

# The Humorous Times

Newsletter of the International Society for Humor Studies

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## Association News

### 2014 ISHS Election Results

*From Martin Lampert, ISHS Executive Secretary-Treasurer*

In Fall 2013, the Society held its biannual Board elections through the internet service, *Qualtrics*. With 170 returned ballots, Larry Ventis (College of William and Mary, USA) received the majority of the votes cast for ISHS President. He will serve as ISHS President through December 31, 2015. Goh Abe (Kagawa University, Japan) and Christian Hempelmann (Texas A & M University-Commerce, USA) were elected as ISHS Board Members-at-Large and will serve through December 2017. We thank Willibald Ruch for his service as ISHS President for 2012 and 2013 as well as Chao-Chih Liao and Andrea Samson for their roles as ISHS Board Members from January 2010 through December 2013. Our best wishes to the new ISHS President and Board members.

### 26th Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies

*University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, July 7-11, 2014*



The 2014 ISHS Conference will be held from July 7 to July 11, 2014, at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. This year's conference conveners are Sibe Doosje and Jeffrey Goldstein from the University of Utrecht and Giseline Kuipers from the University of Amsterdam.

Conference activities will begin on Monday, July 7, with pre-conference tutorials and a workshop on Humor in Business for Dutch executives. On Tuesday, July 8, the conference will officially open with a reception in the evening at the Utrecht city hall. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday will be full conference days with plenary addresses and breakout sessions. The Conference will also host a film comedy on Wednesday evening and a closing banquet with a presentation on the 27th ISHS Conference on Friday night. Over 130 humor researchers are currently scheduled to attend this year's conference.

Registration, program, travel, and accommodation information can be found on the Conference website at [ishs2014utrecht.nl](http://ishs2014utrecht.nl). Inquiries can be sent to the Conference convener, Sibe Doosje at [info@humorlab.nl](mailto:info@humorlab.nl).



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### Next Issue

The next *The Humorous Times* is due August 2014.

## Other Upcoming Events

### **Fourteenth International Summer School and Symposium on Humor and Laughter**

*University of Sheffield, England, July 14-19, 2014*

The International Summer Schools are intended for students and established investigators, planning research projects on humor, an opportunity to develop a strong foundation on the existing theoretical and methodological issues related to the scientific study of humor. For more information on the 2014 Summer School, contact Willibald Ruch at [w.ruch@psychologie.uzh.ch](mailto:w.ruch@psychologie.uzh.ch) or Elena Hoicka at [e.hoicka@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:e.hoicka@sheffield.ac.uk). For information on previous International Summer Schools, visit the Summer School homepage at <http://humoursummerschool.org/14>.

### **First International Conference on Pediatric Hospital Clowning: Reflections on Research and Training**

*Meyer Children's Hospital of Florence, Italy, October 17-18, 2014*

This conference aims to create an opportunity for the presentation and discussion amongst Hospital Clowning researchers and trainers regarding data and reflections on the clowns' work in pediatric settings. The Abstract Review Committee invites proposals for oral presentations and posters. Proposals in the form of short abstracts (maximum 350 words) should be sent to Laura Vagnoli at [l.vagnoli@meyer.it](mailto:l.vagnoli@meyer.it). The deadline for the receipt of proposals is June 8, 2014.

### **2014 Conference of the International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies**

*University of Hawaii, Manoa, USA. October 16-17, 2014*

The International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies will hold its 15th Annual Conference on the campus of the University of Hawaii at Manoa. This year's keynote speaker will be playwright Luis Valdez, playwright and artistic director of El Teatro Campesino. For more Conference and Society information, contact the Conference organizers, Lucia Aranda and Jim Yoshioka, at [humor14@hawaii.edu](mailto:humor14@hawaii.edu).

### **Comedy and Society Symposium**

*University of Hull, November 22, 2014*

Bringing together scholars from several disciplines, this symposium aims to encourage a wide-ranging consideration of the contribution made to society by comedy in all its forms. Papers are invited on written or performed comedy, historical or contemporary. Abstracts of 300 words for papers lasting 20 minutes should be sent to Dr. Louise Peacock, at [l.s.peacock@hull.ac.uk](mailto:l.s.peacock@hull.ac.uk) by May 22, 2014.

## Book Reviews

### **Curious Behavior: Yawning, Laughing, Hiccupping, and Beyond**

**Robert R. Provine. (2012). *Curious Behavior: Yawning, Laughing, Hiccupping, and Beyond*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 271 pp. USD 17.77. ISBN 978-0-674-04851-5**

*From Alexander Kozintsev, Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Saint-Petersburg State University*

Provine's book, highly unusual and excitingly written, exemplifies a genre which he calls "small science", a term in no way derogatory as it refers to the study of minor physiological acts, most of which have been traditionally but perhaps unjustly regarded as mere symptoms of more important conditions. Such acts can be both communicative and culturally significant. Patterns like laughing, crying, yawning, hiccupping, coughing and sneezing pertain to the respiratory tract; others, such as belching, farting and vomiting, to the

digestive tract; and one pattern, tickling, enigmatically includes laughter as a response to cutaneous and muscular stimulation. Some of these “curious behaviors” resemble reflexes; others have been traditionally viewed as emotionally expressive and some can function as paralinguistic signs. The borders between these categories are blurred, because the degree of voluntary control and the ability to play a paralinguistic role display graded variations.

Provine illustrates this theory by drawing a “behavioral keyboard” on which all behaviors are ranked in terms of speed of reaction to verbal command (p. 218). Laughter is somewhat intermediate—an average person needs 2 seconds to effect it, as against a mere 0.6 seconds in the case of smiling. Crying is the hardest act to feign: only 3 percent of subjects are able—or willing?—to even attempt this within the allowed 10 seconds.

A hard act, but not an impossible one. Though widely divergent in terms of imitability, both crying and laughing figure equally in archaic rites of passage where neither sadness nor amusement could be justified, this implying that both patterns functioned as conventional signs: Marcel Mauss called this *l'expression obligatoire des sentiments*. Even nowadays good acting demonstrates that an obligatory response is not necessarily a feigned response.

This appears to support Provine’s ethological observations which suggest that conversational laughter, instinctive as it may be, is less a reaction to humor than a communicative act in some ways similar to speech. In his previous book on laughter Provine called for laughter to be dissociated from humor, the latter interesting him, as a biological psychologist, much less than the former. Such a distinction, however, does not take us far. Granted, humor is not a prerequisite for laughter, but the converse is manifestly wrong. Humor does need laughter, which is why humor scholars too need laughter to understand humor. Age-long attempts to follow the allegedly natural course from stimulus (humor) to response (laughter) have brought us nowhere, as is evidenced by the widely held view that laughter is but a trivial physiological echo of a mental state. Recent attempts to cover this commonsense idea with a psychological veneer by claiming that laughter is an expression of a distinct and hitherto unknown emotion now labeled ‘exhilaration’ or ‘mirth’, have not yielded any appreciable progress.

Actually, because laughter precedes humor in both ontogeny and phylogeny, the connection between the two can be understood only if the obsolete ‘stimulus-reaction’ scheme is replaced, at least for analytical purposes, by the reverse, diachronically more adequate sequence. Provine’s idea that the sounds of laughter derive from ritualized panting accompanying the rough-and-tumble play of our ancestors is quite sound from the ethological standpoint. It is supported by our own ethological observations concerning play-fighting in modern children and, like van Hooff’s reconstruction of the evolution of primates’ play-face as a ritualized sign of mock aggression, is highly relevant for an understanding of the nature of both laughter and humor.

Facts collected by Provine concerning laughter-provoking customs such as farting and tickling are no less relevant for tracing the origins of humor, which is rooted in festive folk culture and, ultimately, in ancient rites of reversal and renewal. In cultural, let alone evolutionary terms, modern jokes and cartoons, which most theorists consider the *fons et origo* of humor, are not even the tip of the iceberg but a thin layer of frost covering it. No wonder Provine fails to see any connection between modern humor and the phenomena he discusses—they are miles apart in evolution. As Jean Paul put it, “laughters preceded the writers of comedy.”

Among the thinkers who inspired him most, Provine mentions the “unlikely trio” of Freud, Jung, and Skinner (p. 7), a trio even less helpful than likely. For instance a tribute to James Sully would have been much more appropriate, while Bakhtin’s classic gets no mention, even though, like many other books on the origins and evolution of humor, it might have helped Provine link some of his “curious behaviors” to culture writ large rather than to specific cultures writ small—a challenge that is neither met nor even issued in his study. Without some attempt to resolve this matter we will remain confined in this chamber of physiological curiosities. Small science, fascinating though it be, will remain small not “because it does not require fancy equipment and a big budget” (p. 8) but because it does not seek to expand its horizons and become truly interdisciplinary.

## Faith to Fun: The Secularisation of Humour

Russell Heddendorf. (2009). *From Faith to Fun: The Secularisation of Humour*. Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press. 202 pp. ISBN-10: 0718891864; ISBN-13: 978-0718891862. Paperback: USD 33.30.

*From Elisha McIntyre, Department of Religious Studies, University of Sydney*

Contributions to the literature on religion and humour come slowly but steadily, and *From Faith to Fun* is another opportunity to consider these overly neglected subjects. It is in examining the two as a single study, in other words, religion *and* humour rather than religion *or* humour, that Heddendorf makes a mark with this book. Any integration of the two is not commonly seen in either the humour studies or religious studies literature, for reasons yet to be made really clear to those few scholars who see plenty of interaction between religion and humour.

However, *From Faith to Fun* is neither religious studies nor humour studies, but theology. This in itself is not a problem. However, at times Heddendorf presents it as a work of humour studies and so attempts to include discussions on the nature of humour. These discussions are quite strong (if not original and with a tendency to conflate ‘humour’ with ‘laughter’ and ‘fun’), but when the book is taken as a whole, humour is considered as part of a religious worldview. *From Faith to Fun* is not a secondary source that contains an investigation into the nature of humour and society. Its usefulness to the field of religion and humour studies actually lies in its theological approach. When used as a theological text by scholars who are not themselves theologians, it becomes more like a primary source in that *From Faith to Fun* tells us about a Christian perspective on religion and humour. When used as such, it provides an interesting, though by no means unproblematic, discussion on the ways that the Christian worldview does or does not accommodate humour. If this is clear, then the book functions well as a work of theology. However, it should not be mistaken for a sociological work of humour in society, though it may exhibit some of those traits.

Heddendorf’s Christian perspective becomes very clear in the early chapters of the book, in which he repeatedly uses (like almost every other theologian on the subject) the biblical story in Genesis 18 of Abraham and Sarah laughing at God’s suggestion that he could give her a baby even though she was an old woman. The problem here is that Abraham and Sarah are discussed as though they carry the weight of tangible, historical examples of laughter operating in real world society. This is acceptable in theology, and the Bible does not offer a large number of cases to work with, so the discussions over Abraham and Sarah get very thoroughly worked through. This contributes to our understanding of how Christians interpret this message of laughter in religious terms, but it does nothing to contribute to the understanding of how laughter operates in society in general. Indeed, there are instances where Heddendorf uses Jesus in the same way as he uses Charlie Chaplin to illustrate a point about humour (p.63). Similarly, the actions of Abraham and Sarah are frequently conflated with the way that humour operates in contemporary society, rather than as an allegorical tale of humans’ relationship with a particular God.

The Christian perspective of *From Faith to Fun* is important to remember in terms of understanding Heddendorf’s overall argument. To accept his argument is largely to accept his premise that there is a kind of humour that is sacred (one that is transcendent and requires faith) and that the secular nature of contemporary society is responsible for the perversion of that sacred humour. I share Heddendorf’s concern that postmodern society’s reliance on a ‘therapeutic culture’ (see especially Chapter 6) has made it more permissive of laughter that trivialises serious issues and reduces social responsibility. However, underlying his argument is that this is caused by a lack of faith, or rather, a replacement of faith by ‘secular fun’; for example he states that “as a cultural commodity, humour trivializes without transcending; it points us to faults in people but not faith in God” (p.8). For the non-religious looking at this trend towards trivialization, this is not a viable explanation. But for those who are interested in the Christian anxiety over humour in the modern world, it is a satisfying explanation of their fears. Possibly this focus on the transcendence of humour results in Heddendorf’s focusing on the theoretical, and this book has a distinct Niebuhrian influence that places humour in an abstract hierarchy, where it is related to, but a step below, faith. Hence with humour, “the social quality is there but the sacred is missing” (p.6). Heddendorf is not as harsh on humour as some other writers, but there is a definite fear pervading his

writing that today we rely too much on a therapeutic trend that makes us prioritize fun over seriousness (that is, faith), and that this is dangerous trend affects both the church and the individual.

Overall, *From Faith to Fun* has some solid discussions on humour that build on existing humour studies. But Heddendorf's greatest contribution is in providing a very specific religious answer to the question of what is happening to humour in our society. He is much more at ease with the example of Abraham and Sarah than with popular culture (the concrete examples he uses are substantially dated, for example *Peanuts* or *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* from the 1970s and 1980s). The book provides an interpretation of how and why humour, fun, and laughter have moved away from a traditional (that is, monolithic, religious and 'restrictive') culture of faith to a trivial, 'permissive' culture of fun. Whether or not one agrees with Heddendorf does not entirely depend on whether one shares his anxiety about a move away from God, because he has covered enough of the common concerns of cultural critics in general. However, ultimately *From Faith to Fun* needs to be considered as an expression of Christian concerns: as a work of theology it is a meaningful contribution to the field of religion and humour.

## Developments in Linguistic Humor Theory

**Marta Dynel (ed.) (2013). *Developments in Linguistic Humour Theory*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. xiv + 425 pp. ISBN 978 90 272 0228 4 (Hardback); ISBN 978 90 272 7110 5 (Ebook).**

*From Graeme Ritchie (University of Aberdeen, Scotland)*

This collection is wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary, and some of the contributions are 'linguistic' only in the very broad sense that they allude to humour that could be conveyed — at least in part — using language. Following a brief introduction by the editor, there are 15 chapters. Carla Canestrari & Ivana Bianchi investigate a subclass of incongruity-resolution jokes in which the incongruity involves a contrast between two phrases in the set-up. They carried out a study in which participants rated the funniness of texts in which the incongruity between the two phrases varied across three levels of difference. On the whole, the texts showing the medium degree of difference were deemed funnier. The authors discuss at length how this might fit into the broader field of incongruity-based humour.

Villy Tsakona examines the public reaction to a Greek television advertisement which depicted what many perceived to be sexist attitudes, and argues that the wide range of opinions exemplifies various phenomena about the more contextual aspects of how potential humour is interpreted. She suggests that these facets of humour can be classified within the General Theory of Verbal Humour, by extending that theory with further *knowledge resources*, particularly one for *Context*. Thomas Flamson & Gregory Bryant summarise their (evolution-oriented) *encryption* theory of humour, developed over recent years. They suggest that a humorous act depends on specific knowledge which is alluded to only obliquely ('encrypted'). Hence, successful humour gives a way of checking that the indirectly mentioned beliefs are shared by sender and receiver but not by others, as it makes sense only to those potential recipients capable of 'decrypting' the communication. This indication of similarity in knowledge and outlook then has various social uses.

Dalbir Sehmy's chapter, drawing on a wide range of literature and many different genres, demonstrates that humour (and comedy) has multiple interpretations and functions, and generally is extremely complex. He argues that all these complications support a position that — in contrast to the traditional Western idea that we can rationally understand the world — some phenomena (such as humour) are ultimately 'unknowable'.

Marta Dynel gives an comprehensive review of approaches to humour based on aggression, superiority, disaffiliation, etc., and discusses how these could be combined with the insights of incongruity-resolution (IR) theorising. In particular, she points out the applicability of IR and dispositional theory to impolite conversational interactions. Extracts from the USA TV drama series *House* illustrate how the humorous status of a given action can be different in separate viewpoints (e.g. a dramatic character versus the TV audience).

Similar ideas arise in Sarah Seewoester Cain's analysis of extracts from stand-up routines in Conan O'Brien's USA TV show. Using a classification of six distinct *ratified participation statuses*, she demonstrates how varied the possible roles for the studio audience can be, and how the roles can alter

dynamically even in the course of a short piece. Henri de Jongste uses a short passage from comedian John Cleese's eulogy at the memorial service for friend and colleague Graham Chapman to illustrate the wide range of factors that are involved in a humorous act (particularly an unconventional one) being accepted as successful within a social and cultural context.

Bastian Mayerhofer argues that various humorous phenomena (particularly jokes where a character is temporarily mistaken, and irony) are best seen as clashes between different possible *perspectives*, where one of the clashing pair contains a mistaken belief. Since this structure also appears in other situations, such as narrative suspense or dramatic irony, he suggests that the humorous cases rely on a playful mind set.

Maria Goeth draws parallels between humour within music and humour expressed in language, particularly focusing on humour created by using established sequences or idioms (*phrasemes*) and humorous parodies. She concludes that there are some formal similarities across the music/language boundary, but that sometimes musical humour relies on factors that have no counterpart in language, such as the possibilities for sonic variation. Valerie Sinkeviciute studies 689 instances of the word *tease* (and related forms) within the British National Corpus, and suggests that the interactions described in these passages can be summarized in terms of a relation between the form/content of a (potentially teasing) utterance, the target's reaction, and four possible overall effects (namely, all the combinations of [mock][im]politeness).

Marta Dynel's second chapter reviews various types of irony, again with illustrative examples from the *House* TV drama, offering an analysis in which incongruity (between literal meaning and hearer's view of the speaker's position) is resolved by discovering the intended meaning. A humorous effect then follows if certain preconditions (already postulated for other forms of humour) are met. Sarcasm can be described by combining this approach with aspects of the superiority theory of humour. Tony Veale describes ways in which a very large corpus can be used to find patterns of stereotyped language usage, to distill information about words and phrases from these patterns, and finally to computer-generate new similes from this information. He focuses on sardonic similes such as *about as useful as a screen door on a submarine* (ironic) or *about as useless as a screen door on a submarine* (non-ironic). Here, irony is taken as a property of an idiom, rather than a phenomenon of inter-personal interaction.

Bastian Mayerhofer & Annekathrin Schacht outline how some of the characteristics of a *garden-path* joke could be captured by adopting a probabilistic model of text comprehension. They offer two hypotheses which relate two properties (*salience* and *accessibility*) of the alternative interpretations of a joke to the cognitive effort needed to grasp the joke.

Diana Popa suggests that a useful way to analyze the elusive notion of 'satire' is to use three levels: the *macro*, in which satire is seen as an institutionalized genre; the *micro*, where satire is a mode of viewing the world; and a lowest stratum in which various techniques such as caricature and metaphor are describable. Illustrative examples are taken from the Romanian TV show *The Animated Planet*. Agnes Marszalek gives a lucid review of some of the humour-related devices used in longer (non-joke) narratives such as novels. Some of these devices are concerned with the relationship between the story world and the reader's knowledge, others are techniques for the creation of humorous effects, and there are also methods for establishing that the overall context is intended as humorous. With the chapters covering such varied material, it can be hard to classify them, and the book's three sections (new frameworks and extensions, new theoretical issues, new theoretical approaches to established forms) represent just one possible arrangement. Most authors touch on a number of different themes, some of which recur in several chapters. The most dominant theme, setting the general tone of the book, involves humour as an interaction between people in a social setting, and the next most prominent thread concerns the mechanisms of jokes. Another strand is humour within broader artistic artifacts, such as TV shows or novels. Irony and teasing also show up in a few chapters, as does the importance of the wider cultural/societal context.

In the volume as a whole, the academic style is fairly discursive: although most of the chapters consider specific data, only Canestrari & Bianci present experimental findings, and only Veale provides precise and detailed (metalinguistic) rules. The invited authors are a roughly equal mix of experienced scholars and (at the time of writing) PhD students. The editor's influence on the contents is evident: she is the most cited author throughout the book, and her pieces occupy almost one-fifth of the pages. The

usefulness of the volume is enhanced by most of the authors providing substantial bibliographies, and some of chapters including extensive reviews of the literature.

Scholars concerned with the way that humour operates in a social and/or cultural setting (broadly speaking) may find several chapters of interest, but there is less to catch the attention of those from other research areas.

## **Comedy-Boom in Japan: Performative and Media Framing of Humour in Current Popular Culture**

**Till Weingärtner. (2013). *Comedy-Boom in Japan: Performative and media framing of humour in current popular culture*. Iaponia Insula: Studien zu Kultur und Gesellschaft Japans, Bd. 27, ed. Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner. München: IudiciumVerlag. 430pp, 50 ills. ISBN 978-3-86205-251-6. €48.00**

*From Wolfgang Zoubek, University of Toyama, Japan*

In this book, Weingärtner describes the great popularity of *manzai* in Japan at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Manzai* is a form of Japanese stand-up comedy that is performed by two comedians playing contrasting roles. One comedian plays it straight (*tsukkomi*), while the other plays the fool (*boke*). They perform short scenes from everyday life, with the jokes and puns often originating from mutual misunderstandings. Typically, the *boke* misinterprets what is said, while the *tsukkomi* tries to correct and reprimand him. These efforts usually lead to more confusion, and the climax is often that the *tsukkomi* gets angry and insults the *boke*.

While studying in Osaka, Weingärtner participated as an amateur *manzai* comedian. Since *manzai* is especially popular in Osaka, this experience afforded him a profound insider's view of the profession. In his book he describes the dominating role of the two big entertainment business companies, *Yoshimoto Kōgyō* and *Shōchiku Geinō*. In the acting schools of both companies, young aspiring comedians receive instruction and guidance for stage performance. The comedians-in-training can participate in competitions that help them develop their craft, and the best of them are allowed to take part in TV shows. This can be the starting point for a great career.

Weingärtner's corpus of research material consisted mainly of DVDs recorded from the TV show *M-1 Grand Prix*. He explains the rules of the show, then analyses the procedure and visual presentation. Each *manzai* duo presents one comical scene in front of a studio audience. A jury of old masters judges and marks their performances. In the finale, the three best duos present one more scene, and then the winning team is determined. Weingärtner aptly compares this method with the presentation of televised sporting events.

For his analyses of *manzai* humor, Weingärtner focuses mainly on the incongruity and superiority theories. The former functions in the dialogue through the incongruence of ideas, caused not only by different ways of thinking between the two comedians but also by misunderstandings occasioned by the various homonyms and double meanings of Japanese words. There is also occasionally incongruity between the actors and their roles. The scenes are usually presented on bare stages without sets or decoration, so the actors are obliged to create fictional situations through their spoken comments and body language.

According to Weingärtner, occasionally breaking the theatrical illusion is an effective means in *manzai* for making the audience laugh. To illustrate how this occurs, he uses the frame analysis terms *up-keying* and *down-keying* (Goffman, 1986). The actors in a *manzai* duo appear on stage at first as 'private' people, and after an introduction, they transform themselves (*up-keying*) into fictional characters presenting a fictional scene. When the *boke* drives his mistakes too far, however, the *tsukkomi* can break the fictional scenario and suddenly revert the actors back to their previous status as 'private' people (*down-keying*). At this point, a *meta-manzai* moment occurs, where the straight man admonishes his foolish partner to act more proficiently before returning to the fictional scene. This sort of back and forth keying can be repeated multiple times until the end of the performance, when the two actors definitively return to their 'private' status.

Concerning the superiority theory, it is obvious that the *boke's* stupidity makes him an object of laughter, but Weingärtner also points out the complicity between the *tsukkomi* and the audience. After a *down-keying* moment, the *tsukkomi* reprimands and insults the *boke*, calling him stupid and even hitting him. As a result, the spectators laugh not only because the *boke* is funny, but also at the way the *tsukkomi*

insults and mistreats his foolish partner while in ‘private’ status. Unfortunately, Weingärtner’s description of this superiority aspect did not go deep enough. Despite the harmless humor that occurs within the fictional scenes – humor without any hint of social criticism – the relationship between the *tsukkomi* and *boke* could well have been analyzed further as a reflection of the structure of Japanese society.

In addition to using Goffman’s frame analysis theory to explain Japanese *manzai* humor, Weingärtner also makes use of insights provided by Erika Fischer-Lichte, a German scholar who argued that since performance art is not originally based on literary drama, stage performance should be considered more important than lines spoken (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). While it may be questionable whether Goffman and Fischer-Lichte’s concepts are in fact compatible, since Fischer-Lichte’s complex theory is presented here very simply, they do manage to fit together well. Fischer-Lichte points out that theater consists of a physical co-presence of actor and spectator; however, in Weingärtner’s corpus of DVDs, most of the audience watched at home on TV, and the original studio audience consisted of spectators who were consciously tasked with creating a fun and vibrant atmosphere because the frequency of their laughter was a criterion for the judges. But is that really the kind of actor-spectator interaction that Fischer-Lichte had in mind?

In conclusion, *Comedy-Boom in Japan* is ambitiously written and provides a very detailed analysis of a Japanese performance art. Readers interested in *manzai* as a form of modern Japanese popular culture will be satisfied.

### References

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- Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008). *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Translated by Saskya Iris Jain. London and New York: Routledge.

## The Mind of Laughter and the Sense of Humor

**Shōkichi Oda. 2010. *Warai no kokoroyūmoa no senseu (The Mind of laughter and the sense of humor)*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten. 225 pp. 2000 yen.**

*From Sachiko Kitazume Kinki University, Osaka*

Shōkichi Oda, the author of this book, is a professional writer of humorous texts. His longstanding experiences of creating humor and his encyclopedic knowledge about humor and laughter have enabled him to present various examples of humor including those of Western humor and the corresponding Japanese humor. *The Mind of laughter and the sense of humor* is successful in showing readers that both Western and Japanese humor have much in common.

In Chapter 1, Oda illustrates laughter as a commercial product by giving us a variety of humorous examples from Japanese traditional arts of presenting humor, such as *Manzai* (a traditional style of stand-up comedy involving two performers trading jokes) and *Rakugo* (a comical narrative involving a dialogue between two or more characters performed by a single storyteller).

Chapter 2 presents varied examples of laughter in our daily lives. Oda introduces some of these spontaneous jokes (p.26), saying that these jokes have progressed from spontaneous humor to be told as a commercial product.

Examining large volume of jokes, Oda attributes the cause of laughter in both commercial products and in daily life to the same cause: “deviation from norms” in a certain group or society (p.60). Norms here does not mean morals nor even ethical rules, but rather the common recognition, customs and behavioral patterns of a group. Oda further explains (p.81) that funniness is created when hearers find that they have been misled by the speaker.

Having described the causes of laughter and the psychology of humor in Chapters 3 and 4, the author illustrates how to create humor in Chapters 5 and 6, with many examples of both Western and Japanese jokes. This book, based on his experiences as a humor writer and his deep knowledge of humor and laughter, contributes a lot to deepening our understanding of humor. It also gives counterexamples to the prototypical perception of the Japanese as having no sense of humor.

In the last chapter, Oda distinguishes humor from laughter (p.212), saying that laughter sometimes occurs without any elements of humor. For example, when one is happy or full of joy, or when one notices others fail or make a mistake, one may laugh, but this laughter is not related to humor. He insists that “humor is deviation from norms. Having a sense of humor means having the sense to recognize or create humor. A sense of humor can find funniness. This funniness is the cause of laughter.”

Oda describes what humor is (p.213), based on his own experience as a humor creator. He insists that in order to live harmoniously with others in a group or a society, we must have norms to abide by, including ethical and moral rules. These norms, however, restrict and bind our free spirits. Sometimes we need to restore our free spirits by being freed from our constraints, as if throwing off our jacket and tie at home. In short, he claims that humor frees us from tension and balances our spirits. His insights into the function of humor as “freeing us of our tensions” will surely deepen our understanding of humor and strengthen our appreciation of humor.

The author has published a series of Japanese language books on Japanese humor, such as *Nihon no yūmoa* (*Japanese humor*, 1986). He also authored a chapter in *Understanding humor in Japan* (2008) -- written in English, this will be of great use to English readers.

## **WARAI: Humour in Japanese Art from Prehistory to 19th Century**

**Paris Nihon Bunka Kaikan (ed.). (2012). *WARAI: L'humour dans l'art japonais de la préhistoire au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle; 3 Octobre - 15 Décembre 2012. (Warai: Humour in Japanese art from prehistory to 19<sup>th</sup> century; 3 October – 15 December 2012). Paris: Maison de la Culture du Japon à Paris. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Maison de la Culture du Japon à Paris, in French, unpaginated (out of print).***

*From Marguerite Wells, Australasian Humour Studies Network, Sydney*

An evil red demon, fangs and claws bared, lurks in a temple to drag you, sinner, off to Hell. He has had the misfortune to be approached by a rat with a holly branch in its mouth. He takes the nearest ladder up the nearest column and clings there, bellowing with fear as the rat makes its way towards him ... Rat one, Demon nil.

The rat is the envoy of the Lord Daikoku, one of the Seven Gods of Happiness, and holly is a talisman against evil. Good bests Evil yet again. This is an *Ōtsu-e*, a form of popular art sold to tourists at Ōtsu near Kyoto in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. It is the cover image for *Warai: L'humour dans l'art japonais de la préhistoire au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, the catalogue of a wonderful exhibition of representations of smiling, humour and laughter in Japanese art from earliest times. The exhibition showed in Japan and subsequently, from 3 October to 15 December 2012, at the Maison de la Culture du Japon in Paris.

The record starts with grave goods of the late Jōmon period, the earliest in this catalogue dating from 2000 to 1000 BCE. The *Haniwa* are *terra cotta* figures that went to their graves with the dead to look after them, and in these cases, clearly to keep the dead smiling in the afterlife.

Depictions of the famous Chinese poet Li Bai (by Kanō Hideyori, 1566) and of the Japanese Zen monk, Ikkyū (by Hanabusa Itchō, d. 1724), both of them dead drunk, head an array of little human dramas including a huge pair of scrolls by Kawanabe Kyōsai (1867), depicting a battle of farts, beginning with cooking the necessary sweet potatoes (to produce the necessary wind) and progressing to a full-on fight, of which the pictures look as vulgar you could wish.

These frivolous pictures appear on scrolls, screens, vases, tobacco pouches, censers, tobacco pipes, fans, statues and plaques. They are in a range of genres. Apart from the *Haniwa* and *Ōtsu-e*, many of the genres of Japanese art are represented, including *nishiki-e*, *kage-e*, *ukiyo-e*, carvings, gold and silver inlay work and *sumi-e* ink drawings.

The *Ōtsu-e* include a pair of figures of the hapless god of thunder leaning down from his cloud, teeth gritted, dangling a hooked anchor, fishing to retrieve his drum that has dropped to earth. Around 1848 there was a fashion for pairs of *kage-e* (shadow pictures) one of them depicting a silhouette that looks like a lobster with a clam, and which, in the next picture, shown in full colour, turns out to be a man sitting in the reeds, fishing - a form of Japanese *trompe-l'oeil*.

The antics of animals have long entertained Japanese artists, so monkeys, native to Japan, naturally lead the parade. One monkey is eternally hopeful, trying to catch a catfish in a gourd.

Lions, tigers and elephants also appear, the 17th to 18th century elephant with its trunk reaching high into the air, clasped firmly round the nose of a disconcerted long-nosed goblin (*tengu*). A cat and a mouse are sharing a *sake* cup, the cat having, in its drunkenness, entirely forgotten to chase the mouse, and the mouse forgetting to run from the cat. A turtle, depicted by Utagawa Kuniyoshi about 1842, glares balefully at the ornamental carp, one of whom appears to be crying, and all of whom swarm around in earnest and politic convocation, trying to decide what to do about the threat.

One of the objects of the Buddhist life is for the soul to escape from this vale of tears and, by attaining enlightenment, to reach Nirvana. Content in detachment from this world and happiness, at least in the afterlife, account for the enigmatic smile of the Buddha in his various manifestations, and the smiles of his disciples.

The seven gods of happiness are conflated with popular Buddhism in Japan and are the subject of many paintings and statues. The god Daikoku, on a ladder, tonsures the enormously elongated bald head of the god Jurōjin. In the next picture, the two of them are wrestling, Daikoku's black legs wrapped round Jurōjin's pale ones.

Legend tells us that the Bodhidharma sat meditating for nine years facing a wall and when he decided to get up, found that his legs had fallen off. He is the origin of the Tumbling Tom and his red-cloaked form is to be seen all over Japan, sold as a charm for good luck. The potter, Kawai Kanjirō, whose house is a museum in Kyoto, owned the statue on the back of the catalogue jacket. The broadly smiling statue of the Great God of Tamatsushima (about 1807) looks to the European eye, with his pointed dunce's cap, hauntingly like a circus clown.

In the words of Andō Hiroyasu, President of the Japan Foundation, in the catalogue, "This exhibition explores the multiple facets of "Le rire" in the arts of Japan from the Jōmon Period to the dawn of the twentieth century, through a hundred works." The French word *le rire* shares a quality with the Japanese word *WARAI*, the title of this exhibition. Although *le rire* means laughter, it can also mean a smile. In Japanese, the word *hohoemi* means a smile as does *le sourire* in French, but in both languages the word for laughter does duty for both. There is therefore a profound ambiguity in the title of this exhibition. It began at the Mori Art Museum in 2007 (see Note below) with the English subtitle *The Smile in Japanese Art* and by 2012 it had become *L'humour dans l'art Japonais*. Is the exhibition about smiling or laughter or indeed about humour or even about the spirit of play? From the point of view of art, this doesn't matter, from the point of view of humour studies, it does.

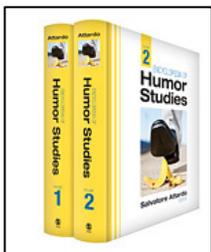
This is a beautiful book, suited for students or anyone who cares about Japanese art or history or about understanding the Japanese people. But in analysing the pictures we must ask, is this particular picture about humour, smiling, laughter or play? Who is doing the laughing or smiling or making the joke? The characters in the picture? The artist? Or is it the viewer? Or all of them?

**Note:** Thanks to the work of Dr. Nelly Feuerhahn, Bibliographer for CorHum, the humour scholars' network in France, an account and images of the Paris exhibition are available at:

[http://www.humoresques.fr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=307:warai-lhumour-dans-lart-japonais&catid=40&Itemid=64](http://www.humoresques.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=307:warai-lhumour-dans-lart-japonais&catid=40&Itemid=64)

## Recent Publications

### The Encyclopedia of Humor Studies



**Salvatore Attardo, Editor. (2014). *The Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Pub., Inc. 2 Vols. 929 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4129-9909-0. Hardcover. USD 350.**

*From the Publisher*

The Encyclopedia of Humor Studies explores the concept of humor in history and modern society in the United States and internationally. This work's scope encompasses the humor of children, adults, and even nonhuman primates throughout the ages, from crude jokes and simple slapstick to sophisticated word play and ironic parody and satire.

As an academic social history, it includes the perspectives of a wide range of disciplines, including

sociology, child development, social psychology, life style history, communication, and entertainment media. Readers will develop an understanding of the importance of humor as it has developed globally throughout history and appreciate its effects on child and adult development, especially in the areas of health, creativity, social development, and imagination. This two-volume set is available in both print and electronic formats.

## New Articles on Humor

*The Humorous Times* announces recent articles from *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* and by researchers who publish elsewhere within humor studies. The following list, compiled by the ISHS Executive Secretary for the online ISHS bibliographies, includes humor studies articles published in print since November 2013. If you have a recent publication, let us know, and we will include it in our next issue of the newsletter.

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## In Remembrance

### Lorene M. Birden

*Adapted with permission from Dorota Brzozowska, Wladyslaw Chlopicki, Diana E. Popa, and Villy Tsakona, European Journal of Humor Studies*



As friends, colleagues and researchers, we were deeply saddened by Lorene Birden's untimely death in late 2013. Those who were not privileged to ever meet Lorene M. Birden, the scholar, must know that she was a literary researcher and translator. Drawing on studies leading to doctoral degrees in French and Russian literature from the University of Massachusetts, USA (1993), and in English literature from the University of Nice, France (1996), she focused on 19th- and 20th-century prose fiction, writing studies on Triolet, Flaubert, Zola, Chekhov, Pasternak, Eliot, Anne Brontë and Saki. She also worked on translations of Triolet, Cixous, Jacob and Chekhov. Her sustained interest in both humor and the short story allowed her to develop projects and publish extensively on both.

A colorful personality, an owner of the largest collection of conference T-shirts, she was the only person in the ISHS who (co-)convened two humor conferences in a row on two continents (2004 and 2005) and co-organized the third one in 2012 in Krakow, Poland. Following the latter she was preparing to edit a highly original, multidisciplinary volume on the classical British story "Three Men in a Boat," but this was never meant to be as there was "literally too little life left in her." Her passing is a great loss to the humor scholar community. She will be warmly remembered for her broad smile and joie de vivre.

### Paul W. Seaver, Jr.

*Adapted from the West Chester Daily Local News, November 5, 2013*



Paul W. Seaver, Jr., 70, died on Oct. 18, 2013 at St. Luke's Mid America Heart Institute in Kansas City, Mo. After he received his Ph.D. from the University of Maryland in 1980, he taught Spanish at the university level for 43 years, most recently at Franklin & Marshall College. Professor, author, and contributor to many conferences and publications, his first book on Enrique Jardiel Poncela, a twentieth century Spanish humorist, is still available through internet sales. Although he wrote primarily in Spanish, he gave a keynote address in English at Hofstra University and his contribution appears in *At Whom Are We Laughing?* edited by Zenia Sacks DaSilva and Gregory M. Pell, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing. UK. 2013). In 1995, Paul received an invitation from the Chinese government to lecture

in southern China on modern methods of teaching foreign languages. That same year, he also founded the International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies (ISLHHS) as well as organizing the society's first international conference, which was held in Philadelphia. Paul was inducted into the Spanish Academy of Humor in 1999 in Madrid, Spain. Although a serious scholar even after retirement, he always had an excellent sense of humor.



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