

The Humorous Times

Newsletter of the International Society for Humor Studies

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Ralph Mueller, Editor

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Association News

Newsletter Update

From Ralph Müller (University of Fribourg)

This issue of *The Humorous Times* comes with two major changes. First, the newsletter will collaborate more closely with the scientific journal *HUMOR* to provide an improved list of recent publications and more reviews. The *Humorous Times* and *HUMOR* will coordinate which books should be reviewed in the newsletter and which books should be reviewed in the journal. As a result of this collaboration, we will be better able to showcase the many books that appear on humor each year in a more timely fashion.

We believe that this joint effort between the newsletter and the journal will be of considerable benefit to the ISHS members. The newsletter can publish a wider range of book reviews sooner and without page restrictions. This possibility will allow the journal to focus largely on books of high theoretical impact and to expedite its book review process.

In this issue of the *Humorous Times*, you will find, beginning on page 6, our new book review section. This issue includes reviews of Mary Morrison's *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* (reviewer: Michael G. Lovorn, University of Alabama) and Jerome Neu's *Sticks and Stones* (reviewer: Michael Cundall, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University), and a short review of Louis Franzini's *Just Kidding: Using Humor Effectively* (Reviewer: Peter Derks, College of William and Mary).

A second change concerns the editorial team of the newsletter. I am very happy to announce that Sean Guillory (Dartmouth College) will assume more editorial responsibilities. Sean has already been supporting the newsletter staff for quite a while. In particular, he fulfills the important function of a link between the newsletter and our many members in the USA.



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

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Next Issue

The next issue of the *Humorous Times* is due February 2013.

On HUMOR:

An Interview with Giselinde Kuiper and Salvatore Attardo



In January 2012, Giselinde Kuipers (University of Amsterdam) succeeded Salvatore Attardo (University of Texas A&M—Commerce) as editor in-chief of the Society's journal, *HUMOR*. We used this opportunity to ask a few questions about the future of the journal and editorial policies.

The Humorous Times: Dear Giselinde and Sal, thank you for agreeing on this interview! First of all we would like to know how you would define the profile of *HUMOR*.

Giselinde: What I have always liked about *HUMOR* is that it is a journal that is truly interdisciplinary and international. With its focus on a theme, rather than a clearly delineated field of study, it attracts contributions from disciplines ranging from literature to medicine, and from child psychology to anthropology. Moreover, it draws contributions from around the globe (although some areas, as Sal notes, are rather underrepresented). I want to work hard to keep, or even strengthen this profile.



Sal: In my ten years as editor-in-chief, I saw the number of submissions increase significantly, resulting eventually in the first increase in page numbers in the history of the journal. New humor journals and associations appeared, first the Australasian Humor Network, and then the Israeli and European journals. Thus I would say that humor's relative status has changed from being the sole English-speaking humor publication, to being the premier such publication. Importantly, this means that the volume of research in humor has increased significantly.

Giselinde: In the 25 years of its existence (quite a milestone that we appear to have missed...), *HUMOR* has indeed grown from the only English-language journal on humor, to the premier one. This is quite an achievement, which reflects both the growing volume of humor research, and the hard work of the previous editors-in-chief. However, the growth of humor studies also means that have to professionalize: we can be, and must be, more selective in what we accept; and to do this we have to professionalize the review and production process. I find the emergence of more new journals in the field very encouraging. Of course, competition is keeping us alert. Moreover, rejecting an article for *HUMOR* used to be difficult because there were few other places where people could go. Now, different journals can fill different niches in the field.

THT: Where do you see further potential for the development of the journal?

Sal: It is difficult to say what a publication such as *HUMOR* can and/or should do. I will note that the increasing importance of online publishing means that some of the restrictions of print media need not be relevant. For example, one can easily imagine a form of online book reviews (perhaps with a print summary for archival purposes) in which not only there need be no length restrictions, since the cost of publishing online a 10,000 words review is exactly the same as publishing one of 1,000 words, but even more interestingly, the authors and other readers can be invited to respond to and discuss the book reviews themselves.

Similarly, a hybrid print/online publication might allow short versions of papers to appear in print (again for archival purposes), while the online medium might allow the publication of the full text and/or supplements (such as databases, video and audio files, and so on).

Finally, I would pursue special issues focused on areas from which little is heard, from a first world perspective, at least. The lack of research on Central African or South-East Asian humor, for example, is disappointing.

Giselinde: To further develop the journal, I first see a number of short term issues that have to be solved: the backlog of course. And we are busy arranging for publication online ahead of print, which speeds up the publication process, but also is a new step towards the hybrid print/online publication that Sal is mentioning, al-

though I'm afraid short articles are still cheaper than longer articles because of the cost of copy-editing. But the difference is decreasing. I see further potential for development of the journal in four areas:

1. professionalization. Now that the journal is getting more submissions, we can afford to be more selective. Thus, we can raise our standards, and ask more of our contributors.
2. digitization. I think we may indeed move towards different forms of academic publishing, which will be more interactive as well as faster. This may also allow the journal to respond more quickly to current affairs related to humor.
3. multidisciplinary. I think there is potential for more articles or special issues that address a specific topic from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.
4. internationalization. Moreover, I think the journal can become more international. Now, the vast majority of contributions is from native speakers of English, and the rest is mainly from Europe. I am hoping for more contributions from other parts of the world. This doesn't mean they have to write about humor from all over the world; Asians or Africans quite possibly can do "general" linguistics, psychology, or literary theory as well, I assume.

THT: Our last questions go particularly to Giseline. What should successful contributions look like?

Giseline: Well, that depends. As a brief look at the journal shows, we publish very different types of articles. So there is not one clear format that everyone should follow. However, to be successful, a manuscript should be of truly high quality. We can accept only a small percentage of the submissions, so we can afford to be selective. With high quality I mean, firstly, that a manuscript should make an original contribution to humor research by raising new questions, presenting original data, expand on or present new theoretical findings.

This also means that the manuscript should engage with existing literature in the field of humor studies. Victor Raskin used to complain about the "first-timers," who have thought up new theories (or rather, "theories") that purportedly explain everything about humor. I was surprised to find that we still receive such papers. We also receive quite a few papers that are really about something else, are mainly in discussion with authors in a specialized non-humor field (say, child psychology).

American or British authors should realize, in preparing their submissions, that not everybody will understand their cultural references.

Finally, successful contributions should be well organized and well written. For non-native speakers, I would recommend asking a native speaker (or a professional copy editor) to look at the text.

THT: And what should potential contributors keep in mind?

Giseline: Good question. All of the above, of course. On a more sober note: I think the main thing to remember is that articles really never get accepted without considerable rewriting. And we very much welcome articles that look at are truly multidisciplinary—i.e. that look humor from more than one disciplinary perspective, or combine insights from different fields. These are usually very difficult to publish, and I think *HUMOR* is the outlet par excellence for such article. So: I would like to receive more of those.

Upcoming Events



25th Annual ISHS Conference

College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, July 2-6, 2013

Our Society's 25th international conference will take place at the historic College of William and Mary in Williamsburg from July 2 to July 6. The conference website for registration is now available online at <http://www.cvent.com/d/1cq5j>. The conference email address is ishs@wm.edu.

The Conference offers two housing options: residence hall accommodations and Hospitality House. The College's residence halls are relatively new and are close to the conference site. Hospitality House provides hotel accommodations and is also within walking distance of the conference site. Colonial Williamsburg hotels require a guarantee of a large number of guest reservations to offer a conference discount. Conference participants wishing to stay in Colonial Williamsburg can do so, but will have to make their own housing arrangements.

Call for Papers for 2013 ISHS Conference

The conference conveners are looking forward to your proposals for papers (20–25 minutes + questions), panels (90 or 180 minutes), workshops (90 minute instructional/working session), or posters. Possible topics include advertising; Film/Television/Internet; Humor and gender/race/ethnicity; Humor and emotion; Measurement; Literature; Health; Culture; Linguistics; Psychotherapy.

All prospective paper presenters must register for the entire conference and pay registration fees at the time that they submit their proposal. If your proposal is not accepted for the conference, a full refund will be made at your request without the penalty. More than one panel or paper can be submitted. Presentations should be planned according to the following guidelines:

- Papers should focus on original research dealing with humor. Paper proposals should include: title, name(s) of submitters, affiliation(s) and an abstract that is no more than 300 words in length and in Times New Roman font in 12 point type.
- Panel proposals should (along with a completed submission form) contain the title of the panel and include the names, affiliations, and e-mail addresses of the chair and each contributor. Each proposal should also include an overview of the session along with separate abstracts for each paper presentation. Neither the overview nor the paper abstracts should exceed 350 words in length.
- Workshops should be planned for a single with one, two or three presenters/facilitators. Proposals should provide the names, affiliations, and e-mail addresses of all presenters along with a 200 to 300 word abstract of the proposed presentation.
- Poster sessions will run 30 minutes with each individual poster assigned a four-by-five foot space for presentation. All poster proposals should follow the same guidelines as for individual papers (see above). Poster sessions are generally made up of research that is in progress and not quite ready for full presentation.

The deadline for early Conference registration and for paper proposals is March 15, 2013.

The 19th AHSN Colloquium

University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia, February 7–9, 2013

The 19th Colloquium of the Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) will be held at the University of Newcastle, from February 7–9, 2013, convened by Professor Michael Ewans, FAHA, and Mr Michael Meany. The conference theme is “Humour and Creativity.” For Call for Papers and Workshops, see the AHSN website.

3rd North East Texas Humor Research Conference (NETHRC) 2013

Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, February 22–24, 2013

The 3rd North East Texas Humor Research Conference 2013 invites submissions for a multidisciplinary 3-day conference in Dallas, TX. The conference theme is “Humor in the Professions, Psychology, Pedagogy: Intercultural Perspectives.” While submissions on the theme are strongly encouraged, all submission in humor research are welcome. NETHRC 2013 will include an opening plenary roundtable and reception, paper sessions, panels, posters, and workshops.

Please submit:

- Abstract for general submission (up to 250 words; plus 1 extra page for images, references, etc.); indicate if paper (20m + Q/A) or poster or either.
- Panels of 3 papers (90 minutes)
- Workshops (90 minutes)
- Submission email: CHSSA@tamuc.edu

The submission deadline is January 4, 2013. Notification of acceptances will be made by January 11, 2013. Conference Fees are \$40 for early registration by January 22, 2013, \$50 on site, and \$20 for students with proof of student status. For further information please visit:

<http://web.tamu-commerce.edu/academics/colleges/humanitiesSocialSciencesArts/nethrc/default.aspx>

Laughter: Interdisciplinary German Studies Conference

University of California, Berkeley, March 8-10, 2013

Laughter occurs at the threshold between what language means, what language does and what lies beyond language's grasp. This conference invites research that interrogates laughter in German literature and film, from jest and ridicule in courtly culture to reports of Kafka's macabre laughter to Werner Herzog's chuckle. We welcome proposals that focus not only on humor as genre, but also explore the affective dimensions of reading, watching and participating in the comical. Can we understand laughter within the parameters of language and representation, or is laughter the moment when language becomes other to itself? How has laughter become a symptom of cynicism and ironic detachment? How might laughter become a body's critical intervention?

For the conference, we encourage an interdisciplinary approach, seeking papers from scholars of modern and medieval literature, film and philosophy, history and art history, linguistics and sociology, and related disciplines. Possible paper topics include but are not limited to laughter's relation to the following: affect theory; parody and performativity; semiotics and protosemiotics; psychoanalysis; theater and catharsis; theories of incongruity and superiority; cynical reason vs. cynicism; the sacred and profane; satire and poetry; self-referentiality and Web 2.0; the Culture Industry, 'Infotainment'; comedy and politics; German-language comedy.

The conference will be held in Dwinelle Hall at the University of California, Berkeley, March 8-10, 2013. Please submit a 300-word abstract for a 15-20 minute paper by January 10, 2013 to berkeleygermanconference@gmail.com. Conference organizers: Jacob Johnson, Alexander Lambrow, Seth Elliott Meyer (berkeleygermanconference@gmail.com).

LAFAL 3 – Entertainment Discourse Beyond Humour Studies

University of Łódź, Poland, March 21–23, 2013

This third LAFAL symposium (2013), entitled "Entertainment Discourse Beyond Humour Studies," is organized by the Chair of Pragmatics at the university of Łódź (Piotr Cap, and Marty Dynel). It is convened to provide a forum for linguists who are interested in concepts and language issues of relevance to humor research but who may prefer to address those without employing the well entrenched humor theories. The primary objective will be to explore multifarious phenomena which, viewed from a certain angle, appear to be humorous and, thereby, to enhance methodological tools used in humor research across a variety of linguistic disciplines. Plenary Speakers are Rachel Giora (Tel Aviv University), Miriam Locher (University of Basle), Dr. Brett Mills (University of East Anglia), Prof. Paul Simpson (Queen's University of Belfast), Prof. Elizabeth Stokoe (Loughborough University).

Deadline for submissions has passed. For further information, please visit the Internet at <http://ia.uni.lodz.pl/pragmatics/lafal-3/>.

Good Laugh, Bad Laugh, Ugly Laugh, My laugh:

15th Annual Graduate Student Conference

Western University, London, Ontario, March 29–31, 2013

You are welcome, for we welcome you to Western University's 15th Annual Graduate Student Conference hosted by the Comparative Literature and Hispanic Studies programs. This event will take place way before Canadian Spring hits, from March 29 to 31, 2013. The conference organizers particularly welcome papers that are interdisciplinary, including but not limited to literature, theory, cultural studies, film studies, visual arts, music, theatre, linguistics and popular culture.

In May, 1968, a much re-stencilled graffito on the walls of Paris, France, read "L'ennui est contre-révolutionnaire" – "Boredom is counterrevolutionary," as the English would say. Decades before, Bakhtin showed us that the carnivalesque helps humor flip the accepted on its head and make it spin into the more acceptable. From Aristophanes, Gogol, Rabelais, and Cervantes up to Chaplin, Breytenbach, Cortázar, Hikmet and Kathy Acker – all of them have done that. So too did the wisecracking superheroes, commedia dell'arte or Ionesco's characters, stand-up comedians, Woody Allen and the Seinfelds. The laughs they stir are not so innocent, for their puns and pranks, their impressions and caricatures help carry on the uphill battle against the fast regrouping armies of ennui.

This gathering invites you to think about humor as a critique and to develop a critique of humor. We want to crack the ground and consider how laughter has been used to subvert and convert the world throughout the ages. We wish to open discussions around varieties of humor which could offer relief from repression. As bright vivacity in the face of the tyranny of the mundane, the routine and the norm, laughter gives us a way to question, deflate and reverse power structures. From the conversational joke to the stage burlesque, the humor has effectively critiqued regimes, stereotypes, societal roles and more via satire, parody, irony, mockery... or has it?

We want to explore how humor varies culturally and historically. As a Gargantuan component of social change, laughter has the power to both unite and exclude. As traditional borders are getting stuck in the united dustbins of the world, is humor becoming more selective? More universal? More shy? Do 'humorist' borders or limits of humor still exist? Do they coincide with the frontiers of the languages? Can the phonetics of humor open up the phonological differences between languages? Is there a global humor, or is everyone just making fun of us?

Suggested paper topics may include but are certainly not limited to the following: parody, satire, black comedy, destabilizing laughter, laughter, rebellion; Puns, wordplay, formal vs. informal language, humor in translation, cultural jokes; Humor in graphic novels, comics, political cartoons, protest paintings/art; Stand-up comedy and mocking the audience; self-deprecation; improvisation; The feminist laughter; responses to misogyny; flipping the male gaze; Laughing with the postcolonials; Laughter and politics; Laughter and the avant-garde; Laughter and social change; The aesthetics of laughter; Modern vs. postmodern comic; Carnival/carnaval/carnavalesque ; Humor – burlesque – grotesque; Languages in funny contact; Tears (of joy, despair or laughter); Syntax and semantics of the joke; Language acquisition and humor; Discourse Analysis and humor

Individuals interested in presenting 20-minute papers submit a 300 word abstract to mllgradconference2013@gmail.com before **January 1st 2013**. Please include name, affiliation, technical requirements and a 50 word biography with the abstract. As this is a conference organized by two programs, we will accept abstracts and papers in both English and Spanish (as panels in Spanish will be also held). For further information, please check out our Facebook page (Good Laugh, Bad Laugh, Ugly Laugh, My Laugh).

Summer School on Humour and Laughter 2013

Universität Magdeburg, July 22-27, 2013

We are pleased to announce that the 13th International Summer School and Symposium on Humor and Laughter will take place in Magdeburg, Germany, from July 22 to 27, 2013. The Summer School will be co-organized by the English Department at Otto-von-Guericke-Universität, Magdeburg, and the University of Zurich.

The aims and objectives for the International Summer School and Symposium on Humor and Laughter are to ensure that both students just beginning their research careers and those already-trained researchers considering a first project on humor will enter the field with a strong foundation in existing theoretical and methodological issues, and will be well versed in the pitfalls confronting the scientific study of humor. For those interested in practical applications of humor in a variety of applied settings, the course will introduce them to the kinds of approaches that are being used around the world to put humor to work and to deliver the benefits of humor and laughter.

Magdeburg is a city with a long and checkered history. As the state capital of Saxony Anhalt, it has seen major regeneration over the past decade and is famed for its magnificent Gothic cathedral as well as the recent addition of a "Hundertwasserhaus." Magdeburg has a long tradition of folk humor and is home to four popular political cabarets. Its geographic location makes the city an ideal starting point for visits to such tourist attractions as Berlin and Leipzig.

More information will be available over the coming months at <http://humoursummerschool.org/13/>. For inquiries contact organiser13@humoursummerschool.org.

International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies Conference

University of Missouri, Kansas City, MO, October 17-19, 2013

More information will follow. For Conference information contact Louis Imperiale at imperialel@umkc.edu.

Humor in the News

Persian Website on Humor: www.itanz.net/aboutus

From Mahmud Farjami

I am going to introduce *itanz.com* to you. This website provides humorous and satiric content alongside studies about humor and satire in Persian. The site may be useful to people who are interested in humor from a cultural studies, political satire, ethnic humor, anthropological, Middle Eastern, and of course, Persian perspective.

The Language is Persian, but you can find something in English about the site and its sections at <http://www.witanz.net/aboutus/>. If you are interested in the rest, ask the nearest Iranian guy. In the U.S, Canada, Australia, Britain, Malaysia and even Israel, access takes just a few minutes, but if you try to access the site at the North Pole it will take a few hours! (And beware of polar bears, their favorite food is humor scholar.)

As the editor-in-chief of iTanz, I am also pleased to inform you that if you have a scholarly humor website, I can provide you with FREE advertisement or a link box in iTanz, the most popular humor website in the world.

Book Reviews

Using Humor to Maximize Learning

Morrison, Mary K. (2008). Using humor to maximize learning: The links between positive emotions and education. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Education. USD \$90.00. ISBN 978 1 61048 487 9; ISBN 978 1 61048 485 6; ISBN 978 1 61048 489 3 (e-)

From Michael G. Lovorn (University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa)

Structured use of humor is a viable means by which teaching strategies and classroom management approaches may be strengthened and enriched for the benefit of all students. Studies overwhelmingly demonstrate that teachers at all levels of education may benefit from the employment of mirth, laughter, and other forms of humor in their classrooms (Berk, 2000; Diamond & Hopkins, 1998; McGhee, 2002). In fact, it is now known that humor positively affects virtually all areas of the learning process as well as the social, intellectual, and motivational wellbeing of each of its participants (Harvey, 1998; Sylwester, 2005). Yet most teacher preparation programs continue to ignore or neglect its value. Discussions and research about the advantages and disadvantages of humor in the classroom have taken place for many years now, with some success. Many progressive and skilled veteran teachers have even developed personalized approaches to the use of humor in their classrooms. Others, however, continue to use it sparingly. Still others resist it completely, and there is a pervading sense of ambiguity and resistance on the part of many administrators regarding all possible school-related humor applications (Endres, 2005). Until recently, teachers have had few practical guides or resources for the purposeful use of humor related to teaching strategies and management approaches. *Using Humor to Maximize Learning*, is an attempt by humor scholar Mary Kay Morrison to provide not only a practical guide for teachers, but to give them the confidence and supportive articulation needed to succeed in introducing and sustaining a humor approach in their classrooms.

A Proponent of Structured Humor in the Classroom

Throughout *Using Humor to Maximize Learning*, Morrison explores, discusses, and champions humor as a means by which teachers can invigorate their classrooms with joy, passion and enthusiasm for learning. Morrison's purpose in writing this book is to "affirm, sustain, and encourage educators in the practice of humor not only as a personal tool to optimize a healthy lifestyle, but also to maximize the benefits of humor in education." (p. 7). She accomplishes this in a most eloquent manner, discussing the nature of humor and its definitions, explaining how and why humor has been ignored or avoided by classroom teachers in the past, confronting the harmful effects of humor when used inappropriately, and finally offering teachers many practical suggestions for its structured use in the everyday classroom.

Morrison introduces the term *humergy* to represent "the energy that emerges from the joy and optimism of our inner spirit, reflects our unique personality, and nourishes a healthy mind/body balance.", and demonstrates how this humor energy is an indicator of having reached self-actualization, the highest level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Scale (p. 12-13). She then makes a very strong, research-backed case for the mental and social benefits of strategic and structured use of humor in all aspects of the learning process. Morrison discusses positive implications of humor to contribute to mind/body balance, maximize brain power, enhance creativity, fa-

cilitate communication, support the change process, and to create an optimal environment for teaching and learning (p. 2–6).

She describes the current predicament of ambiguity and resistance regarding the use of humor in the classroom, and rightly asserts that although “experiential play is a critical component for learning... the opportunities for play in our educational systems are nearing extinction for both children and adults.” (p. 25, 27). Morrison’s brilliant response to this finding is to direct the reader’s attention to the mental and social development of the human being from birth to adulthood. She poignantly uses the several stages of humor development (p. 30–37) to demonstrate that humor is indeed conducive, at virtually all ages, to development of trust, receptivity, and learning. The following chapter (3) elaborates on the many links between a healthy, focused, stress-free mind, and learning. She makes the reader aware that humor is a “strong indicator to us that we can experience life’s difficulties and not only survive them but also thrive.” (p. 62).

The “Humor Paradox” and Planning for Structured Use of Humor

Also discussed here is the apparent paradoxical relationship that society has with humor. On one hand, people generally claim to place a high value on humor, but on the other, they often allow their fears to obstruct their use and practice of it in their daily lives (p. 73). Laudably, Morrison does not dodge this difficult component of the greater conversation. She straightforwardly addresses the many challenges to building and sustaining a humor-friendly school environment by giving appropriate attention to dark, hurtful, and unwelcomed forms of humor and the people who knowingly and unknowingly use them. These challenges are discussed at length and readers are presented with many constructive strategies for countering the actions of “humorphobes”, who display a fear of fun, laughter, and humor (p. 72); and “humordoomers”, who consistently use negative humor to control and manipulate others (p. 79).

Closing chapters encourage and enable teachers to begin their own “humor improvement plans” and foster more engaging and humorous learning environments for students of every age. Morrison attentively speaks to all curricular areas, and her practical suggestions are witty and quite doable. Finally, the book is buttressed with several useful and supportive appendices.

An Overarching Analysis

Overall, *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* is a well-written resource for teachers of students of every age. Morrison’s playful style and attention to the practical and purposeful use of humor provides an elixir for the ailing classroom. Brief but compelling “Jest for Fun” ideas are scattered throughout the book, and each chapter ends with a wide and refreshing variety of effectively practical discussion points and strategies for building a humor environment in any school setting. Morrison’s intuitive placement of humorous quotes throughout the book also makes for fun and engaging reading. These creatively selected quips are randomly placed and genuinely funny. They serve as a constant reminder to the reader of the central purpose of this book, which is to promote the energy of humor.

In her attempt to legitimize and spread *humergy*, Morrison challenges assumptions that humor is divisive, distracting, or undermining of the classroom environment. She articulates what many of us know in our hearts; that humor and laughter are naturally edifying human characteristics, and that we can and do learn better when we are mentally and socially at peace. She proves that the classroom can and should be a peaceful place where structured use of humor abounds. She believes in the transformative and accommodating power of humor as a legitimate and necessary means by which we learn, and she makes believers out of her readers. *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* is an important and timely book. It would make for great reading in any educational setting, particularly teacher preparation courses.

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Sticks and Stones

Jerome Neu. *Sticks and Stones: The Philosophy of Insults.*

New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008. 269pp. \$28.58.; ISBN 978-0195314311

From Michael K. Cundall, Jr. (North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University)

I. Setting Up The Insult

The idea of insult and being insulted is something which most people have experienced. Since insults often use humor and irony as a vehicle for their barbs, what insults are and how they work are directly related to humor. This is because the wittiness of an insult is often proportionate to its effectiveness. Jerome Neu, a philosopher, develops his book around the wide variety of phenomena relating to insults and their use. Overall, this is a readable, thorough and exceptionally careful book. While some issues may not be treated in as detailed a fashion as some might want, the book is intriguing and well worth even a second reading.

Neu begins his text with the actual notion of feeling insulted and how one might achieve a successful insult or experience being insulted. He focuses on the emotional nature of “feeling” insulted as well as on what are the conditions for being insulted. It turns out that what counts as an insult is far from obvious. Further, even recognizing when one has been insulted is not straightforward. Neu is careful to show that since one might not understand the content of a remark, one might not realize one is being slighted. A person may attempt to insult someone but may fail to achieve his or her goal because the target considers such a statement to be a compliment. Someone unimpressed by Blackberries, cell phones and iPads may actually find being called “fuddy-duddy” or “a Luddite” complimentary rather than insulting. To experience insult, the person must agree that being tech-savvy is a good thing. Such barbs rely to a great extent on the background conditions against which the statement is made. These conceptual difficulties raised by Neu about what it means to be insulted and what counts as an insult are interesting and form a recurring theme throughout the book, contributing to its nature as an engaging read.

II. Overview

The first three chapters deal with the act of insulting and what it means to insult as well as where insult can be found. Interestingly, insult can often be used, not to hurt others but as a way to maintain and strengthen social bonds: evidenced by “the dozens” game which has a long and well studied history. Neu then turns his focus to how one might see insults functioning in language and what purpose these insults might serve. For the more philosophically-minded, he relies a great deal on J. L. Austin’s notions of language and what language does. Following this study of language, attention is then given to how the law approaches insult.

For Neu, the act of insulting, whether through verbal acts (slander) or the written word (libel), provides a much needed basis from which to appreciate the moral issues engendered and how one might or ought to deal with them. Those interested in insult and its attendant moral concerns will find fecund ground from which to further an overall understanding of insults, how they work and what effects they may have. Neu clarifies how difficult and complex can be issues relating to insult – satire for example. Giving his own opinion on how one ought to deal with certain forms of insult, in general the author finds certain forms of censorship troubling and believes any attempt to limit free speech should be viewed as suspect. He argues that while not all speech is either free or protected, most insult-related speech does not function in the same way as slanderous speech does and that the liberal tradition of maintaining free speech in order to further the marketplace of ideas is critically important to society.

III. Insults and Humor

Readers of this newsletter will be glad to know that Neu devotes a chapter to insult humor. Here he focuses on the notion of an “insult comic” (an insult comic is a comic performer whose main humor is derived from insulting popular figures like politicians and celebrities or members of the audience or a member of a particular group based on racial, ethnic, national or, religious identity); on the propriety of laughing at certain forms of racist and ethnic humor (among other off-color forms of humor); and on satire. He begins by exemplifying differences in the form and function of comics such as Don Rickles whose entire goal is to make fun of the audience, and notes how this differs from the work of other comics such as Lenny Bruce and Dame Edna (Barry Humphries). He notes the potential harm inherent in jokes that impugn others on the basis of group identity and how often the audience is complicit or colluding with the joke teller against the target. In his opinion, insults in cases of bullying or where the joke is told with a racist attitude may be wrong, given certain conditions; but

even this rule is not without its exceptions. Neu notes that such humor that ostracizes or hurts others may be perfectly acceptable in situation such as “roasts”, among small groups of friends, or when engaging in purposeful satire, or even the dozens game. The main shortcoming of this chapter is that Neu does not substantially change the overall debate regarding certain forms of racist and ethnic humor, although he does provide readers with the background to assist a deeper understanding of the issues.

IV. Overall, I’m Not Insulted

Overall, *Sticks and Stones* is an engaging and thought-provoking study. One of its main strengths is that Neu refrains from fully articulating a position. While some might find this a weakness, it is not so in fact. The text treats a wide variety of issues, showing how deeply involved is the notion of insult in our lives, both private and public. Even the casually interested reader will find Neu’s text scholarly, informative and stimulating: what more can one ask of a book?

Using Humor Effectively

Franzini, Louis R. (2012). *Just Kidding: Using Humor Effectively*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012. USD \$38.00 ISBN 978-1-4422-1336-4

From Peter Derks (College of William & Mary)

Franzini describes how to increase and improve the use of humor in everyday life. This discussion is not for professionals although there are plenty of references to other books on how to be funny and research on laughter and comedy. The style is charming and conversational but the goal is serious. Humor can make work and play more pleasant and improve any social relationship. This book is a positive contribution to the literature on the value and application of humor.

Recent Publications

New Books on Humor

Chovanec, Jan/Isabel Ermida (ed.): *Language and Humour in the Media*. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2012.

(edited advertising material) *Language and Humour in the Media* provides new insights into the interface between humor studies and media discourse analysis, connecting two areas of scholarly interest that have not been studied extensively before. The phenomena described range from conversational humor, canned jokes and wordplay to humor in translation and news satire. The individual studies draw their material for analysis from traditional print and broadcast media, such as magazines, sitcoms, films and spoof news, as well as electronic and internet-based media, such as emails, listserv messages, live blogs and online news. The volume will be of primary interest to a wide range of researchers in the fields of discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, intercultural studies, pragmatics, communication studies, and rhetoric but it will also appeal to scholars in the areas of media studies, psychology and crosscultural communication.

Dubinsky, Stanley/Chris Holcomb: *Understanding Language through Humor*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011.

(edited advertising material) Students often struggle to understand linguistic concepts through examples of language data provided in class or in texts. Presented with ambiguous information, students frequently respond that they do not ‘get it’. The solution is to find an example of humour that relies on the targeted ambiguity. Once they laugh at the joke, they have tacitly understood the concept, and then it is only a matter of explaining why they found it funny. Utilizing cartoons and jokes illustrating linguistic concepts, this book makes it easy to understand these concepts, while keeping the reader’s attention and interest.

Kazecki, Jakub: *Laughter in the Trenches: Humour and Front Experience in German First World War Narratives*. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2012.

(edited advertising material) This book explores the appearances and functions of humour and laughter in selected novels and short stories based on autobiographical experiences written by authors during the war and in the Weimar Era (1919-1933). The author of this book focuses on popular and lesser-known works of German literature that played an important role in the socio-political life of the Weimar Republic: e.g. *Storm of Steel* by Ernst Junger (1920), *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* by Arnold Zweig (1927), and *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque (1929). The author shows that these works often share surprisingly similar narrative strategies in describing humorous experiences and laughter of soldiers to justify direct violence and oppressive power structures, regardless of their ideological assignment and their popular and critical reception.

Franzini, Louis. *Just Kidding: Using Humor Effectively*. Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, 2012.

See *Book Reviews* section for an overview.

Patrick Stewart, *Debatable Humor: Laughing Matters on the 2008 Presidential Primary Campaign*. Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, 2012.

(edited advertising material) *Debatable Humor* represents the first systematic foray into understanding the use of humor by politicians on the campaign trail. Using content analysis of primary debates for both Republican and Democratic parties during the 2008 presidential election, Patrick A. Stewart considers not just how humor was used, who used it, and how successful these attempts at humor were, but he also gives readers insight regarding why humor and the laughter that results is an important part of politics. Not only can humor reveal a candidate's intelligence, values, personality, and his/her connection with the audience, it also reveals the underlying values of egalitarian political systems.

New Articles on Humor

Andrew, Patricia: "Laughter Is the Best Medicine": The Construction of Old Age in Ageist Humor. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 11–24.

Apter, Michael J. / Desselles, Mitzi: Disclosure humor and distortion humor: A reversal theory analysis. In: *HUMOR* 25:4 (2011).

Arampatzis, Christos: Dialects at the Service of Humour within the American Sitcom: A Challenge for the Dubbing Translator, p. 67–82.

Chovanec, Jan: Conversational Humour and Joint Fantasizing in Online Journalism. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 139–161.

Condren, Conal: Satire and definition. In: *HUMOR* 25:4 (2011).

Dakhliya, Jamil: Humour as a Means of Popular Empowerment: The Discourse of the French Gossip Magazines. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 213–248.

Deveau, Danielle Jeanine: The Aristocrats!: Comedy, grotesqueries and political inversions of the masculine code. In: *HUMOR* 25:4 (2011).

Dunbar, Norah E. / Banas, John A. / Rodriguez, Dariela / Liu, Shr-Jie / Abra, Gordon: Humor use in power-differentiated interactions. In: *HUMOR* 25:4 (2011).

Dynel, Marta: Humour on the House: Interactional Construction of Metaphor in Film Discourse. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 83–105.

Erdodi, Laszlo / Lajiness-O'Neill, Renee: Humor perception in bilinguals: Is language more than a code? In: *HUMOR* 25:4 (2011).

Ermida, Isabel: News Satire in the Press: Linguistic Construction of Humour in Spoof News Articles. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 185–210.

Geddert, Melody: Towards a Cross-Linguistic Analysis of Humour in Academic Reading. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 25–43.

Greengross, Gil / Martin, Rod A. / Miller, Geoffrey: Childhood experiences of professional comedians: Peer and parent relationships and humor use. In: *HUMOR* 25:4 (2011).

Kozic, Milena: Framing Communication as Play in the Sitcom: Patterning the Verbal and the Nonverbal in Humour. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 107–137.

Okada, Moeko: Wordplay as a Selling Strategy in Advertisements and Sales Promotion. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 163–182.

Pinar Sanz, María Jesús: Ethnic Humour and Political Advertising. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 211–230.

Raskin, Victor: The Hidden Media Humor and Hidden Theory. In: Chovanec & Ermida, p. 45–64.

Vandergriff, Ilona / Fuchs, Carolin: Humor support in synchronous computer-mediated classroom discussions. In: *HUMOR* 25:4 (2011).