

The Humorous Times

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Ralph Mueller, Editor

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2009 ISHS Conference and Association News

Report on the 21st ISHS Conference in Long Beach

Long Beach, California, June 17–20, 2009

From Amy Bippus, California State University, Long Beach



ISHS President Christie Davies with the recipients of the ISHS Graduate Students Award: Ursula Beermann (Univ. of Zurich), Debbie Iancu-Haddad (Ben Gurion Univ. of the Negev), and Cornelia Cody (Univ. of Maryland).

The 2009 Conference of International Society for Humor Studies is now over, and it was an unqualified smash! This interdisciplinary conference was held on the campus of CSULB from June 17-20, 2009, and drew 150 academics and professionals in the field of humor from 17 different countries. We began on Wednesday with a Teaching with Humor workshop facilitated by Mary Lay Morrison. That evening we held our opening mixer in the Japanese Garden which drew raves from our conference guests about the beauty of the setting.

Thursday and Friday were the presentations on topics ranging from the fear of being laughed at to the therapeutic applications of humor; humor in literature, arts, and entertainment; the intersection of humor with race, gender, sexuality and identity; from humor theory to its application in stand-up comedy; humor through the lifespan, as we develop our sense of humor as children, are educated and join the workforce, and eventually face our mortality; and of course, humor as a communication strategy.

Thursday night featured a hilarious comedy contest showcasing the comedic talents of conference participants and CSULB community members. For Saturday's closing brunch, we were entertained by Time magazine columnist, Hollywood comedy writer and frequent talk show guest Joel Stein, who shared his thoughts on the challenges of being funny (and why humor scholars are not!). Conference guests then were welcomed to join bus tours of Los Angeles or the Getty Museum.

I have received nothing but glowing feedback about the conference organization, our campus, and our students. I wanted to express my sincere appreciation for the range of support I received from colleagues and students in the Communication Studies Department.

You can view pictures from the entire conference at www.photobucket.com/ishs2009.



The Reception under the trees in the Japanese

Future ISHS Conferences

Xiao Dong Yue (City University of Hong Kong) will host the 2010 ISHS Conference in Hong Kong from June 24 to June 27, 2010. At its recent summer meeting in Long Beach, the ISHS Executive Board also accepted proposals for the 2011 and 2012 ISHS Conferences. The Board selected Patrice Opliger (Boston University) to convene the Society's 2011 Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, and Wladyslaw Chlopicki (Jagiellonian University) to host the 2012 Conference in Kraków, Poland. Look for a special message from the 2010 Conference Convenor in this issue. Information on future Conferences will appear in upcoming *Humorous Times*.



For more ISHS news, visit us on the web at www.humorstudies.org.

14th Annual Colloquium of the Australasian Humour Studies Network

University of Sydney, February 20 and 21, 2009

From Jessica Milner Davis, University of Sydney

The Australasian Humour Studies Network <http://www.usyd.edu.au/humourstudies> held its 14th Colloquium on “Perils and Pleasures of Humour” at the University of Sydney on Friday February 20 and Saturday February 21. Twelve Australian and New Zealand universities were represented, with six presenters from the host university. The post-graduate stream heard papers in psychology, film, creativity and French Studies. Dr Jessica Milner Davis was convenor.

A reception was held to mark the launch of the new AHSN web-site and to express thanks to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Dr Michael Spence, and to the University’s IT Dept for their kind support.

Thematic strands included psychological aspects of humour and personality; Australian cartooning, satires on academic life, regional bush humour and a “conversational corroboree on Aboriginal humour” by author and former Melbourne University doctoral student, Lillian Rose Holt. Legal and other humorous perils were addressed by Michael Ewans FAHA, University of Newcastle, describing his new, unexpurgated translation of Aristophanes “Peace”, and by Sally McCausland (from Legal Section of Special Broadcasting Services Australia - SBS), co-author of a recent paper on legal definitions of parody and satire under Australian IP law which cited the Vice-Chancellor’s own publications in this area. Robert Phiddian, Director of the Flinders Humanities Research Centre, acted as Discussant for a forum on early modern theories of humour with papers on Hobbes and Shakespeare, by Conal Condren FAHA FASSA, Centre for the History of European Discourses, University of Queensland, and Penny Gay FAHA, University of Sydney, respectively.

The next Colloquium will be held again at University of Sydney 14-15 February 2010.

Histories of Humour and Laughter Workshop

Cambridge, March 13th 2009

From Helen Robinson, University of Lincoln, UK



The beautiful Newnham College, Cambridge, provided the backdrop for the “Histories of Humour and Laughter” workshop on March 13th (British Comic Relief Day!). Organizers Dr Lucy Delap and Professor Clare Pettit thanked the Economic History Society for their financial support and welcomed Professor Vic Gatrell, author of *City of Laughter*, 2006, who moved that today’s papers were unified by a sense of “the juxtaposition of shock at what is, and what should be.” A broad, international spectrum of architects, anthropologists, historians, linguists and medics discussed topics ranging from the anti-female caricatures of Athenian antiquity, to the significant contribution of script theories in the construction of manipulative humour. A relaxed, refreshing structure included ample time for reflection and discussion, allowing the many strands of interest to be represented and considered.

The first, diverse set of papers fused surprisingly well the thread of shifts in political, social and religious power marked by humour through different time periods. The U-turn of the Berlin authorities during the first world war, allowing previously banned, parodic, theatrical acts to be reinstated, was seen as a managed propaganda exercise. The now encouraged, albeit silent, mimicry ironically permitted a much freer interpretation of subversive satire (Jan Rüger, Birkbeck, London). In Victorian Britain the not-so-clandestine “kitchen sink” laughter revealed a servant-master role-reversal, which unsettled the ruling class and empowered the workers, creating a “dangerous” social breach (Lucy Delap, St Catharine’s College, Cambridge). From the Medieval perspective, laughter, particularly in the theatre or church, was held to be socially destabilising and treated with suspicion and censorship (Brian Johnsrud, Oxford). Discussions considered how humour has shaped historical progression, and whether power shifts are governed more by deliberate, publicly humorous acts, or by the less overt undermining of respect for authority found in humorous banter.

Papers on classical humour provided compelling insights into joke structures which have prevailed into relatively recent times. Akin to contemporary postcard caricaturists, the potters of ancient Athens used widely distributed amphorae to market their particular brand of humour, exposing latent male fears through misogynist iconography depicting women as sex-crazed, lazy drunkards. In this way, visual “humour” became a powerful source of male dominance in the classical world (Alexandre G. Mitchell, Visiting Scholar, Faculty of Classics, Cambridge). In the Roman world, laughter ridiculed both butt and joker, this paper giving particular focus to the boundary between animal and human (Mary Beard, Newnham College, Cambridge). Both provoked rigorous exchange concerning the origins of laughter and gender manipulation.

The final papers on popular and political Scottish pantomime, (Adrienne Scullion, Glasgow), Punch and Judy, (Rosalind Crone, The Open University, and Jesus College, Cambridge), and jocular abuse found in *blason populaire* – inter-community abusive rivalry characterized by football chants and regional nicknames for example - (Vera Stadelmann, Justus-Liebig, Giessen), prompted analysis of the role of community and the comedic functions of visual humour as rebellion against social control mechanisms of the family, Church and State.

Although history has shown humour to be a controlling factor in many instances, it was noted that: “All laughter is inherently unstable and can escape in different ways” (Delap) and, in that respect, cannot be definitively used to control. Humorous contexts are in constant flux, yet, proposed Mary Beard, “although we may not laugh at the same things all the time, there is a direct line of descent through which we have all learnt to laugh.”

Humour’s role, we know, is at the same time expository, revelatory and didactic. Importantly, it “adjusts our sense of period” (Delap), pointing towards fresh readings of disparate social groupings and cultural contexts. The interdisciplinary nature of the group at Newnham is indicative of the number of fields the study of humour touches, and how it both shapes history and reflects continuing temporal narratives.

Upcoming Events

Message from the Convener of the 22nd ISHS Conference

From Dr. Xiao Dong Yue, City University of Hong Kong

The 2010 ISHS Conference will be held on June 24–27, 2010, at the City University of Hong Kong (CityU), which is located under the Lion Rock in Hong Kong. Lying in the heart of Asia, Hong Kong is one of the world’s most fascinating, stimulating centers where cultures of the East and West co-exist in perfect harmony.

We will be delighted to welcome you to this upcoming 22nd International ISHS Humor Conference. Following the previous traditions, we would like this conference to be held as a distinguished forum of scientific discussions and exchanges in humor studies as well as a place for enjoying jokes, laughter, and humor.

We hope that the participation of researchers, experts, academics and professionals from all areas of humor will be very high both in number and quality of their contributions and encourage everyone to enjoy during these days this wonderful city and university!

Hope to see you all in Hong Kong in June 2010.

Monty Python in Its British and International Cultural Contexts or How to Recognize the Spanish Inquisition from Quite a Long Way Away

University of Lodz, Lodz, Poland, December 1–3, 2009

This conference will be held at the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Lodz, Poland, in order to commemorate the 40th anniversary of launching Monty Python Flying Circus.

The suggested areas for discussion will include: Monty Python’s humor; the language of Monty Python; the visual poetics of Monty Python programs and films; Monty Python and the idea of Britishness; Monty Python and stereotypes; cultural subversion and iconoclasm; Monty Python and counterculture; The postmodern contexts for Monty Python; The influence of Monty Python on British/international culture; The reception of Monty Python abroad (in Poland and elsewhere)

The conference fee is 70 € for foreign scholars and 200 PLN for Polish scholars.

LAFLA: Linguistic Approaches to Funniness, Amusement and Laughter

1st International Symposium, University of Łódź, Łódź, Poland, March 24–26 2010

Humor, inherently associated with funniness, amusement and laughter, has attracted scholarly interest for centuries. Over the past three decades, humor studies have been developing at full tilt, with innumerable insightful publications released each year. The conference is convened to provide a forum for linguists interested in the area of humor research. The primary objectives will be to explore the nature of multifarious humorous phenomena and to enhance methodological tools used in humor studies across a variety of linguistic disciplines. More specifically, the organizers invite papers addressing all manner of manifestations of humor, funniness, amusement, and laughter, such as: canned jokes; one-liners; witticisms; anecdotes; teasing; banter; wordplay; rhetorical figures, e.g. humorous irony or humorous metaphors; parody, satire; laughter in discourse; non-verbal humor. There is no limitation in terms of medium or discourse, or in terms of theoretical frameworks subscribing to linguistic disciplines.

The registration fee of 150 euros covers a set of conference materials, coffee breaks with refreshments, and access to the Internet facilities. A selection of conference papers will be published with an international publisher. The submission deadline is November 1, 2009.

Please visit the Internet for further information at <http://ia.uni.lodz.pl/pragmatics/events/lafal>.

1st International Conference on Humour in Conventional and Unconventional Politics (ICHCUP)

Dunarea de Jos University of Galati, Romania, 6-8 November, 2009

The 1st ICHCUP presents interdisciplinary contributions on humor in political speeches, humor in political campaigning and political conferences, humor in parliamentary debates, humor and democracy, humor and leadership, military humor, humor in totalitarian societies, humor in wartime, political humor in the media, translation and political humor.

More information about the conference will be soon online at <http://www.lit.ugal.ro/2009-HUMOUR/index.htm>.

Member News and Humor in the News

Allen Klein Awarded the Doug Fletcher Lifetime Achievement Award

San Francisco-based humorist Allen Klein has received the Doug Fletcher Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) at their annual convention, April 2-5, 2009, in Las Vegas. (cf. http://www.aath.org/lifetime_award.htm)

Ralph Mueller has Finished his "Habilitation" and is now Privat Dozent PD

Ralph Mueller has finally finished his habilitation in German literary studies. A habilitation is a cherished German academic tradition in which you demonstrate your devotion to your subject by writing some kind of extended second Ph.D. thesis.

New Books on Humor

John Benjamins is now offering a very special book discount (50% off the list price) for the newly released *Humor in Interaction*, edited by Delia Chiaro and Neal Norrick. John Benjamins also offers the paperback edition of Wally Chafe's book, *The Importance of Not being Earnest*. The paperback version does not come with a discount, but is just \$35 (less than the hardcover version with the 50% ISHS discount).

Please note that DeGruyter now offers a 20% discount on all its book titles for ISHS members. If this is not enough, Transaction Publishers continues to offer to ISHS members 25% discounts on all books in its Humor Studies series, which includes *Farce* (by Jessica Milner Davis) and *The Mirth of Nations* (by Christie Davies).

And finally, you are still eligible for substantial 35% discounts on all books in Wayne State's Humor in Life and Letters Series at www.wsupress.wayne.edu

Recent Books in Humor Research

Brita Banitz: *Funny Business: Verbal Humor in Business Negotiation and the Non-Native English Speaker*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr Muller, 2009; US\$ 81.00.

Non-native English speakers often have difficulties detecting humor. This book describes primarily linguistic markers of humor as evidenced in the U.S. business sector. The central part of the book focuses on the linguistic analysis of data from various sources. The book concludes with a summary of these overt humor markers and culminates in the proposal of 'The Humor Profile', a comprehensive framework for future data analysis, which is relevant to ESL teachers of business communication, but might also be of interest to business English students, managers and training personnel, as well as linguists and humor scholars.

John Bruns: *Loopholes. Reading Comically*. Edison: Transaction publishers. US\$ 34.95.

Bruns' guiding assumption is that comedy is not simply a literary or theatrical genre, to be differentiated from tragedy or from romance, but a certain way of disclosing, perhaps undoing, the way the world is organized. When we view the world in terms of what is incompatible, we are reading comically. In this sense, comedy exists outside the alternatives of tragic and comic. It is a form of relief from the difficulties of everyday life.

Alistair Clarke: *The Faculty of Adaptability. Humour As The Assessment And Manipulation Of Information*. Cumbria: Pyrrhic House, 2009; £10.99 paperback, £5.99 eBook.

Human adaptability has led to exponential intellectual and cultural development. This ability, claims evolutionary theorist Alastair Clarke, arises due to a facility with the recognition of patterns which, in turn, has been encouraged by the cognitive processes known popularly as humor. This volume expands on the basic pattern recognition theory as presented in the introductory volume by identifying the precise nature of the patterns involved and their relationships to one another. The book is also available as eBook at <http://www.pyrrhichouse.co.uk/book-info/faculty-adaptability.php>.

Satire TV. Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era. Ed. by Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, Ethan Thompson. New York: NYU Press, 2009.

Satire TV examines what happens when comedy becomes political, and politics become funny. A series of original essays focus on a range of programs including *The Daily Show*, *South Park*, *Da Ali G Show* and Internet D.I.Y. satire and essays on British and Canadian satire. They all offer insights into what today's class of satire tells us about the current state of politics, of television, of citizenship, all the while suggesting what satire adds to the political realm that news and documentaries cannot.

Serious Frolic: Essays on Australian Humour. Ed. by Fran de Groen and Peter Kirkpatrick. St Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 2009.

Serious Frolic is the first collection of essays dedicated to examining a range of Australian humor. Leading scholars in Australian literature and culture explore humor, from the high to the low, from the classic to the cutting-edge.

Humor in Interaction. Ed. by Neal R. Norrick and Delia Chiaro. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009; € 90.00, US\$ 135.00.

This volume provides a rich collection of essays by an international array of scholars representing various theoretical perspectives, but all concerned with interactional aspects of humor. All the articles draw on empirical material from different countries and cultures, comprising conversations among friends and family, talk in workplace situations, humor in educational settings, and experimental approaches to humor in interaction.

Humor in der arabischen Kultur / Humor in Arabic Culture. Ed. by Georges Tamer. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009; € 78.00, US\$ 109.00.

This volume contains proceedings of the conference on Arab culture held at the Free University of Berlin in 2007. A detailed report on this conference can be found in the newsletter 20.4 of Fall 2007.

Contributions and Submissions

Next issue is due in Fall 2009. Please send information, contributions and announcements to ralph.mueller@unifr.ch.