

26th Australasian Humour Studies Network Conference

5-7 February 2020

Griffith University, Brisbane, South Bank Campus

Theme: *Laughter and Belonging*

IMPORTANT NEW UPDATES and Reminders –

- Call Deadline Extended to
22 September 2019
- Registration is Now Open

Call for proposals for papers and workshops for the 26th Australasian Humour Studies Network Conference has been extended to close definitively on 22 September. The organising committee would like to thank those who have already submitted their abstracts which are actively under review.

Registration for presenters and attendees is now open.
Click here -

[<https://sydney.onestopsecure.com/onestopweb/AHSN26>] to access registration information and website. Registration will close on 7 January.

General Conference Information

The 26th AHSN Conference will take place from Wednesday afternoon to Friday evening, 5-7 February 2020, at The Ship Inn on the Griffith University South Bank Brisbane campus (see also Important Dates below).

THIS EDITION

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The theme of the conference is '**Laughter and Belonging**'. Laughing together can be a powerful force for bonding and bringing people closer to one another, but laughter and humour can also be divisive and exclusionary. This year's theme invites presentations on either or both aspects of laughter and humour. As in previous AHSN conferences, however, presentations are welcome on all aspects of social laughter and humour, and from diverse disciplinary perspectives, including not only humour studies as such, but also literary studies, linguistics, cultural studies, politics, psychology, philosophy, history, comedy studies, law, creative practices, sociology, communication studies and others.

Visit the [26th AHSN Conference webpage](#) for details on making a submission, keynote speakers, registration, important dates and travel and accommodation options.

For all enquiries, please [email us](#).

Postgraduate Scholarships

As in previous AHSN conferences, proposals from research students are particularly encouraged. There are five postgraduate scholarships available, based on merit, which waive the registration fee. Successful candidates will be advised as soon as possible.

Important Conference Dates:

- Submission portal now open, closes September 22, 2019
- Acceptance advice by October 1, 2019
- Registration portal for presenters and non-presenters now open
- Registration portal closes on 7 January 2020 (refunds not available after 10 January 2020).
- Conference dates: 5 February (midday) to 7 February 2020 (early evening), with optional pre-conference morning workshops, 5 February 2020
- Conference dinner: Thursday, 6 February (details and sign-up TBA via email after registration closes but before conference commences)

Organizing Committee

- [Cliff Goddard](#) is a Professor in Linguistics at Griffith University. He is widely known for his work in language, culture and meaning, using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach and its sister theory ethnopragmatics. He has published a number of papers on cultural and ethnopragmatic aspects of social laughter and humour.
- [Reza Arab](#) is a PhD candidate in Linguistics at Griffith University. He has been studying humour-related speech practices in Persian (Farsi). He is interested in the philosophy of language and pragmatics. He has attended AHSN conferences since 2017 and considers himself a regular!
- [Angelina Hurley](#) is an Aboriginal woman and writer from Brisbane. A PhD candidate at Griffith University her work focuses on humour from an Aboriginal perspective. She holds a BA Ed, MA Arts Admin and is a Fulbright Scholar. She has presented at AHSN twice and very excited about the 2020 conference.

- *Zarek Hennessy*, a fourth-year PhD candidate at Griffith University, composing an artefact exploring fictocriticism and Sartrean existentialism. Having only attended the most recent conference, he is an AHSN newbie, but found the sincerity of those involved captivating and is excited at the interdisciplinary prospects that the study of humour might bring to academia.



Cliff Goddard



Reza Arab



Angelina Hurley



Zarek Hennessy

Enquiries:

Should you have any questions or need any help, please contact us at: ahsn2020conference@gmail.com

Sponsors:

The 26th AHSN Conference will be co-hosted by the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research (GCSCR): <https://www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-centre-social-cultural-research>



New AHSN Board Established

The AHSN Review Panel is the guardian of academic standards for the AHSN. Its founding chair was Dr Bruce Findlay, Psychology Swinburne University of Technology, and two years ago, he was succeeded by Dr Angus McLachlan, Psychology, Federation University, Ballarat. The Panel's terms of reference and current composition can be found on the AHSN website [<https://sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/australasian-humour-studies-network.html>]. Apart from reviewing all proposals for each AHSN Conference, the Panel meets annually (at the Conference) to review the future of the Network. Established in 1997, the AHSN is now over 450 members strong and activities seem to be increasing each year.

At its last meeting, the Review Panel set up a small working party to look at improving the operation of the AHSN and it recommended the creation of a smaller new board to direct the work of the Network and especially to work on improving communications with all far-flung members, thus releasing the larger Review Panel under Angus' continuing leadership to focus upon the original tasks of review.

This has now been done and the AHSN Board is composed as follows:

- Chair, A/Prof Kerry Mullan (RMIT University, Melbourne)
- Dr Jessica Milner Davis (Co-ordinator, Sydney University)
- Dr Michael Meany (Editor, The Digest, Newcastle University)
- Dr Nicholas Holm (Massey University)
- Dr Mark Rolfe (UNSW)
- Consulting Member: Chair, Review Panel
- Consulting Member: Conference Convenor

The principal functions of the Board are

- To manage the affairs of the network, including finances and electronic communications
- To appoint the Review Panel from time to time so as to ensure representation of contributing disciplines
- To appoint the Editor of The AHSN Digest and to arrange for its timely publication and archiving
- To commission and receive reports on the holding of the AHSN Conference and other occasional events such as seminars, colloquia, book launches etc
- To conduct such business as is necessary for the activities and good standing of the Network
- Meetings of the Board shall be conducted via skype or in person as required
- At each annual AHSN Conference, the Board and members of the Review Panel shall meet together to review the year past and plan for the future

Sincere thanks and a very warm welcome to our new AHSN Chair, Kerry Mullan (RMIT University Melbourne).

Jessica Milner Davis

AHSN Co-ordinator

Message from the AHSN Board Chair

Dear AHSN members,

I am delighted and honoured to have been invited to chair the new AHSN Board. As Jessica says, the network has grown exponentially over the years, and the increased workload now needs some redistribution. This growth is first and foremost testament to the achievements and tireless work of Jessica as its Convenor of 20+ years, and to the past and present members of the Review Panel. It is also thanks to you, the members, through your participation at the annual conference, seminars and book launches etc., and to your publications and interest in all things humorous.



I first attended an AHSN conference in 2015 (Adelaide) and haven't missed one since: as a relative newcomer to humour studies at that time, not only did I learn a lot, I found a welcoming and very friendly group of scholars whose respect for, and interest in, each other's disciplinary approaches to the study of humour really impressed me. (And what's not to love about a conference where you get to laugh so much?!)

As members of the new AHSN Board, we are all looking forward to our new roles and to ensuring the Network continues to run smoothly (you will notice we have unashamedly stacked the Board with the right people to achieve this). Your suggestions and involvement as members of the AHSN community are always welcome; please do not hesitate to contact me: kerry.mullan@rmit.edu.au

Kerry

Assoc. Prof. Kerry Mullan
Convenor of Languages
Higher Degree Research Leader, Social and Global Studies Centre
RMIT University Melbourne

Report on a Celebratory Appraisal of the Late, Great John Clarke



John Morrison Clarke, photograph by Stewart Thorn, 2011
(reproduced with permission).

The Satire of John Morrison Clarke (1948-2017) Special Issue of Journal of Comedy Studies, Vol. 10 (1), eds. Jessica Milner Davis & Robert Phiddian, was duly launched at the School of Art and Design, ANU, on 8 August 2019 by Clarke's good friend and collaborator, the artist and satirist Bryan Dawe. Bryan offered some intimate and personal reflections of this erudite but humble humourist and about his own sense of loss at his untimely death.

The event was booked out and a crowd of 140 people braved the cold Canberra night to enjoy the talk and mark the advent of the first extended, book-length academic study of his art. AHSN's thanks go to AHSN member, Dr Lucien Leon (SOAD) and to Professor Will Christie, Director of the Humanities Research Centre at the ANU, for their help in making this celebration possible. A panel of contributing authors attended and addressed the main themes explored in their research, taking questions and answers along with Bryan. They were: Robert and Jessica, Mark Rolfe (UNSW), Anne Pender (UNE), Lucien Leon (ANU) and Paul Horan (NZTV).



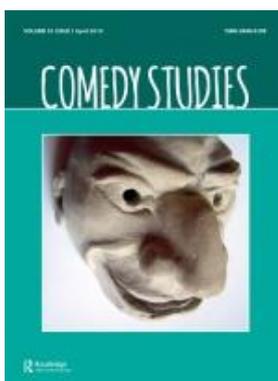
The John Clarke panelists and their Chair. L-R: Lucien Leon, Mark Rolfe, Paul Horan, Anne Pender, Bryan Dawe, Robert Phiddian, Jessica Milner Davis, Will Christie



Mr Bryan Dawe



Professor Robert Phiddian



A subsequent session on the volume was recorded by Jessica and Robert on “Late Night Live” with Phillip Adams (broadcast 15 August, podcast at: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/john-clarke:-tinker,-actor,-comic/11414664>).

The Special Issue of Journal of Comedy Studies Vol. 10 (1) is published by Routledge, London, and can be purchased at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rcos20/current>

Members' New Publications

- Marsh, Moira. 2018. Bunga-Bunga on the Dreadnought: Hoax, Race and Woolf. *Journal of Comedy Studies* 9: 1-16
- Marsh, Moira. 2018. Believe Me, I'm Joking: The Dialectics of the Legend and the Dialectics of Humor. *Journal of American Folklore* 131 522: 444-50
- Marsh, Moira. 2018. Jokes, Pranks, and Humor. In *The Oxford Handbook of American Folklore and Folklife Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bronner. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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Reminder: The LAUGHTER Symposium

September 9th, 2019, 10-3pm

Griffith University, Southbank Campus, Ship Inn Function Room



Laughing together can be a powerful force for bonding and bringing people closer to one another, but laughter can also be divisive and exclusionary. We invite you to present at The LAUGHTER Symposium, and enter a friendly discussion in asking: what does laughter mean to us? Why does laughter matter?

The Laughter Symposium sets out to show that there is laughter in all disciplines of academic research – yes, even yours – and that there are exciting opportunities for further research in this growing field. Each discipline will have a different take on the topic, and we encourage you to use whatever mode of presentation that fits best. We look forward to seeing yourself and your discipline represented at what should be a lively and curious event.

Featured Speakers:

[Dr Jessica Milner Davis](#)

Member Clare Hall Cambridge, Honorary Associate, Dept of English, University of Sydney

Title: Researching Laughter and Humour: Where did 'Humour Studies' Come From?

[A/Prof Kerry Mullan](#)

Convenor of Languages and Higher Degree Research Leader, Social and Global Studies Centre (SGSC), RMIT University, Melbourne

Title: 'You Gotta Laugh', but When, Why and How? Cultural Differences in Joking and Social Laughter

The Laughter Symposium is a precursor to the 26th Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) Conference that will be held from 5-7 February 2020 at Griffith University, Brisbane, South Bank Campus.

To register for the symposium please e-mail: ahsn2020conference@gmail.com

“The Other Manga: It Bites!” Exhibition Update

From AHSN member, Dr Ron Stewart, Tokyo University, Japan

Update on cartoonists involved with “The Other Manga: It Bites!” exhibition held in conjunction with the February 2018 AHSN conference (RMIT University, Swanston Library, February-March 2019)

Congratulations to Yoshiaki Yokota!

This year has been a big one for cartoonist and scholar Yoshiaki Yokota whose work was among the Kyodo News political cartoons exhibited in Melbourne and who also gave a paper at this year’s AHSN conference. On April 6th he defended his PhD dissertation on the history of Turkish political cartooning, and in June received his PhD from Japan’s most prestigious academic institution, Tokyo University. On June 7th, Yoshiaki was awarded the top prize in the cartoon category at Japan Cartoonists Association’s annual awards. The award was presented in particular for his book of war-themed political cartoons, *Cartoon Works* by Yoshiaki Yokota, but it was also in recognition of his work at Kyodo News, and his international activities: in 2018, acting as judge in an international cartoon competition in Cyprus, organizing the “Wonderful? Wonder World 2018” international cartoon exhibition in Tokyo and exhibiting this year in Russia as part of the “Modern Ironic Graphics of Japan” exhibit.



Yoshiaki Yokota receiving his 2019 award from the Japan Cartoonists Association President, Machiko Satonaka.



The trophy presented to Yoshiaki Yokota for the 2019 Grand Award for Manga (Cartooning). It features two characters wrestling each other, a frog and rabbit, from the 12th C scroll *Choju giga* (*Humorous Pictures of Birds and Animals*) which is commonly regarded as one of the earliest examples of Japanese comic art, classified as a National Treasure.

More Congratulations -- to Kyodo News and its Cartoon Editor, Tomoko Sasaki

At a time when there is continual news of newspapers backing away from political cartooning, Kyodo News is continuing to show strong support for the art. From April this year, Kyodo has added new cartoonist to their stable, Kawahara Akane. This young woman cartoonist is a welcome addition to the aging and male dominated

profession in Japan. Kyodo News' cartoon editor Tomoko Sasaki -- who also attended this year's AHSN conference and spoke at the "The Other Manga" exhibit opening -- has begun preparations for this year's annual satirical cartoon review of the past year, the Kyodo Seso Manga exhibition to be held at Shiodome Media Tower in Tokyo in October (with English translations by AHSN member Ron Stewart). This will include work by all the cartoonists whose work appeared in Melbourne this year, plus some by their new cartoonist.

[Best Wishes for Future Plans by No-rio](#)

No-rio (Norio Yamanoi), cartoonist for Asahi Shinbun newspaper and France's *Courrier International* newspaper who spoke at "The Other Manga" exhibition opening has also been busy. He is currently at work on the MS of a book about political cartooning and censorship which expands on his presentation at the 2018 AHSN conference. He is also helping Yoshiaki Yokota organize an exhibition in Tokyo on a similar theme, called "What is Freedom of Expression?" (Hyōgen no jiyū to ha?) and scheduled to open on September 12th. Both Yoshiaki and Norio will be also participating in this year's Salon de l'Humour in Saint-Just-le-Martel, France.

[And, Despite Retirement, a New Book from Yuzo Asakura – More Congratulations!](#)

The cartoonist, Yuzo Asakura, whose post-February 11th, 2011 triple disaster related cartoons for the regional newspaper Fukushima Minpo featured in part-two of the "The Other Manga" exhibition, hung up his brush in April, sadly due to failing health and just a few weeks short of his eighth anniversary of starting. In mid-May all of his "Disaster Picture Diary" cartoons were collected and published in book form. The book includes a news report on the RMIT University Swanston Library exhibition as well as an essay on Asakura's cartoons by Ron Stewart. Fukushima Minpo and Yuzo Asakura have been delighted by the better and broader than expected reaction to book, and comments received. A major reason for publishing the book was to remind people that the difficult road to recovery by the disaster-hit regions still continues and to not allow people to forget the lessons to be learned from the disaster. After the book was published, a number of institutions, including a US university, have begun talking about holding "Disaster Picture Diary" exhibitions. In late July, Saitama Municipal Cartoon Art Museum in Japan began concrete planning towards a 2021 exhibition of Asakura's cartoons to mark the tenth anniversary of the disaster.

AHSN Member Profile

Yoshiaki YOKOTA, Tokyo University

[Activities as a Cartoonist](#)

Taking advantage of an opportunity arising from a contribution I made to a newspaper, in 1994 I began work as a professional cartoonist on the important Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shinbun. From 2001 to the present, I have been drawing satirical cartoons for Kyodo News service which distributes them to regional newspapers throughout Japan. Also, since 1998, I have been a member of the Federation of Cartoonists Organizations (FECO), an international association promoting interaction between cartoonists worldwide. As president of the Japanese branch of FECO between 2006 and 2012, I conducted exchanges with cartoonists from Turkey, Spain, and other countries, and held exhibitions. In 1995 and again in 2003, I won the Grand Prize in the Yomiuri International Cartoon Contest. This year (2019), I was awarded the Japan Cartoonists Association's 2019 Grand Award for Manga (cartooning).



Research activities

After completing a Masters degree at the The Open University of Japan on the history of Turkish cartooning, I entered the Culture and Representation program of the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies at Tokyo University and continued to develop this research. In 2019, I have been awarded my PhD. My PhD dissertation is titled: “The Birth and Significance of a ‘National’ Cartoon Character During Turkey’s Nation-State Formation Period - The independence and representational function acquired by the human figure drawn between tradition and modernity”. As the Ottoman Empire moved forward with a policy of modernization through Westernization, cartoons were introduced as a cultural form including Western-style media. This dissertation looks at the process of these cartoons being widely accepted and read by the common people of Turkey after the 1923 formation of the Republic of Turkey. It explores the meaning of the role played by the central cartoonist of the time, Cemal Nadir, and of Amcabey, the character he drew.

Besides AHSN, I am a member of The Japan Society of Cultural Anthropology, Japan Society for Studies in Cartoons and Comics, Japan Association for Middle East Studies, and The Japan Sociological Society.

“Laughing in an Emergency: Humour in Contemporary Art”

Call for Conference Papers

Dear colleagues,

We are thrilled to announce the call for abstracts for the Laughing in an Emergency: Humour in Contemporary Art conference to be held at the University of Manchester on April 17-18 2020.

In addition to keynotes from leading international artists including Richard Bell (Australia) and Stefanos Tsivopoulos (Greece/US), we welcome proposals from scholars and practitioners addressing the interface of humour and contemporary art from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives. Topics to be addressed include, but are not restricted to, contemporary art and the following: humour and crisis, humour and the global south, humour and identity, humour and gender, humour and resistance, humour and the museum, humour and authenticity, humour and contemporaneity, humour and the art market, humour and cultural resilience.

We invite proposals for individual papers of approximately 20 minutes (allowing an extra ten minute for question/discussion time). Proposals should include a title, an abstract of approximately 300-350 words and a brief biography. Please send proposals to - liae@manchester.ac.uk by October 30th 2019. Responses will be provided by November 30th, 2019.

My best wishes and thanks,

Chrisoula

Dr Chrisoula Lionis

Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellow

Principal Investigator, Horizon2020 Project Laughing in an Emergency

School of Arts, Languages, and Cultures

The University of Manchester

Manchester, United Kingdom

RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

- C. Lionis 'If a duck is drawn in the desert does anybody see it?: Humour and infrastructures of Palestinian statehood', in S Damir-Geilsdorf and S. Milich (eds) *Creative Resistance: Political Humour in the Arab Uprisings* (in press, Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2020).
- C. Lionis and. U. Cvoro, 'When the Periphery Laughs: Humor and Locality in Contemporary Art from Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Cultural Politics*, 15.2 (June 2019): 221-241.
- C. Lionis, *Laughter in Occupied Palestine: Comedy and Identity in Art and Film* (London: I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury, (2016).

Humour: 2nd Global Interdisciplinary Conference

Call for Proposals

Saturday 7th March - Sunday 8th March 2020

Prague, Czech Republic

Humour seems to be an essential feature of human life – 'the ability to be amused by things, the way in which people see that some things are amusing, or the quality of being amusing' (Merriam-Webster). It is not just about jokes but a way of looking at the world. Individually, it is beneficial to health, relieving negative energy and invigorating the mind and the body. Socially, it is an indicator of frankness and sociability. Economically, it generates communication, improves teamwork and increases efficiency. Politically, it is an important form of protest and disobedience. Historically, it has proven to be a powerful weapon in times of crisis. And it can be wielded negatively, as a weapon or entrée into dark social arenas such as racism or hatred.

Possibly the most pervasive and accessible form of humour is comedy. In the 21st century the entertainment industry has expanded significantly in what some see as the pre-planned 'professionalisation' of humour. Television shows explore situation comedy, stand up comedians attract huge numbers to live shows. Humour is carefully channelled, calculated, designed to evoke or provoke laughter and in the process reveals important differences between the two. The ability to provoke laughter, provide amusement or find humour in situations is common across cultures and societies, even though humour works in different ways and on different levels: age, education, gender, ethnicity, space and place all play a part in the things people find funny.

Although humour appears in many forms and styles, it is based on the element of surprise intended to produce a reaction. It can send a message, reveal something new about an otherwise unquestioned event or situation, or about ourselves and our worldview. Through surprise and contradiction, humour can shift the ordinary into the extraordinary, break taboos, transgress boundaries, or call into question our otherwise steadfast beliefs. And while many of its functions are positive, humour can also allow individuals or cultures to elide disturbing facts about social inequality, ignore or downplay injustices and perpetuate stereotypes. Not infrequently, a form of humour more akin to aggressiveness, that incorporates malice, can be used to cause intentional harm, shame and exercise control. Essentially, it can be a technology of power, providing an avenue for expression of prejudice, bias, and bigotry.

Dealing with the complex and often unexpected situations of life, humour takes many forms and meanings. It can

include absurdity, banter, buffoonery, burlesque, comedy, derision, facetiousness, farce, foolery, irony, jocularly, mimicry, mockery, parody, puns, ridicule, sarcasm, satire, scorn, slapstick, spoonerism, taunts, tease, waggishness, witticism. Sometimes it is positive, sympathetic, or constructive; other times it can hurt, harm and damage. It can be playful or serious. It can be an act of resistance or outright rebellion; it can be inappropriate and uncontrolled. It can be repressive or subversive, self-deprecating or ironic. We laugh to release tension, to feel more positive, more energised. We laugh to show our confidence or satisfaction or as in indication of excitement, delight, good spirits and happiness.

The second meeting of this inclusive interdisciplinary project will seek to explore the various facets of humour and to map how humour works. We will examine why we laugh, how we laugh and what purpose humour serves. Alongside the discussions is an intention to form a publication to engender further collaboration and discussion. We aim to bring together participants from a wide range of disciplines, professions, and vocations to create a unique, interdisciplinary event that will explore the serious topic of humour in all its wondrous forms. Our goal is to examine the intersections between humour and the human, and to look beneath the surface and beyond the laughter to examine the reasons why we laugh and why we respond with humour to persons, events and situations.

Key topics, themes and issues for discussion may include, but are definitely not limited to:

- ~ Humour to human: theory of humours, theories of humour
- ~ The archaeology of humour and laughter: from ancient times to the new Millennium
- ~ The anatomy of laughter: the physiological effects of laughter
- ~ Humour and pain, humour and death: laughter as therapy
- ~ Humour in times of change and conflict: acts of resistance
- ~ The topography of humour: local, regional, national variants of humour
- ~ Humour and the city: do cities have a particular sense of humour? What are the differences between urban, suburban and rural humour?
- ~ The language of humour: from traditional jokes to high-brow intellectualism
- ~ The humour gap: gendered versions of funniness
- ~ Laughter in the classroom: humour in educational settings
- ~ Humour in performance: theatre, cinema, stand-up comedy, television, music
- ~ Humour in folklore: trickster figures and fictional characters
- ~ Entertainers in time: clowns and harlequins, pranksters and jesters, comics and comedians
- ~ Borders of humour: dark humour, horror humour, crude humour, toilet humour, off-colour humour
- ~ Humour – levels of acceptance in science, business, politics, religion, architecture, gastronomy, etc.
- ~ Completing our five senses: how to develop a sense of humour
- ~ The English sense of humour: understatement, euphemism, self-effacement
- ~ Globalisation of humour: traceability and translatability
- ~ The present status and future prospects of humour

What to Send

The aim of this inclusive interdisciplinary conference and collaborative networking event is to bring people together and encourage creative conversations in the context of a variety of formats: papers, seminars, workshops, storytelling, performances, poster presentations, panels, q and a's, round-tables etc. Please feel free to put forward proposals that you think will get the message across, in whatever form.

300 word proposals, presentations, abstracts and other forms of contribution and participation should be submitted by Friday 4th October 2019. Other forms of participation should be discussed in advance with the Organising Chairs.

All submissions will be minimally double reviewed, under anonymous (blind) conditions, by a global panel drawn

from members of the Project Team and the Advisory Board. In practice our procedures usually entail that by the time a proposal is accepted, it will have been minimally triple and quadruple reviewed.

You will be notified of the panel's decision by Friday 18th October 2019. If your submission is accepted for the conference, a full draft of your contribution should be submitted by Friday 17th January 2020.

Abstracts and proposals may be in Word, PDF, RTF or Notepad formats with the following information and in this order:

a) author(s), b) affiliation as you would like it to appear in the programme, c) email address, d) title of proposal, e) type of proposal e.g. paper presentation, workshop, panel, film, performance, etc, f) body of proposal, g) up to 10 keywords.

E-mails should be entitled: Humour 2

Where to Send

Abstracts and proposals should be submitted simultaneously to the Organising Chair and the Project Administrator:

Dr Elena Nistor: dr.elena.nistor@gmail.com

Len Capuli (Project Administrator): praguehumour2@www.progressiveconnexions.net

Please direct all questions and enquiries to: praguehumour2@progressiveconnexions.net

For further details and information please visit the conference web site:

<http://www.progressiveconnexions.net/interdisciplinary-projects/narratives-persons-communities/humour/conferences/>

'Extreme Black Humour' – a Significant New Term in Humour Studies

By AHSN Member, Jocelyn Chey (Universities of Sydney and Western Sydney)

We are all familiar with the concept of “black humour.” China has now added “extreme black humour” to our humour lexicon. This is not simply a deeper shade of blackness but a description of a particular humour style that deserves close study. The category may also be usefully applied in other humour cultures, including in Australasia. The term “extreme black humour” or *gaojihei youmo* 高級黑幽默 (extreme black humour) was developed in the Peoples Republic of China to be applied to phenomena in Chinese political discourse but could well be used more generally.

Drawing on the entry in China’s online encyclopaedia *Baidu baike*, Xueliang Ding, in a recent book (in Chinese language) entitled *Zhengzhi yu Zhongguo tese de youmo* 政治與中國特色的幽默 (*Politics and humour with special Chinese characteristics*), describes extreme black humour as follows:

It means to use high-class, civilised, humorous language to blacken everything in the world.... Extreme black humour implies that someone will use polite and realistic extreme black methods, not underhand and low-class means or coarse language, to blacken his/her target.... Apparently praising, but in fact mocking, where the object

that is praised and the target that is mocked are not one and the same thing, but what is praised is used to mock the target that he/she wishes to criticise. [Ding: x, my translation]

Ding quotes a 2015 article by columnist Cao Lin in a major national newspaper that defines four subtypes of extreme black humour: the first being to say that something bad is actually good; and the second being to give exaggerated and overblown praise of something at best questionable. The third subtype is subtle since it suggests that there is no need to doubt or question something of excellence that is already being promoted. This method is currently used by Chinese netizens for instance to mock President Xi's much-touted "China Dream" and his vaunting of the country's achievements over the past forty years of economic reform. The last subtype of extreme black humour is the process of creating enemies who are painted in blackest and most extreme terms in order to produce a reaction that is the opposite of what was originally intended by the authorities. (Ding: xii)

According to Ding, Chinese political commissars have made a serious study of extreme black humour because they are concerned about the risk of humour destabilising the status quo. This fact alone should be sufficient reason for humour studies scholars to engage more deeply in its study. If, by identifying the essential criteria of extreme black humour, Chinese authorities hope to provide censors and Party hacks with tools to weed out sprouts of dissent, they are playing with fire. It is virtually impossible to distinguish intentional humour from officially sanctioned propaganda, as Ding himself points out. From the time of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s up to the present, Party and government documents can be read either straight or as examples of extreme black humour depending on the political inclination of the reader and the reader needs little encouragement to switch from one reading to the other. The implied hypocrisy of extreme black humour is perhaps the reason why a 2016 survey inviting the public to comment on the difference between "extreme" and "regular" black humour, run by *Renmin Luntan* 人民论坛 (*People's Forum*), a regular feature of the online *People's Daily*, was dropped without the results being published.

The title of Ding's book *Politics and humour with special Chinese characteristics* indicates that it is mainly concerned with politics rather than humour because the phrase "with special Chinese characteristics" is frequently used by China's political leaders to describe their practice of socialism, which of course bears no resemblance at all to real socialism.

The first chapter is an updated Chinese-language version of his contribution to Davis and Chey's 2013 edited volume, *Humour in Chinese Life and Culture*. Here Ding posits that the quantity of humour production in China and other cultures is in direct proportion to the extent of political freedom. This thesis appears to be now widely accepted. The unstated "humour" of the rest of the book resides in the author's highlighting of the enormous gaps between Chinese propaganda and policy and actual practice. These absurdities are simply ridiculous in themselves. Ding gives many concrete examples and focusses on people's response with subversive humour.

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Call for Papers for a Journal Special Issue

Deflating the Dictators

Special Issue of "Humanities" Journal: "Deflating the Dictators: Satire, Humor, and Twenty-First-Century Tyranny"

The journal *Humanities* seeks to publish international analyses of current efforts by satirists and humorists to call attention to the injustice and abuse inflicted by autocrats. Which satirists are engaging in a national or international struggle for justice against repressive leadership and with what means? How are satire and the related mode of humor currently functioning, despite censorship, in oppressive regimes? How do current satirical or humorous texts depicting oppression incorporate facts and artefacts that generate countercultural memories and thereby fill gaps in other historical or mass media narratives?

A few examples of such artworks include *Day of the Oprichnik* by Vladimir Sorokin (2006); *United States of Banana* by Giannina Braschi (2011); the Masasit Mati acting group's finger-puppet show series "Top Goon: Diaries of a Little Dictator" (2011-2012), created to deflate Syrian president Bashar al-Assad; and Trevor Stankiewicz's mixed genre satirical play *The Darfur Compromised* (2015). As Martha C. Nussbaum writes, "the ability to imagine vividly, and then to assess judicially, another person's pain, to participate in it and then to ask about its significance, is a powerful way of learning what the human facts are and of acquiring a motivation to alter them" (*Poetic Justice* 91). This issue of *Humanities* delves into the political outcries and aesthetic innovations of satirical and humorous responses to twenty-first-century oppressive regimes.

Please send essays to Jill Twark, East Carolina University, twarkj@ecu.edu by October 30, 2019. URL: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special_issues/humor_satire

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