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Historical views of humour

Throughout history, from the ancient philosophers and the Bible, from the earliest scribes to contemporary writers, from folk medicine to modern medicine, humor and laughter have elicited discussion. Viewed alternatively and sometimes simultaneously as healthy and devilish, humor and its physical manifestation laughter have long been the subject of discourse and debate, of business and pleasure, of entertainment and scorn. Recently, however, humor and laughter have become a focus of the health fields, both physical and psychological. This lecture traces the conceptualizations of humor and laughter from their early references in antiquity through the present day, highlighting and underscoring the importance of the social facets and functions of humor and laughter. So let us look first at the social nature of humor and then at some of the approaches to humor, from its earliest mentions to the present time, including an examination of some of the major theories of humor and inquiry into the universal human phenomenon we know as humor.

Humor as a social activity

As a social activity, humor has been examined by a number of theorists including, among others, Raskin, Apte, Freud, Greig, Viktoroff, Bergson, and Fry. Raskin, a linguist, acknowledges that "the scope and degree of mutual understanding in humor varies directly with the degree to which the participants share their social backgrounds" (1985, 16). Mahadev L. Apte, an anthropologist, discusses "joking relationships" (1985, 29-66), which he calls "patterned playful behavior that occurs between two individuals who recognize special kinship or other types of social bonds between them" (30-31).

Apte's description of the joke teller and the audience is much more interactional than Raskin's as Apte's emphasis is on "joking relationships." According to Apte, "joking relationships [can] mark group identity and signal the inclusion or exclusion of a new individual" (1985, 56), and, consequently, that "joking relationships ... manifest a consciousness of group identity or solidarity" (1985, 66). Clearly, for Apte, then, it is upon recognition and acknowledgement by both the joke teller and the audience of the common ground between them (the "special kinship or other types of social bonds") that the joke teller and his or her audience build their joking relationship. Apte's discussion both illustrates and demonstrates the social nature of joking relationships from pre-literate to industrialized societies.

Sigmund Freud describes the social nature of humor by enumerating six aspects that contribute to and accompany the humor event:

- (a) The most favorable condition of the production of comic pleasure is a generally cheerful mood in which one is "inclined to laugh." ...
- (b) A similarly favorable effect is produced by an expectation of the comic, by

- being attuned to comic pleasure.
- (c) Unfavorable conditions for the comic arise from the kind of mental activity with which a particular person is occupied at the moment.
 - (d) The opportunity for the release of comic pleasure disappears, too, if the attention is focused precisely on the comparison from which the comic may emerge. ...
 - (e) The comic is greatly interfered with if the situation from which it ought to develop gives rise at the same time to a release of strong affect. ...
 - (f) ... the generating of comic pleasure can be encouraged by any other accompanying circumstance. (1976 [1905], 282-85)

In essence, Freud has, with his first five conditions, provided a checklist, a sort of laundry list, for the humor event. The last of Freud's conditions is virtually a wastebasket or catch-all category intended to account for every- and anything for which his preceding conditions do not or cannot account.

John Y. T. Greig observes, "Nothing is laughable in itself: the laughable borrows its special quality from some persons or group of persons who happen to laugh at it" (1923, 71) and notes that the joke teller must "know a good deal about this person or group" (71) in order to make them laugh. Clearly, Greig's contention about the social aspect of humor comes very close to my own theory, that a joke text is not inherently funny, that a joke text is not successful unless and until an audience finds it amusing. It is in this way that Greig underscores the integral nature of the role of the audience to the humor event, to humor itself.

Like Greig, David Viktoroff acknowledges the importance of membership in social groups to the existence of humor. Viktoroff avers, "One never laughs alone—laughter is always the laughter of a particular social group" (1953, 14). For Viktoroff, then, one must be a member of a social group in order to laugh, to laugh within that group, or to elicit laughter from within that group. Viktoroff's assertion of laughter, and therefore humor, as a communal, social event underscores the notion that humor is a social activity, a social phenomenon. Viktoroff seemingly views laughter as the end result of the humor event, proof positive that humor has been elicited in the audience, presumably by a joke or jokes put forth by a teller. So why, then, does he claim that laughing alone, or solitary laughter, is an impossibility? Certainly the joke teller can be part of the audience and frequently is the only or the original audience for a joke, as has been demonstrated above. Perhaps for Viktoroff, group membership supersedes humor.

Henri Bergson dourly calls laughter and, therefore, humor a social "corrective...intended to humiliate" (1899, 187); directed against someone, laughter or humor "would fail ... if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness" (188). Thus, Bergson's view of humor is very narrow and puritanical and falls squarely within the group of humor theories that view humor as based on aggression or malice, as we will see shortly. There is no interaction for Bergson; humor is one-sided: those who laugh and those who are laughed at, and it must be assumed that, for Bergson, those who are laughed at constitute the joke. In this way, Bergson is describing in-groups deriding someone or group outside that in-group. In this discussion, Bergson does not consider the relationship of the joke teller, he or she who has first noticed and noted the defect that needs to be corrected in the object of the laughter, to the others who find humor in the laughed at. Presumably, however, those who laugh—together at the object of the laughter—must share some sort of "social bonds," to use Apte's term, or "social backgrounds," to use Raskin's term, or be part of a "particular social group," to use Viktoroff's term, in order to laugh together at whom the humor is directed.

William F. Fry has surveyed some of the views on the relationships between and among people involved in humor and touches upon several of these views:

It has been suggested that humor embodies an attack by one individual on another. Laughter is then variously explained as resulting from feelings of superiority in attack or ... as representing a compensatory reaction to feelings of inferiority in battle. ... Some state that people can only smile and laugh together if they are feeling a deep love or affection for each other. Humor then seems to become a reaffirmation of "warm," "positive" emotions. It is also presented that persons mutually involved in humor are covertly indulging in some illicit, forbidden behavior. This behavior is usually represented as being of a sexual nature. And there are other ideas about this interpersonal relationship, none of which have been demonstrated to be conclusive. (1963, 31)

Here Fry has provided a brief summary of some of the early research into the social nature of humor. In the first part, Fry echoes Bergson's assertion that humor is based on aggression or malice. Fry then presents the anthropological view on joking relationships developed later by, among others, Apte. While these theorists do acknowledge, in one way or another, that humor is a social activity, they do not delve deep enough to show how or why.

Historical views of humor

Humor is a universal human phenomenon, bearing upon all aspects of human life, relationships, and interactions. But humor, as a term, is not easy to define. Harvey Mindess calls humor "a frame of mind, a manner of perceiving and experiencing life...a kind of outlook, a peculiar point of view, and one which has great therapeutic power" (1971, 21). Fry, a psychiatrist and humor researcher as well as a firm believer in the therapeutic power of humor (Fry and Savin, 1988), calls humor "play" (1963, 138). While the definitions of humor abound and circle, like a wagon train, around the term, there is still no precise agreement on exactly what is meant by humor, and there may well never be. For some, humor is its physical manifestation, laughter; for others, humor is the comic, the funny, or the ludicrous. For still others, humor is synonymous with wit or comedy. And so the terminological fog abounds. Yet in spite of this lack of a precise definition, humor research has become serious business, attracting a diverse and growing corps of researchers and scholars who are nevertheless certain of the phenomenon which they investigate, the phenomenon of humor.

So how has humor been perceived through the ages? Plato held that people laugh at others' misfortunes (1975 [-4th], 45-49), and Aristotle, who used the term comedy, said that humor was "an imitation of men worse than the average; worse ... as regards ... the Ridiculous ["a mistake or deformity"], which is a species of the Ugly" (1954 [-4th], 229). In addition, Aristotle called "people like satirists and writers of comedy ... a kind of evil speakers and tell-tales" (1975 [-4th], 109). Cicero concurred, restricting humor to the "unseemly or ugly" (1942 [-55], 373). Thomas Hobbes followed in these ancient footsteps by claiming,

The passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonour. (1650, 46, emphasis in original; see also Hobbes, 1651, 45)

Nineteenth-century scholars and theorists were no less dour in their views of humor. Georg W. F. Hegel, for instance, called laughter "an expression of self-satisfied shrewdness" (1920 [1835], 302), and Alexander Bain held that "... in everything where a man can achieve a stroke of superiority, in surpassing or discomfiting a rival, is the disposition to laughter apparent" (1859, 153). Moreover, added Bain, "the occasion of

the ludicrous is the degradation of some person or interest possessing dignity in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion" (1859, 248). Bergson also falls easily into this collection of humor theorists and theories, noting that "it is the trifling faults of our fellow-men that make us laugh" (1899, 149).

In the twentieth century, this view of humor as rooted in disparagement, aggression, and malice has continued to thrive with William Hazlitt's assertion that "[w]e laugh at absurdity ... at deformity... at mischief ... at what we do not believe ... to show our satisfaction with ourselves, or our contempt for those about us, or to conceal our envy or our ignorance. We laugh at fools, and at those who pretend to be wise—at extreme simplicity, awkwardness, hypocrisy, and affectation" (1903, 8-9), in other words, Cicero's "unseemly or ugly."

Anthony M. Ludovici put forth an evolutionist's claim that "all laughter is the expression of superior adaptation" (1932, 74). Commenting on Ludovici, Patricia Keith-Spiegel observes that for Ludovici, "[t]he greater the dignity of the victim, the greater the resulting amusement" (1972, 7). Albert Rapp (1951), also following in an evolutionary vein, posited a theory, based on hostility, of the evolution of humor. Dolf Zillmann and Joanne R. Cantor summarize this view of humor well when they assert, "[a]ppreciation [or humor] should be maximal when our friends humiliate our enemies and minimal when our enemies manage to get the upper hand over our friends" (1976, 100-101).

Today, the Ancients' grim views of humor and laughter can be seen in teasing. Verbal attacks, even if punctuated with "I was just joking" or "Can't you take a joke?" still deride, still hurt. According to psychologist Susan Forward, humor can frequently be used as a mask for verbal abuse, and if the abused, the audience, "complains, the abuser invariably accuses him or her of lacking a sense of humor. 'She knows I'm only kidding,' he'll say, as if the victim of his abuse were a co-conspirator" (1989, 97).

Also recall Fry's observation that some claim that humor "embodies an attack by one individual on another" (1963, 31). When play mimics or takes on an aggressive or hostile nature, for instance, it is easily viewed as an evolution of that which had been described by the Ancients.

Not everyone throughout history viewed humor and laughter so negatively. Some took a different approach to the subject of humor and laughter. In the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant called wit "the play of thought" (1790, 176, emphasis in original). He asserted that laughter follows from something absurd and "is an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (1790, 177, emphasis in original). Kant continued, "the jest must contain something that is capable of deceiving for a moment" (1790, 179). In short, Kant located humor and laughter in **incongruity**. The key to Kant's definition of laughter and wit, and therefore humor, is the word sudden. Were the transformation not sudden, but rather slowly built, and deceptive, there would be far less—and perhaps no—incongruity as the incongruity would have been resolved during the construction of the joke text or jest. After all, a joke "gotten," that is, one which has "fired" for the audience, is generally far more enjoyable to an audience than a joke explained, though it is possible for an audience to judge humorous a joke that has been explained.

A typical manifestation of Kant's "sudden transformation" is the punch line of a joke text. According to Fry, the punch line is "a highly specialized article ... [which] presents a seemingly irrelevant idea, or it may seem incongruous with respect to the main body of the joke. Or it may seem to open up an entirely new trend of thought. Or the punch line may be an unexpectedly rational statement" (1963, 33-34). James C. Humes draws an analogy between joke texts and their punch lines and balloons: "you

pump [a joke text] up with details and then puncture it with a punch line" (1975, 5). For Elliott Oring, the punch line "... triggers the perception of an appropriate incongruity ... [and] must bring about an abrupt cognitive reorganization in the listener" (1989, 351). And for Attardo and Raskin, the punch line is the pivot on which the joke text turns as it signals the shift between the scripts necessary to interpret the joke text (1991, 308).

For Arthur Schopenhauer, the cause of laughter and, therefore, humor is "simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through in some relation," and the ensuing laughter is consequently "the expression of this incongruity" (1957 [1819], 76). James Beattie, writing more than two hundred years ago, observed,

laughter [or humor] arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them. (1776, 602)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, humor and laughter began to be seen as a form of release or relief. Freud spoke of "the release of comic pleasure" (1976 [1905], 282) and believed that it was the release and the relief as well as the pleasure derived from them that were characteristic of and characterized all humor. Freud even went so far as to classify, or categorize, humor based on the particular kind of relief it elicited: "The pleasure in jokes has seemed...to arise from an economy in expenditure upon inhibition, the pleasure in the comic from an economy in expenditure upon ideation...and the pleasure of humor from an economy of expenditure upon feeling" (1976 [1905], 302, emphasis in original).

For J. C. Gregory, writing two decades after Freud, relief was at the core of all humor:

Relief...is written on the physical act of laughing and on the physiological accompaniments. It is written on the occasions of laughter and, more or less, plainly, on each of its varieties. A laughter of sheer relief may be the original source of all other laughters, which have spread from it like a sheaf. ... Relief is not the whole of laughter, though it is its root and fundamental plan. The discovery of sudden interruption through relaxation of effort merely begins the inquiry into laughter. But it does begin it, and no discussion of laughter that ignores relief or makes it of little account can hope to prosper. (1924, 40)

A half-century after Freud, Martin Grotjahn, in the introduction to his book, Beyond Laughter (1957), asserts that laughter and, therefore, humor

... can be used to express an unending variety of emotions. It is based on guilt-free release of aggression, and any release makes us perhaps a little better and more capable of understanding one another, ourselves, and life. What is learned with laughter is learned well. Laughter gives freedom, and freedom gives laughter. (1957, viii-ix)

Following in these footsteps is any discussion of the healthful and/or healing effects of humor, that is, therapeutic humor. Perhaps the most notable, and certainly one of the more prolific, proponents of the therapeutic uses of humor is Fry (1990; Fry and Stoff, 1971; Fry and Allen, 1975; Fry and Rader, 1977; Fry and Salameh, 1987; Fry and Savin, 1988), who notes that accompanying what he calls "mirthful laughter" are "increases in arterial blood pressure" which are then "followed by pressure decreases below resting pressure levels" (Fry and Savin, 1988, 49). Hence, Fry and Savin suggest "that this phenomenon contributes to physiologic survival by its enhancement of circulatory efficiency" (1988, 49).

Humor research and major theories

Having looked at historical perspectives of humor, it becomes easy to see that while theories of humor date back to the Ancients, including, as we have seen, Plato and Aristotle, and have been posited, examined, and developed throughout the intervening centuries (by, among others, Hobbes, 1650, 1651; Schopenhauer, 1819; Bain, 1859; Bergson, 1899; Freud, 1905; Apte, 1985, 1988; and Raskin, 1985), humor theories and humor research have generally fallen into three main categories or classes of theories: cognitive/perceptual or incongruity, social/ behavioral or disparagement, and psychoanalytical or release/relief. Keith-Spiegel lists eight categories—biological, instinct, and evolution; superiority; incongruity; surprise; ambivalence; release and relief; configurational; and psychoanalytic (1972, 4-13)—and includes an excellent, albeit brief, historical bibliography of humor research and theories, but her categories essentially conflate to these three major groups. Neutral to these theories and groups of theories are a number of relatively recent theories: Raskin's script-based semantic theory of humor (1985), Salvatore Attardo's five-level model for the analysis of joke texts (1989), Attardo and Raskin's General Theory of Verbal Humor (1991), Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin's empirical support of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (1993), and my own Audience-Based Theory of Verbal Humor (1993; 1997a; 1997b).

There are, of course, other types of research into humor which cannot be as easily taxonomized. Some of the more notable ventures include the empirical research into the physiological and psychological responses to humor (see, for instance, Ruch 1993b, a guest-edited special issue of HUMOR devoted to psychological humor research, and see below). Other areas of humor research include examinations of gender differences in the appreciation of humor (see, for example, McGhee, 1976b; Brodzinsky, Barnet, and Aiello, 1981; Mundorf et al., 1988; Cox, Read, and Van Auken, 1990; Van Giffen, 1990; Lundell, 1993; Derks, Kalland, and Etgen, 1995; Ehrenberg, 1995), humor in the workplace (see, for instance, Duncan, 1982; Consalvo, 1989; Ramani and Varma, 1989; Kushner, 1990; Morreall, 1991; Franzini and Haggerty, 1994; Gibson, 1994; Ehrenberg, 1995; Unger, 1996), children's humor and children's uses of humor (see, for example, McGhee, 1974, 1976a, 1976b; McGhee and Chapman, 1980; Masten, 1986, 1989; Sherman, 1988; McGhee and Panoutsopoulou, 1990; Mowrer and D'Zamko, 1990; Mowrer, 1994; Holt and Willard-Holt, 1995; Alves, 1997), the therapeutic and healthful/healing powers of humor (see, for instance, Cousins, 1979; Fry and Salameh, 1987; Fry and Savin, 1988; Haig, 1988; Klein, 1989; White and Camarena, 1989; Lefcourt, Davidson-Katz, and Kueneman, 1990; McGhee, 1991; Martin et al., 1993; Gelkopf and Sigal, 1995; Derks, et al., 1997; Ryan, 1997), ethnic humor (see, for example, Bermant, 1986; Ziv, 1986, 1988, 1991; Bier, 1988; Schutz, 1989; Spencer, 1989; Davies, 1990a, 1990b, 1997; Epskamp, 1993; Mbangwana, 1993; Draitser, 1994; Kazanevsky, 1995; Fry, 1997), cross-national and bilingual humor (see, for instance, Ruch, 1991; Ruch, et al., 1991; Leeds, 1992; Ruch and Forabosco, 1996), and women's humor (see, for example, Barreca, 1988, 1991; Walker, 1988; Walker and Dresner, 1988; Kaufman, 1991; Warren, 1991; Radday, 1995; Thorson and Powell, 1996).

Incongruity theories

Incongruity-based theories, which virtually dominate contemporary psychological research into humor (Raskin, 1985, 32-33), envision humor as the "linking of disparates" (Monro, 1951, 248), "incorporating into one situation what belongs to another" (Monro, 1951, 45). For Oring, "[h]umor depends upon the discernment of an appropriate

incongruity" (1989, 349). According to John Morreall, the enjoyment of incongruity is uniquely human and sets human beings apart from other animals, who process incongruities as potential threats, which is, in Morreall's words, "cognitively limiting" (1989, 12). Morreall claims that because human beings can both perceive and enjoy incongruity, humans have been able to view the world in "nonpractical ways" and therefore have been able to develop not only science but art (1989, 12). Perceiving and enjoying incongruity thus have facilitated, according to Morreall, the development of rational thinking, objectivity, and humor.

Apte, whose approach to humor is, again, anthropological, anchors humor to culture, asserting that humor "is primarily the result of cultural perceptions, both individual and collective, of incongruity, exaggeration, distortion, and any unusual combinations of the cultural elements in external events" (1985, 16).

Also included in incongruity-based theories of humor can be some of the theories about play, which Fry defines as "behavior which depends on the mutual recognition ... that that behavior (play) does not mean the same thing as does that behavior (fighting, etc.) which play represents" (1963, 125-26). Part of the incongruity in play, then, is that the behavior that play represents, as Fry points out, is clearly not the same behavior as that in which the participants are engaged; rather, it is simply an image of that particular behavior.

Thomas R. Shultz (1976) claims two stages of incongruity: perception and resolution. Shultz's stages constitute a traditional view of incongruity, for it is only after the incongruity is perceived by an observer that it can be resolved, and it is in the resolution of the incongruity that the perceiver, according to those who, like Shultz, subscribe to incongruity-based theories, finds the humor. For Shultz, then, humor is inherent in the incongruity—or, at least, in the resolution of the incongruity.

Mary K. Rothbart and Diana Pien put forth the results of combining what they call "two categories of incongruity and two categories of resolution" (1977, 37). What can happen, they claim, are impossible or possible incongruity and complete or incomplete resolution. Given this taxonomy, Rothbart and Pien assert,

cognitive aspects of humour would be seen as a function of (a) the number of resolved incongruous elements, (b) the number of incongruity elements remaining unresolved, (c) the degree of incongruity of each element, (d) the difficulty of resolution, and (e) the degree of resolution. Increases in the first three factors should lead to increases in humor appreciation, while the difficulty of resolution may be ... related to humour (McGhee 1974). (Rothbart and Pien, 1977, 38)

Incongruity-based theories thus concern themselves with the stimulus, that which the joke text is about. Essentially, incongruity-based theories of humor and those researchers, theorists, and scholars who espouse them locate the humor in the incongruity itself and then leave it to the audience to identify, perceive, and resolve the incongruity and find, as a result, the humor inherent in the incongruity. For the proponents of incongruity-based theories of humor, humor exists, irrespective of an audience, and failed joke texts, then, must be failures on the part of the audience to "get" the joke, to find the humor which must, according to these theories and those who espouse them, exist in the incongruity. This view of humor clearly places the burden of humor very definitely on the text of a joke. The audience exists only to identify, perceive, and resolve the incongruity that is already present in the text of the joke.

Disparagement theories

A second class of humor theories, whose roots lie in classical Greek and Roman rhetorical theory, includes those theories of humor based on malice, hostility, derision,

aggression, disparagement, and/or superiority. Included in this group are ethnic, racial, and "dumb" jokes. Scholars, theorists, and researchers who espouse theories of humor based on hostility or malice frequently cite the similarities in bodily positions between aggressive behavior, such as fighting, and laughter to substantiate their claims (Kallen, 1911; Crile, 1916; Ludovici, 1932; Rapp, 1947, 1949, 1951).

Jerry M. Suls defines this group of humor theories as "based on the observation that we laugh at other people's infirmities, particularly those of our enemies" (1977, 41) and easily include the views of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Hobbes, Hegel, Bain, and Bergson cited above.

Disparagement-, malice-, hostility-, derision-, aggression-, or superiority-based theories characterize the attitudes between the joke teller (or the joke's persona) and the target of the joke text, which may or may not be the audience. But, cautions Keith-Spiegel, "[n]ot all theorists who include the element of superiority as part of humor believe that laughter is always contemptuous or scornful. Sympathy, congeniality, empathy, and geniality may be combined with the laughter of superiority" (1972, 7; also see Hunt, 1846; Bain, 1859; Carpenter, 1922; McDougall, 1922; Rapp, 1949). In this way, those scholars, theorists, and researchers who espouse theories of humor based on superiority, aggression, or malice, for instance, may view or employ humor and laughter as the means by which to temper the aggression and aggressive behavior they examine. But the superiority, aggression, and malice nevertheless remain.

Release/Relief theories

The third group of humor theories is comprised of the release/relief theories which perceive humor and laughter as a release of the tensions and inhibitions generated by societal constraints. Mindess, for instance, finds humor liberating and a source of vicarious living (1971, 38).

Clearly, the text of the joke has to bear the burden of being the catalyst for the release and/or relief. Humor, then, must again be inherent in the text of the joke and thus presented to the audience. If the audience experiences any release or relief, the joke has been successful. If not, the joke has failed to fire. What is integral is the effect the joke text has on the audience. In this way, a non-firing joke is a failure on the part of the audience to interpret or perceive successfully or correctly the humor inherent in the text of a joke and, hence, to reap the benefit of successful joke interpretation, which is the release and/or the relief.

Script-based semantic theory of humor

Neutral to these conceptualizations of humor is Raskin's script-based semantic theory of humor (1985), which was the first linguistic-based theory of humor. Raskin's theory posits that

the text of a joke is always fully or in part compatible with two distinct scripts and that the two scripts are opposed to each other in a special way. ... The punchline triggers the switch from the one script to the other by making the hearer backtrack and realize that a different interpretation [of the joke] was possible from the very beginning. (Attardo and Raskin, 1991, 308)

General Theory of Verbal Humor

In the revision of Raskin's script-based semantic theory of humor, Attardo and Raskin collaborate to put forth a "General Theory of Verbal Humor" (GTVH) based on six knowledge resources, or KRs, "which inform the joke": script opposition, logical mechanism, situation (which includes the audience), target, narrative strategy, and language. According to Attardo and Raskin, "each KR is a list or set of lists from which

choices need to be made [by the joke teller] for use in the joke" (1991, 313). This new theory "incorporates, subsumes, and revises" (329) Raskin's script-based semantic theory and Attardo's five-level model but still concentrates virtually exclusively on the text of the joke.

Audience-based theory of verbal humor

The Audience-Based Theory of Verbal Humor is my own (1993) and posits, in short, that humor resides with the audience; and thus, nothing is inherently humorous, or funny. Some joke texts will succeed for one audience and fail to fire for another. Humor does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it has four necessary constituents which make up the humor event: the joke teller, the joke text, and the audience all existing within a particular situation which contributes to each of the other three constituents in the humor event. It is important to note that the joke teller and audience can, in fact, be the same person or, in the case of two—or more—people, can alternate roles. No single constituent of the humor event is any more or less necessary—or important—than any other, and each is related to and dependent on the other three constituents. Because of the pervasive nature of the situation, however, and the significance of its contribution to each of the other constituents of the humor event, it is impossible to discuss situation as a discrete component of the humor event. In other words, the situation encompasses everything that occurs in, or is a part of, the humor event—including the individuals involved—by establishing the context for joking or, at least, for attempts at joking. While the situation of a humor event can vary widely because humor can be generated in any number of situations, for our purposes here today, we will, in a little while, examine the context of humor in therapeutic settings.

Psychological inquiry into humor

Humor has also been approached empirically by psychologists and physiologists, among others, through its physical manifestations. Willibald Ruch (1990) has verified smiling as the most frequent facial response to humor, and Mark Frank and Paul Ekman have empirically examined Ruch's finding in terms of what they call enjoyment and nonenjoyment smiles by looking at a number of "markers of the enjoyment smile" (1993, 22).

Mark Winkel (1993) has looked at humor through changes in pupil diameter, skin conductance, and heart rate, while Lambert Deckers, falling clearly in the incongruity camp, has developed a weight-judging paradigm (WJP) "to investigate the conditions necessary for incongruity, degree of incongruity, ... and detection of incongruity" (1993, 43). Peter Derks and Sanjay Arora have looked at the effect of the sequencing of cartoons in the perception of humor; that is, following the results of a study by Jeffrey Goldstein, Jerry Suls, and Susan Anthony (1972) who, according to Ruch, "demonstrated that the repetition of a joke theme makes this theme salient and that subsequent jokes are found funnier when the same theme is continued rather than alternated" (Ruch, 1993a, 4), Derks and Arora have mixed what they have identified as sexual and innocent cartoons and have hypothesized that "by priming participants [in their study] with certain kinds of humor, it should be possible to pit various theories of humor appreciation against each other" (1993, 58).

In Israel, Ofra Nevo and her colleagues have examined the relationship between humor and pain tolerance and found a positive relationship "between tolerance of pain and sense of humor, especially with the capacity to produce humor" (1993, 71). They also posit, based on the results of their study, that those subjects who perceived the film presented by the researchers as humorous tolerated more pain induced by the cold

pressor test administered by the researchers, which suggests to the authors "that humor helps [in tolerating pain] only when perceived as such" (71). In Canada, Rod A. Martin and his colleagues have investigated the relationship between, as their title suggests, "humor, self-concept, coping with stress, and positive affect" (1993, 89). Their findings indicate that humor "may also play an important role in enhancing the enjoyment of positive life experiences" (89). Essentially, Martin and his colleagues confirm their hypothesis that humor does help to reduce stress and that humor has a positive effect on an individual's outlook and health (see also Fry and Savin, 1988; Cousins, 1979; Lefcourt and Martin, 1986; Martin, 1989; Martin and Dobbin, 1988; Martin and Lefcourt, 1983; Kuiper and Martin, 1993).

Humorology, international conferences, the International Society for Humor Studies, and humor as big business

In the lead article of the first issue of the only academic journal devoted entirely to humor scholarship, HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research), Apte observes, "[n]ot only does humor occur in all human cultures, it also pervades all aspects of human behavior, thinking, and sociocultural reality; it occurs in an infinite variety of forms and uses varied modalities" (1988, 7). It is because of this "infinite variety of forms and ... varied modalities" that the study of humor must be and is a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary field of inquiry. Its boundaries are indistinct and blurred by the many researchers and scholars who investigate and have investigated humor from a variety of different perspectives, many looking for and at very different aspects of the same subject.

Most, if not all, humor scholars, theorists, and researchers come to and at the subject from different backgrounds, angles, and perspectives. Some seek to explicate the humor in particular works of literature (for instance, Ross, 1989; Ridsen, 1990; Greenfeld, 1993; Takahashi, 1994; Hopkins, 1997) or the humor of a particular author or artist (for example, Meyerhofer, 1988; Scott, 1989; Tanner, 1989; Barrett, 1991; Batts, 1992; Hallett, 1992; Holcomb, 1992; Gehring, 1993; Fisher, 1995; Olson, 1996). Others investigate humor by attempting to explain what is meant by a sense of humor and/or how to measure it (for instance, Mindess, et al., 1985; Raskin, 1992; Ruch and Rath, 1993; Ruch, 1994; Craik, Lampert, and Nelson, 1996; Köhler and Ruch, 1996; Martin, 1996; Ruch, 1996; Ruch, Köhler, and van Thriel, 1996; Svebak, 1996), and still others look more broadly at the psychology of humor (see below). There are, of course, other areas of inquiry into humor research, some of which will be discussed and/or referenced below. The important point here, however, is that research into humor provides an enormous, fertile field of inquiry for scholars, theorists, and researchers.

In the article cited above, Apte calls for the establishment of humorology as a discrete and distinct academic discipline and then looks at and suggests possible disciplinary boundaries in an effort to streamline and codify the field he calls humorology. Apte (1988) also examines the schizophrenic nature of research into humor and defines humorology, a term he claims to have coined in 1984, as "the study of the causes, nature—that is, form and substance—and functions of the phenomenon labeled humor" (1988, 9). It is no wonder, then, that this phenomenon—and attempts to define, classify, and explain it—has fascinated scholars since ancient times.

In the past few decades, research into humor has become recognized as a valid area of inquiry, though the preponderance of humorologists, to use Apte's term, have come to the field of humor research both through and from other disciplines. (Apte himself, for instance, is a linguist-turned-anthropologist-turned-humorologist.) In other

words, humor research, as an organized field of inquiry, is still in its infancy. To date, but one degree has been granted in humor in the United States, and that at the undergraduate level. A decade ago, however, the University of Reading (England) instituted a Master of Arts degree under the direction of sociologist and humorologist Christie Davies (Nilsen, 1990, 463-65).

One early attempt to bring together humor scholars, theorists, and researchers as well as their work, which predates Apte's (1988) article, was the commencement of the International Conferences on Humor, the first of which was held in Cardiff, Wales, in 1976 and was hosted by Antony Chapman and Hugh Foot. Three years later, Mindess hosted the Second International Conference on Humor in Los Angeles, and in 1982, Rufus Browning hosted the Third International Conference on Humor in Washington, D.C.; the Workshop Library World Humor (WLWH) and the American Humor Studies Association cohosted the Third Conference. Other International Conferences on Humor were held in Tel Aviv, Israel (1984, Avner Ziv), Cork, Ireland (1985, Des MacHale), and Tempe, Arizona (1987, Don L. F. Nilsen). (The International Conferences on Humor have since merged with the conferences of the International Society for Humor Studies.)

In 1982, Don L. F. Nilsen organized a humor conference at Arizona State University as part of the Western Humor and Irony Movement (WHIM), an organization founded by Nilsen as an affiliate of the WLWH. Nilsen and his wife, Alleen Pace Nilsen, hosted annual WHIM conferences at Arizona State University from 1982 until 1987. The following year, in 1988, WHIM VII, the last of the WHIM conferences, was held at Purdue University and was hosted by Victor Raskin (Mintz, 1988, 91-92).

At the Seventh International Conference on Humor in Laie, Hawaii, in 1989, an organization called the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) was formed as an evolution, or perhaps mutation, of WHIM and has joined forces with the International Conferences on Humor. Since the inception of the organization, annual ISHS conferences have been held in Sheffield, England (1990), St. Catharines, Ontario (1991), Paris (1992, in conjunction with CORHUM, l'Association française pour le développement des recherches sur le Comique, le Rire et l'Humour), Luxembourg (1993), Ithaca, New York (1994), Birmingham, England (1995), Sydney, Australia (1996), Edmond, Oklahoma (1997), Bergen, Norway (1998), Oakland, California (1999), and Osaka, Japan (2000). The 2001 conference will be held at the University of Maryland.

Humor has also become big business. As the theoretical interest in humor has grown, so, too, has interest in the practical value of humor (Morreall, 1991). Morreall has examined the veritable explosion of research into humor and the applications of that research to the workplace. He cites the fact that "[t]here are...dozens of humor consultants working with corporations, government agencies, hospitals, and schools" (1991, 359). Morreall also cites the successes of Joel Goodman and John Cleese (of Monty Python and Fawlty Towers fame); the former has presented programs on the importance of humor in the workplace to more than a quarter million people, and the latter has produced ninety training films (359). Most important, observes Morreall, is the fact that "[a]ll this interest in the value of humor in the workplace represents an important swing away from the traditional assessment of humor as frivolous and unproductive" (359). According to Morreall, humor belongs in the workplace because it promotes "health, mental flexibility, and smooth social relations" (359). Apparently, corporate executives and administrators agree.

Clearly, the field of humor research is taking on a shape of its own. Membership in the ISHS is growing, and its conferences are well attended by humor scholars and

researchers as well as humor practitioners and other "just interested" individuals. Submissions to HUMOR, distributed to every ISHS member as a benefit of membership in the organization, are growing, humor specialists are being sought out and hired by major corporations, hospitals, and schools all over the world, and Apte's call for disciplinary boundaries is, at long last, being heard and heeded.

Summary

Since Apte's (1988) call for legitimizing the field of humor research, forays into the area have expanded and multiplied. Humor research is being conducted all over the world, from the United States and Canada to Europe (for instance, Attardo and Chabanne, 1992, and references there; Ruch, 1990, 1991, 1993a, 1993b; Ruch, Ott, Accoce, and Bariaud, 1991) to the Commonwealth of Independent States (for example, Zelvyts, 1990) to Israel (for instance, Rosenheim, Tecucianu, and Dimitrovsky, 1989; Ziv, 1986, 1988, 1991, and references there; Ziv and Gadish, 1990; Tsur, 1989; Elitzur, 1990a, 1990b; Zajdman, 1991; Nevo, Keinan, and Teshimovsky-Arditi, 1993) to Australia (for example, Deren, 1989) to Turkey (for instance, Karabas, 1990) to Japan to Poland. Students of and researchers into humor are writing not only articles and books but dissertations (for instance, Attardo, 1991; Carrell, 1993) on various aspects of humor. Moreover, in addition to the ISHS, the Modern Language Association and the Speech Communication Association are devoting colloquia, symposia, and workshops to the phenomenon of humor, and new organizations are being formed, including, for instance, the Japan Society for Laughter and Humor Studies and the American Association for Therapeutic Humor.

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