

**2003 COLLOQUIUM OF THE
AUSTRALASIAN HUMOUR SCHOLARS NETWORK
AT UNSW, SYDNEY**

**“STUDYING AND APPLYING HUMOUR ACROSS
THE DISCIPLINES”**

Saturday 15th November 2003 (9.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m.)

**Australian Graduate School of Management Building
(AGSM) at UNSW**

**Entry: Gate 11, Botany St, Randwick; parking in non-reserved places in the nearby
Parking Station and fore-court is free on Saturdays. In case of problems, collect a parking
voucher from the AGSM Front Desk on arrival.
(AGSM Front Desk Tel: (02) 9931 9200)**

CONVENOR AND CHAIR: JESSICA MILNER DAVIS

TIMETABLE

9.00 – 9.30 am	<i>Registration; Tea and Coffee</i>
9.30 – 10.10	Dr Jo Milne-Home, “Humour as it Relates to Constructs of Self-esteem and Emotional Intelligence”
10.10 – 10.50	Dr Carmen Moran, “The Multidimensional Scaling of Sense of Humour: How many dimensions before we give up on the concept?”
10.50 – 11.20	<i>Morning Refreshments</i>
11.20 – 12.00	PARALLEL SESSIONS A AND B A: Neville Nickels, “The Hero's Journey” and the Development of Comedic Performers” B: Gerard Matte, “Bergson and Freud Should Have Met for Lunch”
12.00 – 12.40	A: Dr Helene Grover, “Putting Attitude into Laughtitude” B: Mosey Aaron, “Applying Humour in Practical Problem Solving - Some Experiences”
12.40 – 1.40 pm	<i>Lunch</i>
1.40 – 2.20	Dr Alexis Tabensky, “TV and Political Satire: the Case of <i>Les Guignols</i> and the French Presidential Elections 2002”
2.20 – 3.00	Agnes Czeiger, “Humour of Direct Descendants of Holocaust Survivors”
3.00 – 3.20	<i>Afternoon Tea</i>
3.20 – 4.00	Dr Paul S. Thomas, “Laughter - associated Asthma”
4.00 – 4.40	Dr Peter Spitzer, “The Work of Clown Doctors in Australian Hospitals”
4.40 – 5.20	Dr Jessica Milner Davis, “Back to Basics: What is Humour? Conceptualizing its elements, forms, styles and environments”
5.20 – 5.30	Dr Marguerite Wells, “Performance of a Japanese Patter Song: ‘Geisha Song’, from <i>Yabuhara Kengyo</i> , by Hisashi Inoue”
5.30 pm	<i>Refreshments and Report on ISHS Conference, Chicago, July 2003</i>
6.00	Close

ABSTRACTS

Mosey Aaron, Consultant

“Applying Humour in Practical Problem Solving – Some Experiences”

This presentation will visit some of the points in the problem-solving process where humour and laughter have produced stronger options and solutions to problems or challenges being addressed, and explore some of the approaches being used. It will discuss where Play, Fun (hence humour and laughter) fit into creating a setting for small group innovation and creativity, and how this setting provides for trust; empowerment, permission to perform, and the improvement of employee retention in businesses.

NEW LEADERS: WANTED - A MULTIFARIOUS VISIONARY WITH A LENS OF HUMOUR. A well-trodden cliché says, “change is the only constant”, and rapidity of change significantly reduces the ‘half-life’ of knowledge and ideas. The ability to be entrepreneurial, obtain, distribute, act on knowledge and make fast decisions in a tough environment is a prerequisite for the modern leader. Even this is insufficient. The leader needs to formulate and persuade all stakeholders of his/her vision, motivate, and empower their staff to follow suit.

To this end, humour has a role to play, not only in the act of creating ideas and solutions, but also to provide a sense of perspective, spark spontaneity, engender trust, team orientation, and show genuine concern for the intrinsic motivation needs of employees.

Agnes Czeiger, School of Theatre, Film and Dance, University of NSW

“Humour of Direct Descendants of Holocaust Survivors”

A dominant mode of expression of Direct Descendants of Holocaust Survivors is humour that “smiles through tears”. This paper on *The Visual Representations of Direct Descendants of Holocaust Survivors* explores the identification of members of the Second Generation with their Holocaust Survivor parents’ experiences of *angst*, anxiety, pain, guilt, and similar traumas, and the *presence of absence* of memories of the Descendants. It argues that the members of the Second Generation construct their own ‘assimilative memories’, which are the basis for the appropriation of all modes of their visual (and other) representations.

The types of humour examined within this context include culturally-influenced disparaging self-criticism, and humour that distorts reality and is used as a weapon. Based on psychoanalytical theory, humour is considered from the point of view of the topographic system or economic expenditure as a yield or psychical discharge of comic pleasure. However, the notion that Direct Descendants of Holocaust Survivors engage in a form of *jouissance* is contrary to most of the literature. This paper suggests that Direct Descendants of Holocaust Survivors construct their own “assimilative humour” as a distinct form of coping mechanism for distancing from and dealing with their “assimilative memories”. This is evident in the documentary *Angst* (1993, dir: Judy Mentzel, Australia, 56 mins), which is an ideal genre and medium for visual representation of the paper’s argument.

Dr Helene Grover, Therapist

“Putting Attitude into Laughtitude”

As children we are taught to: “Grow up! Wipe that silly look off your face! What are you laughing at? This isn’t funny! Playing is for kids!” etc, so that people end up with a constrained view of what they should laugh about, how be funny and what play means. Some of the results are stress, tension, illness, inability to cope, aggressive behaviour and not living life to the fullest. After all, we want to be happy, enjoy life, work and have fun. Too many people don’t know how to bring that about.

What I have researched and developed are programs to do with the value of humour, laughter, fun and play

as a life strategy. In the humour sessions that I conduct, I often hear that people want to lighten up. Their workplace is unpleasant. Their health is impaired, and for people who have life threatening illnesses, they feel that they can't find much to laugh about, they don't know what to do about it. There are many reasons why people need to lighten up, have fun and laughter in their lives. Apart from introducing the idea of *making ourselves laugh* because we can't always *bring in the clowns*, there is a need to find ways and means to get our own laughter moving. That means, looking at our attitudes, the way we perceive humour, what we are prepared to do to incorporate humour, laughter, fun and play in our daily activities. Children play, have fun, laugh a lot and have the ability to enjoy themselves in simple ways. They are less stressed than adults. My work, as a laughter trainer and humour consultant, is to assist people to regain that ability by learning skills to generate laughter, fun and to give themselves permission to lighten up.

In my presentation, I will cover:

- Introduction to laughter and humour - What are our views and beliefs about laughter and what we think is funny.
- Dealing with Attitude - Where our laughter messages came from and the way we perceive it. How far are we willing to take risks and appearing silly to create our own humour and laughter. The way we evaluate humour.
- Seeking humour by developing our awareness of the myriads of daily incidents that surround us. The ability to laugh at ourselves.

Notice: People attending this presentation will be asked to participate in some practical and fun activities which may require extraordinary acts of bravery and death-defying skills to induce laughter and humour.

**Gerard Matte, School of Performing Arts, Australian Catholic University, Patrick Campus
“Bergson and Freud Should Have Met for Lunch”**

Freud and Bergson were both highly educated Europeans living in close proximity to each other. The groundbreaking insight of the former into the nature of comedy, published as *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, appeared in 1905. Bergson's equally innovative work, *Le Rire (Laughter)*, was published in 1910. However, even though it is possible that both of these men knew of each other and saw each other's works in bookshops, there is no reference to this in either of their examinations into comedy, and certainly any sighting of them as having met has never been recorded. This is a shame given that both still to this day offer what I consider the most comprehensive understanding of how humour occurs. This I mean as something understood in terms of its motivation, how this impacts on its construction, and why it is a unique form of expression. Whether we refer to older luminaries such as Aristotle, Beattie and Schopenhauer, or modern ones like Raskin and Attardo, research into how comedy operates is still fragmented and piecemeal. No one besides Freud and Bergson offer such an extensive perspective of its operation. The purpose of this talk will be to show the specific contribution to comedy that each of these two makes. Then to show how an understanding of both can fruitfully overcome certain limitations they have and hence to arrive at a more comprehensive view of the comedy process.

**Dr Jo Milne-Home, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney
“Humour as it Relates to Constructs of Self-esteem and Emotional Intelligence”**

This presentation will review the literature and refer to two student research projects conducted in 2003: an honours project and a masters research project. In addition, Students in the Master of Psychology: Educational and Developmental program have looked at social, emotional and cognitive development with specific reference to humour and more specifically, what makes us laugh at different ages and stages from early childhood to late adolescence and young adulthood. Masters students interviewed parents, teachers, authors, librarians, actors, clowns and psychologists as part of their research and excerpts from these interviews will be used to illustrate points made in developmental theories. However, more systematic research was conducted using questionnaires with high school students and university students in two student projects. This presentation will report on student findings and indicate suggestions for future research. It will also report on the reactions of students in the masters program to doing research on humour when they were expecting to be looking at clinical problems and behavioural disorders in children

and adolescents.

Dr Jessica Milner Davis, Hon. Visiting Fellow, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW
“Back to Basics: What is Humour? Conceptualizing its Elements, Forms, Styles and Environments”

When the classical theories dealing with what is the essence of ‘the comic’ are examined carefully, it is possible to identify three broad groups: those which emphasize superiority theory, those emphasizing theme of indulgence and taboo-violation (often in a context of festive ritual), and those dealing with the imposition of mechanical patterns, including incongruity (which, more accurately dissected, is a combination of predictability and surprise). I speculate that in every instance of successful humour (both intentional and unintentional) an element of each of these three components is to be found.

Such elements may already exist as ‘humour potential’ before they are either shaped by a humorist for the entertainment of others (intentional humour), or suddenly perceived as co-existing by an observer (unintentional humour). This paper outlines a graphical schema for locating the potential elements, the optional formats, and the personological and environmental variables which will shape the resulting styles and the success or failure of the ‘humour product’, or stimulus to the experience of humour. I conclude that humour is both an affective and a cognitive experience, sometimes enhanced by the subject’s conscious anticipation of experiencing it, but sometimes simply imposing itself without being anticipated. Such analysis suggests important variables which might be relevant to formal humour testing, both in lab studies and neurological research, particularly the selection of ‘stimulus material’. Perhaps the strongest and most reliable humorous stimuli might be those which induce an anticipatory mood, which contain a cleverly constructed/concealed surprise, and which make use of strong non-verbal/visual elements, such as characterize cartoons, or stage- and film-farce.

Dr Carmen Moran, School of Social Work, UNSW
“The Multidimensional Scaling of Sense of Humour: how many dimensions before we give up on the concept?”

In recent decades there has been an increase in the number of humour scales published in psychological and related disciplines. The ones used in serious humour research come from highly respectable researchers, such as Lefcourt and Martin, Ruch, Svebak, Thorson and Powell, and more recently Martin and associates. The concept of ‘sense of humour’ tends to be treated as a multidimensional concept in several questionnaires. For example, Lefcourt and Martin offered two questionnaires on sense of humour, the Situational Humor Response Questionnaire and the Coping Humor Scale, while Thorson and Powell offered four subscales on their Multidimensional Sense of Humor Questionnaire. More recently, Martin has noted that humour questionnaires are not subject to the same rigorous testing requirements on psychometric properties as other personality questionnaires.

In this paper, I wish to argue that the concept of ‘sense of humour’ (SOH) may include several assumptions that are not always the same across researchers, including whether it *is* a personality characteristic. In some cases, for example Ruch’s recent book, SOH is regarded as a personality characteristic and treated accordingly. In other cases, it is a behavioural characteristic or action, such as a tendency to laugh in certain situations. In yet others it is a strategy one calls upon to ‘use’, especially in times of stress. Further, because the subscales on SOH questionnaires may measure different things, they often ‘go’ in opposite directions, which means information is lost when the scales are averaged to get a total SOH score. I suggest that such a unitary label as *Sense of Humour* may be psychometrically unsound, but I posit that it is such a popular term it will not be dispatched very easily.

Ref: R.A. Martin, “The Humor Styles Questionnaire”, in *Journal of Research in Personality*, 2003

Neville Nickels, M Bus, Queensland University of Technology
“ ‘The Hero’s Journey’ and the Development of Comedic Performers”

Reflective learning involves working on what we already know to develop new knowledge by reprocessing current knowledge. This paper examines the personal experiences of myself and other comedians and comic writers in the light of humour theory, and using Joseph Campbell's study of "The Hero's Journey" from mythology as a template. This synthesis provides a novel understanding of the development of the comic personality in performance. The resulting model of the development processes involved may provide further insight into the meanings of humour theory.

**Dr Peter Spitzer, Chairman and Medical Director, Humour Foundation
"Clown Doctors in the Health-care Industry – an International Perspective"**

In 15th century Turkey, Dervishes were responsible for the well-being of patients in hospital. As well as serving fresh food, they made rounds 3 times a week bringing music and song to the bedside. First they fed the body, then they looked after the soul. Consider also the work/role of the court jester.

Now, Clown Doctors use the timeless and universal figure of the clown/fool to dispense mirth, infect the wards with laughter and leave their patients in stitches: "They must continue to disturb us. If they don't disturb us, then they're not doing their job properly" (Dr O Hartmann, Dept Chief, IGR Hospital, Paris).

The Clown Doctor program is the core work of the Humour Foundation charity. This unique and national program has been operating for nearly 7 years. It links the performing arts and medicine for the benefit of patients, families and hospital staff.

This presentation takes a (mostly) serious look at the work and structure of the Clown Doctors. Results of a 3-month Churchill Fellowship study tour of US, UK and Europe will also be presented (a full version of my report, "A study of overseas-based Clown Doctor programs and their impact on the health-care system", is available online at www.churchilltrust.com.au).

**Dr Alexis Tabensky, Dept of French, Modern Language Studies, UNSW
"TV and Political Satire: the Case of *Les Guignols* and the French Presidential Elections 2002"**

Politicians, football players, singers, actors, television presenters and other well known faces of contemporary French society are the most exploited targets of "Les Guignols", a humoristic and popular television program in France. Political life is in particular a rich source of satire: attitudes, friendships and rivalries among Presidents and Ministers of all political sides become familiar images for spectators. The traditional confrontation between the Left and the Right is always one of the strong points of the program. Words, gestures and mimicry are typically associated with these somehow funny people who happen to be governing the country. The program is based on a routine that creates complicity between the actors and the audience (in and out of the studio) and, to some extent, humanizes the political character.

However the results of the last (May 2002) Presidential elections broke down the traditional pattern: the candidates of the second round of balloting were not, as it has been the case for the last thirty years, the representatives of the Right and the Left but those of the Right, Jacques Chirac, and the National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen (Head of the Far Right party that fiercely opposes immigration). Following this, the televised presidential debate, a "classic" of French television that traditionally opposes the Left and the Right, did not take place: Jacques Chirac plainly refused to debate with Jean-Marie Le Pen and did not even mention his name at other public performances! Through the analysis of a selection of "Les Guignols" broadcast during the presidential campaign, the paper will focus on how "Les Guignols" represented (or not!) the odd situation the country was living, and whether they used "the presidential debate that never was" as a material to make people laugh.

**Dr Paul S. Thomas, Faculty of Medicine, UNSW, and Prince of Wales Hospital
"Laughter - Associated Asthma"**

(Co-Authors: Liangas G^{1,2}, Yates D.H.³, Wu D.⁴, Henry R.L.^{1,2}, and Thomas P.S.^{1,4}.
Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales¹ and Departments of Respiratory Medicine, Sydney Children's Hospital², St Vincent's Hospital³ and Prince of Wales Hospital⁴)

This study was conducted to assess the prevalence of laughter induced asthma, and to study any associations with asthma-related triggers and measures of disease activity, using a questionnaire-based survey of asthma subjects in both the community and on presentation to hospital.

A total of 105 subjects participated, and 44 (41.9% reported laughter-associated asthma. Exercise and laughter trigger were strongly associated as triggers ($p < 0.006$), as well as moulds and grass pollen ($p = 0.03$). It seems to be associated with poor asthma control as well, since hospital admissions are also more frequent in this group ($p = 0.043$).

Laughter-induced asthma is strongly associated with exercise as a trigger, the mechanism remains uncertain, but better understanding of this problem may assist in controlling difficult asthma.

Dr Marguerite A. Wells, Independent Scholar

“Performance of a Japanese Patter Song: ‘Geisha Song’, from *Yabuhara Kengyo*, by Hisashi Inoue”