor in asthmatic symptoms. While clinicians have long noted this aspect of laughter informally, it has received little in-depth attention in research. This study represents a modest but innovative step in that direction. A clinical asthma group and a control group (N=22) were compared on 1) Self-rated breathing difficulty associated with laughter; 2) Frequency of laughter; 3) Preference for types of humour; and 4) Scores on Martin's Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ). The asthma group scored significantly higher on laughter-associated breathing difficulty, and the difference increased with the robustness of laughter. However, they did not report lower frequency of laughter. There were significant differences in preference for humour, with the asthma group showing greater preference for verbal humour than the controls. Finally, both groups scored close to the norms on the HSQ, but the asthma group were more likely to report using self-defeating styles of humour. It is possible that another clinical sample selected on the basis of severe laughter-induced symptoms would show greater constraint of their reactions to humour. Albeit with qualifications needed for a small study, these results suggest some prudence is necessary in labelling laughter as 'good for you'.

Dr David Rawlings, Psychology, University of Melbourne
Ph: 03-83446358 and 0417-390164 E-mail: rawlings@unimelb.edu.au

Humor Styles and Brain Laterality in Normal People

A range of mostly clinical literature has associated right-hemisphere dysfunction with certain aspects of humor production and appreciation. However, lateral preference has not previously been associated with humor 'styles' in normal individuals. A group of 109 undergraduate students completed the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) of Martin et al. (2003), measuring Affiliative, Self-enhancing, Aggressive, and Self-defeating humor styles. These were correlated with an index of lateral preference and with absolute lateralization irrespective of direction, using a chimeric faces task. Affiliative humor was associated with a leftward preference when viewing the chimeric faces; Self-defeating humor with a rightward preference. Absolute lateralization was associated positively with Affiliative humor and negatively with Self-defeating humor. The data give general support to the literature associating the right hemisphere with sense of humor, and are tentatively interpreted within the framework of Crow's model relating lateralization to schizophrenia.

Ms Maren Rawlings, Faculty of Life and Social Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology
Ph: (03) 9214 8093 E-mail: marenrawlings@yahoo.com

Evolution and Social Construction as Speculative Explanations of Humour in the Workplace

Do inventories of attitudes to humour pay enough attention to current theories of emotion? In *Culture of Honor*, Nisbett and Cohen (1996) demonstrated that white American Southerners became more angry than amused when bumped into by a large Confederate and white American, Northerners became more amused than angry. Why do anger and amusement appear as the behavioural opposites in such a situation? This paper examines several current theories of emotion from the standpoints of evolutionary theory and social constructionism with a view to explaining the uses of humour in the workplace situation. Consequentialist constructs such as 'well-being' and 'inclusive fitness' may explain some of the stress arising in workplace situations and 'affordances' and 'social scripts' may be helpful in explaining how humour can contribute to personal well-being in the face of 'rogue memes' that cannot

be dealt with in terms of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) problem-focussed coping model.

Dr Iain Topliss, English Program, La Trobe University

Ph: (03) 9479 2387

E-mail: i.topliss@latrobe.edu.au

Saul Steinberg's War: The Uses of Caricature and Propaganda

Saul Steinberg (1914-1999), the doyenne of *New Yorker* artists, was born in Romania, trained as an architect in Italy, and arrived in the United States as a refugee in 1942. He was already a well published satirist and caricaturist. Steinberg was immediately inducted into the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), spent time in China and India, eventually working with a newly formed unit in Italy, Morale Operations, which conducted psychological warfare against Germany. This talk will look at Steinberg's work as a caricaturist in both the USA and occupied Europe and explore the propaganda aspects of his caricatures.

Dr Marguerite Wells, Independent Scholar and Performer, Japanese Studies and Humour

Ph: (02) 4271 7584

E-mail: sycorax@ihug.com.au

Taboo-breaking and Humour: "The Tale of Camel Asleep..."

The coming of Buddhism to Japan can be dated fairly precisely to the year 552 AD. It became overlaid on, and interleaved with, the native religion, Shintō, The Way of the Gods. Shintō was, and is, Primitive Animism with powerful taboos on ritual defilement, especially dirt, blood and death taboos. It remained politically powerful well into the twentieth century and, although the political power is a thing of the past, the taboos persist into the twenty-first century.

The Tale of Camel Asleep (Nemuru ga rakuda monogatari) is a one-act play in three scenes by OKA Onitarō (1872-1943). It is a farce adapted from a *rakugo* monologue and first performed as a stage play in the 1920s. It has since become a comic favourite in the *kabuki* repertoire, having been most recently played at the Kabukiza in Tokyo in 2000, the Shōchikuza in Osaka in 2002 and the Hakataza in Fukuoka in 2003.

"Camel" is a layabout who has spent a riotous evening feasting on blowfish with his friend Hanji, and has suddenly died. Hanji, equally a ne'er-do-well, is faced with arranging Camel's funeral. He asks Camel's landlord for the money for the grog he plans to drink at the wake, but the landlord refuses. Hanji extorts the money by taking the corpse and making it dance in front of the landlord's house until the landlord pays up and begs him to take Camel away. Given Japan's ancient and powerful death-taboo, from the point of view of theory of humour, this play is an example of the place that taboo-breaking plays in humour, and the way humour pushes the boundaries of the socially acceptable.