Chapter Six: Elaborations of the Model

1. Introduction page 3

2. The Requirement of Identity Distance page 5

3. The Requirement of Involvement page 15

3.1. Definition page 15
3.2. Causes of insufficient Involvement page 19

3.2.1. Independent Discredit of the Perceiver page 19
3.2.2. Misfortune for the Claimant page 20
3.2.3 Other Implications of the Discrediting Fact page 28
3.2.4. Non-Discredit Interpretations page 29
3.2.5. Amusement-Consciousness page 31
3.2.6. Intentional Distraction page 31
3.2.7. Cognitive and Emotional Carry-Over page 31
3.2.8. Additional Causes page 32

4. Amusement Modifiers page 33

5. Combinations of Funnies page 39

6. Conclusions: The Full Hypothesis page 43

1. Introduction

In Chapter Four, I presented the following alternative to the traditional causal theories of amusement:

> *Amusement is provoked only and always in a subject when he perceives that a self-claim put forward by a claimant has been discredited, provided that 1) the perceiver does not identify himself as the claimant at the moment of perception; 2) the perceiver is sufficiently involved in a definition of events which places the discrediting in the foreground.*

In Chapter Five, I attempted to demonstrate how a description of the comic as 'self-claim discredits' could account for the widest range of amusement stimuli, by ordering such phenomena according to a five-variable classification of claim-discredit situations. To avoid excessive complexity, however, the latter two amendments of the hypothesis were simply assumed to hold: the requirements that the perceiver: (1) not be identified with the claimant discredited; and (2) be fully engrossed in the discrediting events. In this chapter, I will complete the proposed causal model with these and other complicating issues.

The perceiver-claimant identity relationship will be presented as a fulcrum balancing the two ends of an amusement/embarrassment scale. The proposed notion that self-claim discredits result in amusement jars with Erving Goffman's well-known and convincing depiction of interactional disasters, where the unpleasant emotion of embarrassment plays the dominant role (1967: 97-112). The drunken misbehaviour of a guest at a black tie party may lead to the chagrin of both himself and other guests. I will argue, however, that the question of whether amusement or embarrassment are experienced in such circumstances depends on the perceived relationship between the observer and the claimant whose self-claim is discredited. Specifically, an observer may find funny the discredit of a claimant as whom he does not feel identified: "I laugh at the source of your embarrassment/You laugh at the source of mine." Amusement at the 'self,' as described in Chapter Five (Types III, IV, VII, VIII), is possible when the observer

regards the discredit of a part of himself not considered truly his own --for example, himself ten years before.

Amusement, as any emotion, further depends on the involvement of the perceiver in the interpretation of events as a self-claim's discredit. Numerous competing drains on attention may stifle amusement, including the simultaneous discredit of the perceiver, misfortune which has befallen the claimant, other cognitive or emotional implications of the discrediting fact, self-consciousness regarding the amusement process itself, intentional distractions, cognitive and emotional 'carry-overs' from preceding events, as well as others. Depending on whether one regards the sinking of the Titanic primarily as a tragic loss of human life or primarily as the deflation of its makers' boasts of 'unsinkability', the event may elicit sadness or amusement.

A third complicating issue is closely related to the previous. The subjective quality of various particular instances of amusement intuitively seem to vary from joyful to malicious to any number of different emotional and cognitive hues or shadings. This will be explained as reflecting the essential impurity of experienced affect, which is ever a swirling mix of impressions. The same competitors to attention which may stifle amusement may in weaker form simply produce reactions which coexist with this emotion, in greater or lesser intensity.

Finally, as an extension of this point, competing foci of attention may include additional sources of amusement, when several claim-discredits are perceived within a short space of time. In comedy, audiences are typically bombarded with funny stimuli, both in close succession and even simultaneously.

These amendments to the model as discussed so far will permit, in the conclusion, a complete statement of the hypothesis I am proposing. This will set the stage for the third and final part of the thesis, where this model of amusement will serve as the source from which an account of laughter and humour will be derived.

2. The Requirement of Identity Distance

The identity relationship between the perceiver of a discredit and the discredited claimant is a crucial variable of humorous appreciation. If an individual perceives the discrediting of a self-claim *for which he is a claimant*, he experiences not amusement but rather the unpleasant emotion known as **embarrassment**, exteriorized by "blushing, fumbling, stuttering, an unusually low- or high-pitched voice, quavering speech or breaking of the voice, sweating, blanching, blinking, tremor of the hand, hesitating or vacillating movement, absentmindedness, and malapropisms" (Goffman, 1967: 97). His self-presentation partially or wholly ruined, he finds himself disqualified from a scene of social interaction and, if currently present at such a scene, is unable to continue his performance normally. He may experience the disagreeable subjective aspect of this emotion as an intense desire to escape from the social situation. Lowering of eyes, turning away of head, covering of face with hands, or even a hurried exit may signal this forced withdrawal from interaction. As the outcome and tell-tale sign of discredit (or mere fear of discredit), embarrassment lies at the heart of Goffman's influential ideas regarding impression management and the resulting 'interaction order.' Moreover, this account of embarrassment has become the leading view in studies of the emotion[1].

Over one thousand self-reported cases of embarrassment analysed and classified by Gross and Stone (1964) have confirmed Goffman's description of embarrassing situations:

> In this paper, we have inquired into the conditions necessary for role performance. Embarrassment has been employed as a sensitive indicator of those conditions, for that which embarrasses incapacitates role performance. Our data have led us to describe the conditions for role performance in terms of identity, poise, and

[1] In a recent book integrating up-to-date research findings and theoretical approaches, Rowland Miller identifies as the 'real contenders' to an account of embarrassment "two explanations...that spring directly from Goffman's analysis of social life, with both assuming that embarrassment hinges on the presence of others, either as interactive partners or as evaluative critics...the dramaturgic model and the social evaluation model." (1996: 121-122). See also pp. 111-112 and Oatley and Jenkins, 1996: 90.

> sustained confidence in one another. When these become disturbed and discredited, role performance cannot continue.
>
> (p. 15)

Norbert Elias (1939), T.J. Scheff (1990; 94) and others have also attributed to this emotion a crucial role in the psychology of social behaviour. Ekman and Friesen's cross-cultural studies suggest that embarrassment may be one of the basic universal emotions (Ekman, 1980). Displays which resemble its expression have also been observed in other higher primates (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996: 90; Miller 1996: 156).

Despite the value and success of Goffman's account of embarrassment, I would argue that he exaggerated its reach throughout a social situation:

> ...while a *gaffe* or *faux pas* can mean that a single individual is at one and the same time the cause of an incident, the one who feels embarrassed by it, and the one for whom he feels embarrassment, this is not, perhaps, the typical case, for in these matters ego boundaries seem especially weak. When an individual finds himself in a situation which ought to make him blush, others present usually will blush with and for him, though he may not have sufficient sense of shame or appreciation of the circumstances to blush on his own account.
>
> (1967: 99-100)

Embarrassment is not always contagious in this way. Though Goffman does admit the existence of what he calls "gaffes" and "faux pas", in practice he ignores these and similar cases, giving no detailed examination of the circumstances under which embarrassment might or might not cross 'ego boundaries.'

It is possible for individuals to feel embarrassed *for* another participant during interaction, but this may be said of any emotion. Empathy is the ability "of entering into another's personality and imaginatively experiencing his experiences" (Chambers, 1990: 464). This empathy or 'closeness' is thus a temporary attempted or felt adoption of another's perspective. Things are seen from the other's position and felt as the other would feel them; 'ego boundaries', to use Goffman's phrase, are crossed --or at least this is

how the process is imagined. Not only embarrassment, but also disappointment, relief, joy, anger, fear and even pain may be experienced in this manner. (Consider, regarding this latter case, the winces of cinema audiences at certain fictional knife wounds or medical injections). Such vicarious experience is a transformation of 'real' experience, and thus normally of a much lesser intensity.

I would disagree with the assertion, however, that embarrassment is particularly prone to empathic appreciation[2]. In a study by Stonehouse and Miller (in Miller, 1996: 46-70), reports of empathic appreciation of embarrassment by keepers of an 'embarrassment diary' (3% of the total) suggest that only a certain breed of individual finds space in his emotional life for the social pain of others. The three examples given of such occasions *all include reports of bystander laughter*:

> ...I felt embarrassed and sorry for him because everyone laughed at him!
>
> ...As I walked behind her I could hear people laughing and saying, 'Someone please tell her!' I felt so badly for her...
>
> ...I just laughed so hard. I was embarrassed for him and knew how awkward he must have felt. Other people did not think it was embarrassing at all.
>
> (p. 69)

Moreover, the very experiential quality and exterior signals of embarrassment seem to imply the existence of 'others' who will not be embarrassed by the discrediting fact: the observers whom the flustered individual shies away from. In the imaginary horror-house of the embarrassed, the staring, pointing, and laughing crowd of fellow social actors looms large and menacing. In a recent study, the phrase "I felt that other people were laughing at me" was selected by 89% of respondents as a typical descriptor of embarrassment (Miller and Tangney, 1994). Many of the common signs of the emotion --

lowering of the eyes, covering of the face with the hands, escaping or desiring to escape--orient the discredited individual away from the observational range of these implied others.

Furthermore, embarrassing situations constitute the core of much everyday as well as commercial entertainment. In such stories and circumstances, non-empathic appreciation of events is easily achieved by audiences. The result is enjoyable amusement at the expense of the spoilt self. In Chapter Five, I made reference to numerous anecdotes in this vein: a boastful card player's failure to play well, an aeroplane pilot's flight in the wrong direction, a vice-president's displays of ignorance, etc. Another typical example has been provided by Canadian author D.M. Clark, who recently recounted his first attempt to buy a pack of condoms (in Kurc, 1990). A close examination of this episode will help clarify the relationship between amusement and embarrassment.

The story takes place in a crowded pool-hall in the 1950's, during Clark's early teenage years. After much dithering, the teenage Clark approaches Ben, the manager of the establishment:

> "Huh, Ben?" I said. It was now or never.
> "Yeah?" he asked over his shoulder.
> "Ben, I...uh...need somethin' here."
> "Yeah?" He turned from the window and came over to the counter.
> "What?" he said.
> "I...uh...need some..." I waved my hand as though he could read that gesture as well as my mind.
> He aped the gesture. "An' what the hell is that supposed to mean?"
> "Uh, I need some...'safes.' 'Frenchies.' Sort of."
> He got this look on his face that made me sorry I'd ever asked. I figured I'd rather be shot and pissed on than be where I was right then.
> "Three for fifty cents," he said.
> "Yeah, I know." Like I'd been doing this for years.
> He bent over beneath the counter. Then a second later peered at me with his chin resting on the edge.
> "What size?" he asked. "Men's or boys'?"
> "Men's size," I said.
> At that precise moment a God I wasn't sure I even believed in stilled the universe so that everyone in that pool hall would hear this exchange. The pop

[2] What sometimes may happen is that the action of one participant actually discredits several others, leading to generalized embarrassment, though perhaps for different reasons (See Section 3.2.1). This is not the same as merely appreciating another's embarrassment due to imaginative perspective-taking.

> machine stopped gurgling, the ubiquitous radio conked out. Not a soul shooting pool in the back made a sound or a move. No balls clacked. The lights over the pool tables ceased humming. Out on the street no car honked a horn.
>
> I sent up a silent prayer, promising to dedicate what was left of my life to God's Works, if He'd just get me through this.
>
> But a second later the house came down. Ben whooped and hollered. Old guys who hadn't laughed at anything since their wives died gagged on their juices. Pool players doubled. Some slapped their thighs, others banged their cues on the floor. Some did both. Fat guys had strokes. Smokers coughed themselves to death. Grown men wept with laughter. In the very back by the exit doors, two guys I knew from high school yelled and called my name. I was now famous. I'd have to leave town, buy they'd never forget anyway.
>
> (pp. 22-23)

In this example, Ben provokes the discrediting of Clark's independent self-claims to sexual experience and 'manhood.' The boy has entered a pool-hall (primarily an adult venue), has attempted to purchase something which only sexually active adults have use for, has assented “yeah, I know” to the price (“Like I’d been doing this for years”), and finally, when challenged by an agent of his soon-to-arrive discredit, he not only displays an ignorance which discredits all of the preceding, but simultaneously makes a further empty self-claim of possessing adult-sized genitalia. Throughout the exchange, his embarrassment is obvious through his continuous stammering, hesitating (“Ben, I...uh...need somethin' here”, “Uh, I need some...'safes.' 'Frenchies.' Sort of”) and at one point his inability to say clearly what he wants. As narrator, the feeling is also spelled out for us: “I figured I'd rather be shot and pissed on than be where I was right then.” The final discredit intensifies the feeling to complete mortification (“I’d have to leave town”), which justifies the inclusion of the story in a collection of ‘most embarrassing moments.’

Clark’s intense embarrassment, however, does not spread to Ben, let alone others in the pool-hall. Rather, a general outburst of spontaneous laughter, recalled in vivid detail by the author, follows the event. Moreover, the laughter does not stop at the scene of the crime. The reader who encounters this scene, at one remove from reality, may also share in the amusement, and it seems likely that the story will have been recounted before, not only by Clark but by many of the others present. Clark's discredit is funny to us because it is *someone else*'s discredit --to him it is embarrassing because it is *his* discredit. Most people are likely to fulfill the criteria of identity distance from the

discredited claimant, and thus will find the story amusing. It is the story of a teenager in 1950's Canada, and one who commits an outrageous bluff. Though empathy with the mocked boy is possible, it is unlikely to be very strong.

The very existence of a book, and indeed a whole genre (See Chapter Five, 3.1), devoted to retellings of true-life 'embarrassing moments' is significant, especially when these sorts of books are catalogued as 'humour' in bookstores and libraries. In the above story, one participant blushed under the crushing laughter of a whole crowd; in others embarrassment is shared by several or even all participants. In every case, however, at least the reader of the anecdotes is expected to find them "hilarious," as they are described on the back cover of Martha Kurc's collection. One person's most embarrassing moment is always, at least potentially, another's source of amusement.

I propose that a self-claim's discredit will be funny to an observer who does not identify himself *as* the discredited claimant (and embarrassing to an observer who does). Identifying the self 'as' another person is to say 'I am, in some way, that person.' This usage is to be distinguished from the concept of identifying 'with' another person --a question of empathic understanding which can lead to vicarious embarrassment, happiness, sadness, pain, or any other sensation or emotion. To identify *as* someone does not lead to vicarious emotion, but to 'first-hand' emotions.

The complementarity of amusement and embarrassment has been noted by various theorists and researchers, or else is evident in their work. The case of Erving Goffman's study of interactional failures has already been noted in Chapter Three, 4. In Rowland Miller's book on embarrassment (1996), references to laughter and humour are also frequent, though they are not given theoretical importance. The "catalogue of embarrassments" he develops, which closely resembles the typology of funny events I presented in Chapter Five, is full of amusing anecdotes of others' mistakes and public disclosures. In relation to a study discriminating between embarrassment and shame, he notes that,

> Light hearted, funny predicaments were almost always embarrassing rather than shameful. People often found embarrassments to be "kind of humorous" and said they smiled and "felt like laughing" at themselves.... People often made jokes

> about embarrassing predicaments....Embarrassed people recalled that observers had been laughing at them."
>
> (pp. 23-24)

In further chapters, Miller also gives evidence for the importance of smiles, amusement, laughter, and humour as responses of both victim and audience of embarrassment (pp. 146-48, 166, 171-173, 177-81, 197). For Thomas Scheff (1985), who does not distinguish between embarrassment and 'shame', his preferred term, "the feeling of shame is a result of bodily preparation for laughter, but preparation that is not discharged by laughter" (p. 258). In Scheff's view, the release of 'laughter' (i.e., amusement) is also dependent on an identity relation between observer and the discredited claimant, though he proposes that 'catharsis' takes place when one achieves a state of both observation and participation:

> Comedy evokes shame and anger through graphic depiction of mistakes. Since the mistakes and scorn seem to belong to the characters and not to the members of the audience, they feel free to partly identify with the characters, allowing their own unresolved shame and anger to surface, and to laugh about it.
>
> (ibid.)

Superiority theorists of amusement (See Chapter Two, 2.1.1) have also given weight to embarrassment, 'shame,' and 'humiliation' as the fate reserved for the defeated or inferior victim of amusement: "In the person ridiculed the concomitant feeling is one of embarrassment, in its milder forms; and abject humiliation, in its stronger" (Rapp, 1949: 85). Even Thomas Hobbes' own description of amusement as "sudden glory arising from some conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly" (1640: ix, 13) appears the perfect complement of his 'shame,' which takes place when a person "discover[eth] in himself some defect or infirmity, the remembrance of which dejecteth him" (ibid: ix, 3).

An important question has yet to be addressed. If the discredit of an individual causes his embarrassment, rather than his amusement, how can the *self-amusement*

described in Chapter Five be accounted for (funny event types III and IV, VII and VIII)? The above analysis may seem inconsistent with the major variable regarding the 'claimant discredited' (See Chapter Four, 3.2.2), who will be either another person *or else the perceiver himself*. The incongruity is only apparent however, and due to the common (Western) conception of identity as an indivisible unit, rather than as the shifting, multipart entity which it actually is in everyday experience. D.M. Clark himself, for instance, probably finds the above story funny --its publication suggests that he is now able to see the 'lighter side' of that once-terrifying moment. This is possible because identity is not fixed, the configuration 'who am I' evolving over time and from one situation to the next. Individuals do not identify themselves as every part of who they can be or have been at different moments. The adult Clark, for example, is clearly not the teenage Clark, at least not in terms of personal characteristics. The effect of distance from the self on recalled embarrassments was noted by Thomas Hobbes: "Men laugh at the follies of themselves past" (1640: IX, 13). What is embarrassing today may be laughable tomorrow, next week, or in a few years --whenever it becomes possible to say that 'I was not then what I am now.'

To be more accurate, it is not time itself but merely the adoption of a distanced perspective which is necessary. Once a particular self or persona has been 'shed' by the actor, and he views it as such (i.e., as a character rather than his 'real self'), any discredits may be recalled with amusement. The ending of a social situation during which embarrassment was experienced may allow actors to achieve the required distance:

> Funny things are always happening in TV studios or out on location. Usually they don't seem so funny at the time, but we can get a laugh when the programme is over.
>
> (Sally Magnusson, in Hornsby, 1989: 72)

Some discredits of the self may allow an easy and almost immediate distancing, as when discredit is produced by evidently unfair means or when the discrediting fact is generally known not to affect the 'true' self of the individual. Such is the case of many verbal jokes, tongue-twisters, pranks, visual illusions, wind-ups, jesting, tickling, and

similar pretend discredits. On the other hand, not always are actors able to shed their spoilt selves, even after much time has elapsed, as Martha Kurc implies in the introduction to her collection of embarrassing stories: “Naturally, when I sent out my call for authors' most embarrassing moments, I didn't expect anyone to respond with the really painful, never-to-be-discussed memory, the type that wakes you up at 5:00 am with an 'oh my god' feeling, nor did they” (1990: xiii).

A common phenomenon is the experience of amusement and embarrassment, apparently simultaneously[3]. Here it appears that the actor views himself both from the perspective of disattached perceiver and from that of discredited subject: “Over twenty years later, I can't think of that time without laughing --and without turning a bright red” (Joy Fielding in Kurc, 1990: 44).

The identity of a perceiver as a given self he has been (or might be) is partly self-imposed and partly imposed upon him by the observers present. An interesting socio-psychological phenomena to be considered in this respect is the well-documented ‘actor-observer divergence’ (Jones and Nisbett, in Brown 1967), and its relationship to the work on first impressions and stereotypes. It appears that observers of an actor tend to treat specific actions as representative of his personal traits (i.e., his 'real' self); an actor, on the other hand, tends to treat his actions as punctual responses to particular situations (i.e., not necessarily his 'real' or 'normal' self). This divergence of views is widest when actors deal with complete strangers, and smallest when the interactants are close companions who know well the various facets of the actor. Thus, we might say that a person finds it easiest to 'detach' himself from a particular action or verbal utterance, to 'cast off' or 'shed' a self, when he finds himself on his own or among close friends than in a highly 'public' situation. Consequently, it is also easiest for him to find himself funny, and be less embarrassed, when he finds such a 'detachable' self discredited. 'Role distance' (Goffman, 1961) is not only something actors display to each other, but also something they may or may not achieve by these displays.

In conclusion, in order for the perception of a self-claim’s discredit to elicit amusement *the perceiver must not find himself closely identified with the claimant*.

[3]It is unclear whether the two reactions truly occur simultaneously or perhaps alternatingly, perhaps as a kind of 'gestalt switch' experience.

Identification can occur by considering oneself to actually *be* the claimant (or one of the claimants) --unless sufficient distance from this self is achieved-- or by empathic appreciation with the claimant.

3. The Requirement of Involvement

3.1. Definition

The detection of a self claim's discredit, like any other perception, can have greater or lesser cognitive, emotional, and behavioural consequences on the observing individual. Partly, this will depend on the content of the perception itself --in this case, as discussed above, the type of self-claim, seriousness of the discrediting, identity of the claimant, etc.... However, there is also the issue of the individual's **involvement** or engrossment in the perception (See Goffman, 1961: 37-74; 1974: 345-495). Though a framework appropriate to the detection of a discrediting may be applied as it occurs, its application may be fleeting and/or superficial, so that the potential mental and bodily repercussions are not given full expression. Competing drains on attention may weaken the impact of any specific perception.

Involvement has two dimensions: duration and intensity. On the one hand, an individual's perception of an event may have a greater or lesser extension in time, either allowing its various consequences to mature and develop fully or otherwise condemning them to be prematurely shunted. The joy obtained from noticing a friend's letter in the post box, for instance, may be suddenly cut short or severely 'dampened' by an unexpectedly ugly bill read closely afterwards.

On the other hand, an individual's involvement in a particular perception may be of greater or lesser intensity. In certain moments, particularly when the individual is in a state of mental and emotional calm, he may be able to focus a great part of his concentration on a single task, perceptual or otherwise. All elements in the environment considered irrelevant by the frame applied can be ignored completely. At other times, however, numerous distractions and competing frames may prevent full involvement in a particular task: preoccupations about an exam may mar the proper enjoyment of a meal, a toothache may ruin a chess-player's vital concentration, the spotting of an ex-lover in the crowd may cause a politician's rhetoric to falter. Returning to the previous example, if an ugly bill were read before noticing a dear friend's letter in the mail, the intensity of the latter perception, and thus the associated positive emotional experience, could well be

reduced by the displeasing distraction (which could go even further and 'ruin' an entire morning or longer).

Involvement is subject to at least some conscious control by the individual. Attention may be allotted in various ways according to priorities or desires. One may attempt to forget about an ugly bill, 'not look down' to avoid vertigo while driving along the edge of a precipice, ignore someone's physical deformity in order to treat him 'normally,' concentrate fully on the exam question at hand, keep the doctor's warnings about unhealthy eating always 'in mind' at the table, or 'maintain a distance' from a certain social situation to avoid overinvolvement. Such attempts are not always successful. In fact, techniques for mental self-control are available commercially to improve the relevant abilities, which vary from person to person.

It is worth noting that this feature of the amusement mechanism has been among the most widely discussed within the literature of humour theory. For adherents to the 'play' school (See Chapter Two, 2.1.4), distance from unpleasant or serious events has been identified as the source of amusement itself. Almost all theorists, however, have made some mention of the fact that amusement requires a certain distance, emotional calmness, or detachment from events to be appreciated properly, or that these events be free from tragic elements. Aristotle specified that an amusing event was a mistake or deformity "not productive of pain or harm to others" (On Poetics, V, I). Henri Bergson commented on the "insensibility" which normally accompanies amusement:

> It seems that the comic cannot produce its shock wave unless it drop on the surface of a calm, well unified spirit. Indifference is its natural environment. Laughter has no greater enemy than emotion. I do not wish to say that we cannot laugh at a person for whom we feel pity, for example, or even affection: only then, for a few moments, he will make us forget this affection, make silent this pity.
>
> (Bergson, 1900: 388; my translation)

Baillie (1921) argued that "detachment from a situation...is certainly necessary to free laughter." Hazlitt (1818: 411) was even more specific in describing the requirements concerning attention.:

> as long as the disagreeableness of the consequences of a sudden disaster is kept out of sight by the immediate oddity of the circumstances, and the absurdity or unaccountableness of a foolish action is the most striking thing in it, the ludicrous prevails over the pathetic, and we receive pleasure instead of pain

Herbert Spencer (1891) integrated these facts into his theory of tension-release, suggesting that when other emotions are present laughter is not discharged, as accumulated tension simply continues along the new emotional channel:

> Among the spectators of an awkward tumble, those who preserve their gravity are those in whom there is excited a degree of sympathy with the sufferer, sufficiently great to serve as an outlet for the feeling which the occurrence had turned out of its previous course. Sometimes anger carries off the arrested current; and so prevents laughter.
>
> (p. 462)

In my own account, I simply propose that in order for amusement to be experienced, *the perceiver must be sufficiently involved in a definition of events which places the discrediting of an actor in the foreground.* Furthermore, the degree and temporal extension of amusement will vary positively with the intensity and duration of such involvement. Though any number of distractions may mar humorous appreciation, there exist a few common and noteworthy obstacles: the independent discredit of the perceiver, misfortune which befalls the discredited claimant, other emotional implications of the discrediting fact, competing interpretations of events as non-discrediting, excessive self-consciousness regarding the amusement process itself, intentional distractions sought by the perceiver, and cognitive and emotional 'carry-over' from previously perceived events. In section 3.2, I will discuss each of these in turn.

3.2. Causes of Insufficient Involvement

3.2.1. Independent Discredit of the Perceiver

Special circumstances arise when the perceiver and claimant are engaged in mutual interaction simultaneously with the perception of the discredit, or where the two are considered somehow associated by third-party observers. In such cases, if the discrediting events are noticed by several or all participants, the perceiver himself may be discredited as well. Rather than being embarrassed *for* the discredited claimant, due to empathic identification, here the perceiver is embarrassed *in his own right*, his own self-presentation having been damaged in some way[1]. In such situations, the perceiver may fail to be amused because he is too 'busy' being embarrassed himself.

What Goffman labelled 'contagious' embarrassment actually referred, in many cases, to situations where one discrediting leads to further discreditings --rather than directly to general embarrassment. A guest at a formal drinks party who drunkenly insulted an important dignitary by removing his toupee would not only discredit himself but also the victim whose honour and demeanour had been transgressed. The host who invited this unruly guest, let alone the latter's spouse and/or other companions, would also be to some extent discredited by association with the latter, not merely embarrassed *for* him. Moreover, anyone present directly at the scene --i.e., within the conversational circle where the offense took place-- might be discredited as well.

Each of these discreditings would be based on different types of self-claim. In the case of the transgressor, the self-claim to proper behaviour at a formal party, including appropriate respect for others' (and especially important dignitaries') bodily, informational, and ego territories. In the case of the victim, control over his own bodily, informational, and ego territories. In the case of the host, the role-self-claim of prudence and taste in the choice of guests and the self-claim to respect for others' territories (put into question by his invitee's behaviour). In the case of the spouse and/or accompanying guests, the self-claim to prudence and taste in the choice of spouse/associate and the self-claim to respect for others' territories (put into question by the behaviour of their partner).

In the case of others present at the scene, the self-claim to be able to carry on a normal social encounter of this type (made almost impossible to sustain by such a disruption) and to respect the informational territories of others (the 'secret' toupee revealed to all by the transgressor).

Any of these affected individuals, upon observing this episode, might be too overcome with embarrassment himself, and perhaps too concerned with managing the difficult social situation at hand, to be able to appreciate its amusing aspects. Only with time and distance from the scene might they come to laugh back at the evening's embarrassing moment. Other guests at the party, however, as well as friends of the guests made privy of the news soon afterwards, might well enjoy the situation --even if open laughter at those involved is tactfully concealed or suppressed.

3.2.2. Misfortune for the Claimant

Discrediting facts often result in or are associated with minor or major tragedies for the claimant, due to their intrinsic characteristics: carelessness or uncoordinated physical movement can cause accidental death or injury, speech faults may be due to a degenerative brain disease, poor thinking can lead to economic ruin, violating others' territories can be followed by brutal retaliation, social ineptness may provoke virtual ostracism of an individual and give rise to a terrifying solitude. If such circumstances come to the attention of the perceiver, either before or after perception of a discrediting, empathic appreciation may reduce or stifle amusement[2].

Consider the following story, included in a collection of humorous 'blunders':

> In 1979 a Spanish Air Force ace managed to shoot himself down: his bullets ricocheted off the practice target in the Iberian hills, and then hit his jet, forcing him to eject to safety --and ridicule.
>
> (Hardy, 1983: 82)

---

[1] Miller (1969: 34,48,69) makes a similar distinction.

[2] In Section 3.2, I have analyzed empathy with one type of discredit-related misfortune: the public disclosure of the discrediting fact itself and its resulting embarrassment. I will thus refrain from discussing this particular category (embarrassment *for* the discredited individual) further.

Part of our ability to appreciate the humour in this anecdote with a clear conscience is the fact this pilot was able to "eject to safety." Many readers would be less amused by a variant ending according to which the bullets 'hit his jet, killing him,' or, even worse, 'hit his jet, causing the engine to explode through the cockpit, incinerating the horrified youth before the plane smashed to the ground, a raging fireball.' Such grim circumstances might engage a reader's empathy and elicit a tragic interpretation of events.

This is not to say that a grim outcome would render the story 'not funny' in absolute terms. On the contrary, it would not only maintain its comic potential, but could even gain a new comic element: the inappropriateness of making a joke out of a horrific story. Its comic status would become controversial, however, both 'technically' and on moral grounds. Some perceivers would argue, even vehemently, that such things are simply 'no laughing matter,' that they do not (or, in any case, should not) inspire amusement[3]. Others would say that it constitutes 'black' or 'grim humour,' and defend their right to experience a kind of restrained amusement, a wince and a smile, a disgusted chuckle, a mix of horror and appreciation of the absurd (See Section 4). Finally, some would be able to experience amusement unproblematically --an ability which might be judged cruel by more empathic individuals.

Laughter at 'cruel' discredit stories or events depends on the ability of perceivers to focus on the discreditings themselves rather than on the pain of a fellow human. I suggest that four main factors will affect this ability: cultural and individual differences in the distribution of this required 'distance' or lack of empathy; interpretative concurrence by perceiver and victim; affective relationship between perceiver and victim; and the specific context in which the discredit takes place.

Regarding the first factor, it may be noticed that certain social environments value and promote distance from own and other suffering (i.e., 'toughness,' 'hardness'). A Royal Marine Officer admits (in Mayo, 1993: 43), “It will come as no surprise to you when I say that the humour of the [Armed] Forces in general can be rather cruel and harsh

[3] Boston (1982), for example, provides the following opinion in a compendium of practical jokes: "To cause actual bodily harm...is not a laughing matter.... The dictionary and the House of Lords rightly distinguish between what causes the victim(s) to be embarrassed and look foolish and what might cause him, her, or them to suffer personal, physical, financial and any other real injury."

sometimes". This anonymous officer retold, on Simon Mayo's BBC Radio 1 program 'Confessions,' how he and some others played a practical joke on an overly keen officer who was not allowed to continue in the Corps for medical reasons. Having lured him into a state of complete inebriation, they had his arm tattooed with the words "43 Commando Royal Marines." With hindsight, the episode which had seemed "funny at the time" years later seemed simply "cruel," prompting the confession on Mayo's program.

More extreme cases are possible, of course. Beyond mere slapstick disparagements, tasteless jokes and black humour of the darkest hue we encounter the chilling laughter of those considered truly 'evil.' Hollywood 'bad guys,' literary demons, and even real-life 'beasts' can laugh at misery, torture, and death --indeed are monstrous on this account alone. Ugandan leader Idi Amin, for instance, murdered hundreds of thousands of his people --some having to sledgehammer each other to death-- often for mere pleasure:

> What deepens the sense of shock in learning of Idi Amin's misdeeds is the knowledge that so much human suffering was inflicted by a man with a broad smile and a ready, if heavy-handed, sense of humour. It is said that many of his victims died with the sound of his laughter in their ears.
>
> (Regan, 1984: 63)

Young children, who have not yet learned empathic skills, also find it simple to laugh in the face of others' suffering:

> Toddlers in playgroups quite often laugh after they hit each other. There is no "play face", the violence is real and the laughter is hostile.
>
> (Cohen, 1994)

> The young child's egocentrism makes it impossible to take another person's point of view, and this has a major effect on reactions to humor. In short, younger children seem to be more cruel in their humor because they laugh directly at another person's limp, unusually shaped nose, distorted speech, and so forth. It

> simply does not occur to them that they might be hurting the feelings of people in such conditions.
>
> (McGhee, 1979: 78)

Empathy is also partly dependent on the coincidence of interpretations between perceiver and 'victim.' If the former does not happen to view the latter's condition as such a tragedy after all, he will find amusement easier. An extreme example is that of parents who laugh at a baby's misinterpretation of a dear uncle (with a new bushy beard) as a horrible monster. Empathy may be possible with the neonate's desperate tears, but it is unlikely to be very strong.

In fact, intentional humour can be used as a technique for minimizing the importance of a specific misfortune. A category of individuals who often engage in cruel humour are those who experience great suffering themselves. As was seen in Chapter One, the use of 'gallows humour' often emerges among those in desperate or tragic circumstances. Among the patients of an experimental metabolic ward, for instance, Fox (1959) found that jokes were made about the experimental surgery, the drugs, and their roles as human subjects, but those about death were the "most frequently made and most relished of all" (p.173). For these people, tragedy has become the norm, a taken-for-granted element of daily existence. Or, perhaps more accurately, this normalization of certain tragic events has become a central aim for all actors. The distancing requirement of black humour, normally disapproved of in such doses, here becomes a means of escape, a blasé acceptance of the inevitable, a therapeutic instrument of relief. He who can laugh at death and misery has conquered their hold over his mind. He transforms himself from a pathetic victim living a daily horror to a mere figure of fun (See Chapter Eight, 4.3).

It would be expected that a third important factor regulating empathy by a perceiver towards an aggrieved actor should be the former's affective relationship towards the latter. If I am quite fond of someone, I am more likely to feel pained when he suffers, and happy when he succeeds. If I detest someone, the reverse will be true. In the case of potentially amusing events where a discredited actor suffers pain or misfortune, it would be expected that a perceiver should be more amused at misfortunes befalling

disliked individuals or groups than at those which affect liked individuals or groups. This should be so due to the perceiver's increased distance with the former, and increased empathy with the latter.

In fact, as was seen in Chapter Two, this is precisely what dozens of experiments in the psychology of 'disparagement humour' have repeatedly confirmed. Wolff and his collaborators pioneered the field by conducting experiments in which the appreciation of disparagement jokes by subjects 'affiliated' and 'unaffiliated' to the victims was measured. In accordance with their predictions, it was found that Jews were found to enjoy anti-Jewish jokes less than non-Jews, among other findings (Wolff et al., 1934). Zillman has summarized the results of the numerous replications that followed these early efforts with the following interpretation: “Mirth...is said to vary proportionally with the negativeness of the affective disposition toward the disparaged party” (p. 92).

Whereas most of these experiments have considered the disparagement of one fictional character by another, there is also some evidence that extends these findings to cases of real-life 'unprovoked' accidents. An experiment by Zillman and Bryant (cited in Zillman, 1983), for instance, found that subjects laughed more at an 'experimenter' (actually an actress) who spilled a cup of tea over herself in the condition where they were led to develop a negative disposition towards her.

The manner in which participants contextualize a potentially amusing event or story is another crucial influence on perceiver response. There exists a publishing genre composed of books which list true stories of great mistakes[4]. Most of them are explicitly classified by authors, editors, publishers, and libraries as "humour", while some are more ambiguous in this regard. All of them, however, include anecdotes of dubious or controversial 'humour status.' It is their contextual frames, however, which direct attention and guide interpretation. In the introduction to *The World's Greatest Mistakes* (Blundell, 1980), for instance, we find the following warning:

[4] Some titles include: *Amazing Blunders and Bungles* (Eldin, 1987), *The World's Worst Predictions* (Nown, 1985), *1000 Blunders* (Brandreth, 1983), *The World's Greatest Mistakes* (Blundell, 1980), *Facts and Fallacies* (Morgan and Langford, 1981), *What a Mistake!* (Hardy, 1983), *Own Goals* (Jones, 1985), *The Guinness Book of Historical Blunders* (1984).

> There is also a more serious side to this book...stories of mistakes so monumental that they have altered the course of history. They are mistakes that have cost dearly in money, honour, and human life. They include the sinking of the Titanic, ...Custer's Last Stand...
>
> (p. 7)

On the other hand, in the introduction to *Own Goals* Graham Jones explains that the book includes "items which have two things in common: *Yes, they're funny*. But Ouch! they hurt...actions which rebounded mightily, savagely --but *always amusingly*-- on their makers" (Jones, 1985: 11-12; my emphasis). The back cover of *The World's Worst Predictions* informs us that "prediction is a very risky business --or at least a very funny one" (Nown, 1985).

The tone of the writing in each of these two types of book is consistent with these divergent statements of purpose. The former intends to entertain but also admits the tragic side of human mistakes, and expects the reader to identify with misery and suffering where appropriate. The latter merely intends to 'get a laugh.'

Blundell mentions the sinking of the Titanic and the defeat of General Custer as two mistakes with a serious 'side.' In his own depiction of the Titanic episode, he describes the "horror for the 2,300 passengers of the White Star liner" and gives space to the human and tragic aspects of the story. Though the absurdly defiant claims about this engineering wonder being 'unsinkable' are also included within the account, an average reader would not laugh heartily at the resulting discredits --a sensation of 'tragic irony' and a stunted smile might be elicited at most. In *The World's Worst Predictions*, however, the story is reduced to the following one-liner (Nown, 1985: 76):

> "Madam, God himself could not sink this ship..."
>
> Crew member of the Titanic
> to a passenger, 1912

In this presentation, the story itself disappears altogether. No deaths, no grief, no choking on sea-water are to be seen. It is the self-claim itself which is offered, cleanly decontextualized, accompanied only by the barest reference to time, place, and actors involved. Quickly read, the Titanic tragedy may thus become a source of unconcerned laughter, particularly when placed amidst other equally awful forecasts in a chapter on travel mispredictions ("'Nothing is more ridiculous than the claim to build a locomotive which will travel at twice the speed of a mail coach' --British Engineering Journal 1825"; p. 76)

'Custer's Last Stand' is similarly dehumanized in *Own Goals* (Jones, 1985: 25), where it is the absurdity of sending 215 men against "1500 warrior braves" which is stressed, rather than the pain, young stunted lives, and families of the victims. Jones gleefully reveals, for instance, that Custer took out more than 5000 dollars of life insurance before the battle. He also questions the fact that these men were particularly heroic: "Some say that they were the bravest of the brave. Others that they were suffering from too much drink and sun."

One contextual aid to obtaining emotional distance from a victim is *physical* distance in space and/or time. Laughing at 'old' fiascos like the Titanic and the Light Brigade will be easier for Americans than chuckling at similar examples from the Vietnam War. Jokes about forced child labour in the present-day third world seem more controversial than those about Egyptian slaves at Pyramid building sites. The former might be found even more objectionable by someone who has witnessed such practices personally (provided, of course, he finds the practices themselves objectionable). A suffering individual who is within direct and close physical presence of the perceiver should have the greatest hold over the latter's empathy.

Another common distancing method is the overt fictionality of either the misfortune or the victim in question. In much potentially controversial humour, characters and events are often removed from reality by grotesque distortions of every type. Techniques used to maintain slapstick violence 'harmless' to the audience include the use of caricatured drawings or cartoons, especially of animal figures; the bizarre antics, outfits, and settings of slapstick worlds; and standard alterations in the laws of physics and biology by which falls from cliffs, dynamite explosions, and all manner of

stretchings, piercings, and crushings result in nothing more than temporary discomfort and chagrin:

> Tom and Jerry, or all the other cartoon heroes and villains, can be cut up to slices, burned to death, or crushed to mush --in the next moment they will, of course, pop up alive and well....Hostility, brutality, and cruelty, ultimately have no apparent ill-effects.
>
> (Dolf Zillman, 1977; in Chapman, Smith, and Foot, 1980: 146)

If the guarantee of this fictionality is found to be lacking, comedy may turn into something quite other:

> Willson Disher, a noted historian of the comic arts, once observed a performance by a trick cyclist, where 'a well intentioned rumour made it known that he had not yet recovered from a broken rib. In consequence his tumbles were watched in the silence of deep concern.'
>
> (Staveacre, 1987: 41)

Even more extreme audience reactions can be imagined to the hypothetical case of Donald Duck or Wile E. Coyote bleeding to death.

3.2.3. Other Implications of the Discrediting Fact

A wide range of discredit side-effects may interfere with the perceiver's involvement in the amusing elements of the situation. Tragedy may strike the perceiver himself --as when a ridiculously careless act causes the death of a scatterbrained family member-- so that the emotion felt would be far from vicarious. Moral disapproval or outrage with the actions of the agent of discredit or the discredited claimant is another possibility. Fear and anger may also interfere. Nown (1989) has recounted the story of an airline pilot fond of socializing with passengers during long flights while the automatic pilot guided the aircraft. A sudden quake of turbulence caused the terrorist-proof cabin door to close and lock shut. According to Nown, passenger "anxiety" quickly turned to "undisguised fear" as "the pilot, smiling reassuringly, attacked the lock on his hands and knees with a plastic spoon from the galley" (p. 89). It is unlikely that many on board laughed before the door had been charged down by a group of passengers. Even then, anger at the pilot's irresponsible behaviour may have taken precedence for some. To the airline company directors, the story was also probably anything but amusing. The pilot's incredible lack of foresight can nevertheless be found funny by a reader safe at home -- though a twinge of airtravel apprehension is more than likely.

Many kinds of humour, apart from the ‘black humour’ discussed in 3.2.2, may fail to amuse certain sectors of an audience due to competing emotional involvements. 'Sick' humour, designed to provoke strong disgust, may be too successful in this regard to allow for any amusement at all. Sexual humour is another risky category, which may embarrass and/or offend some listeners. 'Blasphemous' humour may provoke offense, moral outrage, and even fear (i.e., of divine retribution) in the faithful. For example, when Monty Python released their 1979 biblical parody *Life of Brian*, Christian and Jewish groups denounced the film as blasphemous, immoral, and offensive, and picketed many cinemas where it was showing (New York Times, 1979, 30/8, III, 13: 1; 4/9, III, 7:1). Professional comedians are all too aware of the dangers of material which could provoke unintended emotional disinvolvement: “If you offend and/or embarrass your audience you will have a very hard time winning them over again.” (Kilgarriff, 1973: 3)

Some types of humour are intended by their creators to make a particular 'point,' to communicate a specific message or assertion. For example, an old Yiddish proverb states that “If triangles had a God, He'd have three sides.” Though the statement is humorous, and involves the absurd proposition of triangles having Gods, it is not meaningless. It draws attention to the fact that the deities believed in by a society tend to resemble the members of the faithful themselves. This leads to the thought-provoking and --for any believer-- worrying conclusion that gods, or at least their representations, have been fancifully invented by humans. To some believers, who in fact are the targets of implicit discredit, the implication might even be found offensive or the reasoning unfair and malicious.

Humorous appreciation of such wit depends on the 'catching' of the intended message, and thus understanding stimulates amusement. Nevertheless, it is possible that excessive attention to the message of wit could reduce involvement in its humorous aspects, especially if the point is anxiety-provoking, tragic, hostile, or contrary to the perceiver's beliefs or opinions.

3.2.4. Non-Discredit Interpretations

Not only may different participants disagree on whether a particular circumstance discredits an actor; such disagreement may take place within a single perceiver. As discussed in Chapter Four, it is possible for an observer to be uncertain regarding the fit between a proposed self-claim and the relevant facts. Thus, he may both find a situation funny and simultaneously entertain a definition of events under which the discredit disappears. Partial involvement in such a competing frame would reduce amusement resulting from the humorous interpretation.

I once participated in a lively argument between several university students regarding the question of whether it was acceptable to nap on the library floor if one felt tired, especially after the lunch hour. One student, who actually practiced this unusual behaviour, seemed to waver between a serious defense of sleeping on the carpet ("it's much more comfortable than slumping over the desk, and it doesn't bother anyone") and

an amused acceptance of its ridiculous side. This instability of interpretative frameworks was accompanied by an alternation of serious and amused expressions.

3.2.5. Amusement-Consciousness

A fifth type of distraction associated with potentially funny stimuli is an excessive concern with the humour process itself. For example, apprehension about whether one should laugh in public at a particular event could reduce or suppress amusement. Guilt at finding a 'sick' or 'dirty' joke funny might actually be effective in curtailing the perceived impropriety. Aesthetic appreciation of the 'cleverness' of a well-constructed witticism may detract from pure enjoyment of its art. Mere interest in the mechanics of a particular joke, its reception by other participants, or the subjective characteristics of hilarity may decrease involvement in the experience itself --a personal complaint voiced by more than one humour researcher.

3.2.6. Intentional Distraction

In some cases, perceivers may attempt to ignore the amusing aspects of an event consciously, in order to suppress mirthful reactions. During a courtroom trial against American comedian Lenny Bruce, the jury was requested to suspend all humorous appreciation during the viewing of a videotaped comic act. The viewing proceeded in silence (Goffman, 1974: 65-70).

More commonly, participants of interaction may attempt to ignore funny elements of a scene when such elements clash with the established definition of the situation. Where laughter is not permitted or not appropriate, manoeuvring attention away from amusing stimuli will be safer than suppressing its visible signs (See Chapter Seven).

3.2.7. Cognitive and Emotional Carry-Over

The 'wrong' mood can spoil amusement. Potentially amusing events may be witnessed by a perceiver too preoccupied with other affairs, or engulfed in other feelings, to take proper notice. A married couple who quarrel minutes before the start of a comedy show, or a student with an important exam only hours away, may find it difficult to enjoy the proceedings.

3.2.8. Additional Causes

This list of common causes for reduced involvement can be completed by a 'remainder' category, containing an assorted set of situational miscellanea --a startling noise, the appearance of an unexpected friend, an insect bite, a sudden lapse of concentration, an aesthetically pleasing sight. Indeed, any attention-engaging percept that closely precedes, accompanies, or follows that of the discrediting event may dampen or drown out the bodily expression of amusement. A professional comedian includes in a list of reasons for 'no laughs' from an audience that they "may be physically cold" and that "the seating may be uncomfortable" (Kilgarriff, 1973: 15). That elusive and undefinable of comic skills, 'timing,' may well be directed, at least to a considerable extent, to harnessing the attention of audience members away from irrelevant distractions and upon the flow of the comic presentation itself.

4. Amusement Modifiers

It may appear that some of the irreducible subjective qualities of amusement experience have been missed by the analysis provided. Beyond the differences that may arise from amusement at others versus amusement at the self, or the funniness one type of self-claim versus another, we continue to distinguish between triumphant guffaws and nervous tittering, haughty snorts and nostalgic smiles, guilty giggles and sarcastic grins. A number of these categories could be dismissed as external appraisals which attribute attitudes or pass moral judgement on observed displays of laughter[1]. On the other hand, some descriptive modifiers seem to have a subjective basis which challenges the assertion of a single unitary account for amusement. It feels different to laugh nostalgically about the 'good old days' than to smile at a dark irony.

I would argue, however, that these phenomena merely reflect the essential impurity of affects. As we have seen, an individual may be more or less involved in an emotionally-engaging perception. In other words, he may also be partially involved in a number of additional such perceptions, each with its cognitive, emotional, and bodily consequences. The bodily consequences of previous perceptions may yet be active when those of current ones take hold of the individual; the consequences of current perceptions will interact with those of forthcoming ones.

In short, emotions and feelings do not follow each other sequentially, despite the convenience of such an arrangement for both actors and computer models of the mind. Anger does not neatly give way to guilt, guilt does not neatly give way to nostalgia, nostalgia does not neatly give way to a toothache[2]. Nor are these affects and sensations easily separable from each other when co-present. Even some of the observable bodily aspects of laughter --such as increased heart rate-- are identical to those of emotions as

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[1] Such appraisals will be analyzed in Chapter Seven.

[2] In these and other discussions of feeling and emotion, I make no claims about the accuracy or reality of such concepts as "nostalgia," "guilt," and other affects --with the exception of amusement and embarrassment. Ekman and Friesen have provided convincing evidence that at least some cross-cultural emotions exist, which in our culture correspond to happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust (Ekman, 1980). Lacking --beyond such simple findings-- a well-accepted cross-cultural classification or theory of emotional reactions, I will fall back upon the terms used in common speech for the sake of simplicity. It should be noted, in any case, that the argument concerns emotions as experienced by subjects,

disparate as anger or fear. Various impressions accumulate and coexist, mix and dilute, a continuous challenge to the mental cognitive processors (of both actors and scientists) which attempt to interpret and modify them. The realm of experience resembles more a pool of whirling coloured dyes than a Turing machine tape of separate printed symbols. The possibility of 'emotion blends' is increasingly becoming recognized in the psychological literature on emotions (Scherer, 1996: 299).

One consequence of this fact is the uniqueness of each 'emotion' felt, a proposition already suggested by William James (1890: 743-746). One bout of anger is never identical to another, due to the interaction between the psycho-bodily processes provoked by the angering perception and preceding/subsequent psycho-bodily processes. Similarly, an injection of amusement into the emotional pool will modify, but not replace, its current hue, and will in turn be diluted and altered by further additions.

With observations selected from a few cases, some theorists have attempted to reduce laughter to the expression of another single affect, especially surprise, joy, hostility, and relief. A much wider range of emotional and sensory shadings may colour the amusement experience, however, including fear, admiration, sadness, disgust, sexual arousal, embarrassment, pain, nostalgia, and guilt. As I have argued above, such competing affects may reduce, suppress, or prevent spontaneous laughter by interfering with the subject's involvement in the relevant frame of interpretation. In many cases, therefore, one or more of them may coexist with some measure of amusement, resulting in a potentially infinite range of unique combinations.

Many of the typical conjunctions have either been alluded to in the previous discussion or arise from the categories of the typology developed in Chapter Five. A crucial distinction, for example, regards the relationship of the discredited claimant to the perceiver. Laughing at oneself may well differ experientially from laughing at others, particularly the more responsible one feels for the self-claim discredited. As considered in Section 2 of this chapter, embarrassed 'giggles' may arise when an individual simultaneously perceives himself as the claimant of a discredited attribution and as a distanced observer of this claimant. More specific categories may give rise to particular

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and thus the use of native terms is not altogether unjustified. The topic of emotion will be discussed further in Chapter Nine, 3.

details of experience. Tickling, as we have seen, results from a perception of an inappropriate defense reflex, and thus by definition the subjective quality of this joking torture includes the feelings and bodily events associated with this automatic wince. Anxiety or fear of suffering a tickles 'attack,' embarrassment from the public loss of control, or --in romantic contexts-- sexual arousal, are other typical modifiers.

Extensive discussion of empathy for discredit-related tragedy has also been provided above. Clearly, in some cases, pity, sympathy, and/or vicarious pain may be felt with amusement. A staple comic aggression, the kick to the testicles, provokes in male viewers both spontaneous laughter at seeing the most sacred of bodily territories violently abused, and a no less spontaneous empathic flinch at the groin. 'Black' humour, similarly, may result in recoilings of a more subtle nature:

> "Mommy, why are we having this Christmas tree in August?"
> "I've told you twenty times if I told you once, Sheldon. You've got leukaemia."
>
> (Davis, 1993: 142)

Funny stimuli may contain additional cognitively and emotionally-engaging implications unrelated to the fate of the discredited individual. For example, it can be both funny and frightening (for any air-traveller) to read that in a study of pilots conducted by the Institute of Aviation Medicine in 1985, one hundred respondents mentioned tiredness as a daily problem, while twelve "confessed to falling asleep at the controls" (Nown, 1989: 90). Eye-widening disbelief and outrage or head-shaking moral disapprobation, if they do not prevent humorous appreciation completely, may certainly colour the experience of reading about Old Bailey judge Michael Argyle QC, who let off a man found guilty of physically assaulting, forcibly undressing, and attempting to rape a woman with the following words...

> You come from Derby, which is my part of the country. Now off you go and don't come back to this court...For goodness sake make this the last time. Once you put your hands around a woman's neck when you are in drink anything can happen.

(Mason and Burns, 1985: 57-58)

Much intentional humour is meant to be thought-provoking, containing a serious 'point' conveyed in amusing form:

> I picked up a woman last night and took her to my house. "Make me feel like a woman," she said. So I cut her wages 40 percent.
>
> (Larry 'Bubbles' Brown,
> in Davis, 1993: 126)

Such humour thus provides a 'deeper' experience, --though not necessarily funnier-- than mere wordplay or absurdity[3]. The perceiver, though perhaps entertained, is additionally prompted to consider the criticism, social problem, philosophical hypothesis, or logical relation proposed. Such intellectual stimulation may or may not be accompanied by further emotional consequences such as moral approbation/disapprobation.

Disgust commonly accompanies discreditings where territories of the self are violated by objects of revulsion, or where control of bodily excretions is lost by the claimant: food fights, spitting in the face of a rival, medical student jokes with body parts, retrieving dropped keys from a dirty toilet, vomiting in public. This combination may also arise when a felt or expressed reaction of revulsion is deemed inappropriate by its subject, such as when a witnessed medical injection, minor cut, harmless insect, or blatantly fake 'gory' film scene provokes excessive disgust. 'Sick,' and 'dirty' jokes discredit the perceiver by forcing him to witness or conceive of taboo thoughts and ideas, which may elicit revulsion (among other reactions):

> Q: What's grosser than gross?

[3] This is not to say that wordplay or absurdity may not, too, be intellectualized. Davis (1993:14), for instance, considers the difference between 'quality humour' and 'mere silliness' as a question of degree rather than essence, both provoking a "comic attack on culture" (of which language is an essential element).

A: A baby eating its way out of a cartful of babies.

Q: What's grosser than that?

A: The same baby coming back for seconds.

Attention to the discrediting and/or amusement process itself may also alter its result, with a number of cognitive and affective elements: anxiety about whether a joke will be understood, indecision over whether laughter should be expressed, guilt or doubt regarding the appropriateness of amusement.

More pleasant emotions may also act as modifiers. Admiration or aesthetic pleasure at the cleverness of a particular witticism/comic novel/mathematical puzzle or the gestural abilities of a skilful comic performer may add to the enjoyment of a humorous perception. Surprise, awe, and wonder at seeing the impossible accompanies the 'I'm-being-fooled-here' amusement during a magic show (though unpleasant frustrated curiosity is another typical side-effect). Joy at the sharing of laughter with a liked participant, of course, gives the amusement a particular tone. In contexts of courtship or amorous interaction, excitement, love, and sexual arousal may be further stimulated.

Tension-release theories have been based on the observation that amusement is sometimes associated with a sensation of relief. This phenomenon often arises when a disagreeable emotion is found to have been based on erroneous perception or interpretation: fear at a rollercoaster fall, anger at reading a letter that turns out to be a practical joke, dejection over a misfortune which is suddenly seen as a mere trifle. I would argue that in these cases amusement itself either *is* or *results in* relief --a relief from accumulated anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, pain, boredom, or other discomfort. If relief were a cause or aspect of amusement, it would become difficult to explain not only the numerous cases where previous negative sensations were absent, but especially those where *positive* affects have been found superfluous. For example, the optimistic mishearing of a lottery number could result in a perceiver's temporary belief that he possesses a fortune. The eventual disillusionment might stifle any amusement at the error, but might on the other hand allow a weak and whiny chuckle of resignation.

5. Combinations of Funny Stimuli

In Chapter Five, examples were provided to illustrate specific categories of funny event. The humorous aspect of some of these examples, however, may have seemed more elaborate than warranted by their simple classification. Real-life stimuli of amusement often contain numerous potentially funny elements, each of which may have its effect on a perceiver. Consider the following amusing incident from real life:

> A child was overheard praying, "Please God make Paris the capital of Turkey!" -- which is what he had written on his geography exam.
>
> (Muir, 1984: 26)

This child is funny to us on two counts: firstly, for believing Paris to be the capital of Turkey, an outrageous social frame mix-up in itself; but secondly for believing that praying to a supreme being could have Him change the basic facts of geography merely in order to save his grade, an equally serious natural frame error. Either comic 'half' could provoke amusement --though not as much-- on its own:

> 1. Child's answer on an exam: "Paris is the capital of Turkey".
> 2. A child was overheard praying, "Please God change my exam answers so they're all correct."

Neither of these elements is likely to escape the attention of the perceiver, each adding comic value to the anecdote. And yet the amusement generated will normally be experienced as a seamless whole.

Unsurprisingly, complex stimuli are particularly common in humour, where the intention is to amuse by whatever means possible. Verbal jokes which fool the perceiver into erroneous interpretations or illogical reasoning may also include the discredit of characters within the more or less fictional world of the joke, as well as other elements.

> Reagan had a cancer taken out of his colon and a cancer off his nose. You figure out how he got them.
>
> (Will Durst, in Davis 1993: 123)

Here Durst provokes the listener into making an absurd and completely unwarranted connection between Ronald Reagan's tumors. Believing that the cancers are related in the way suggested (i.e., by some sort of barely imaginable contact) can lead to self-amusement at the mental lapse. In addition, of course, the comedian's implication involves the former American President in disagreeable mutual violations of two of his own --highly incompatible-- bodily territories by each other. This can be considered a separate humorous element. Finally, the taboo nature of the very concept entertained and shared by comedian and audience discredits their self-claims to guard and respect a trio of informational territories which are strictly off-limits in our own society: cancer, sex, and the anus. Again, however, the amusement achieved by a perceiver of this joke appears to him as a single, undivided experience.

More extended comedic structures, such as humorous novels, films, or live shows, normally combine and vary numerous techniques. A comic performer may, during his act, 1) discredit his own self-claims (or rather, those of his comic 'persona') with tacky or ridiculous outfits, impossible self-claims, facial expressions, extremes of ineptness and stupidity, self put-down jokes, and stories about past discredits; 2) discredit the self-claims of the audience (and/or of specific singled out members) with clever verbal foolery, visual tricks and illusions, stories of common embarrassments we all share, deliberate put-downs and insults, and the breaking of taboos; 3) discredit the self-claims of third parties by telling ethnic jokes, satirizing politicians, recounting embarrassments of his supposed acquaintances, and imitating various real or fictitious characters in an unflattering manner. Many of these varied elements can be combined within the space of a few seconds, even simultaneously.

Tommy Cooper, for instance, entertained audiences for thirty years with the same 'incompetent magician' act. During performances, 'his' (or rather, his character's) role self-claims of conjuring skill, stage poise, and appropriate appearance were continually discredited by his demeanour and botched tricks. This main emphasis, however, was

supplemented by various additional humorous techniques, observable in the following description of an act:

> [Cooper makes] an entrance with a huge pile of plates. One falls from the bottom, and shatters. A manic cackle, and suddenly, he throws the remaining plates into the audience! Screams, hysteria --relief, it's only a clever inflatable! He closes the show two minutes in; changes his mind, lurches to his props table.
>
> > "Magic wand --white tip here, white tip there. The reason for the white tips is to separate the centre from the ends. Now I'll make it disappear."
>
> Wraps wand in paper, loosely. Paper out of control, Cooper loses patience, breaks wand, breaks table. Roaming dangerously, he walks *through* another table (which opens like swing-doors)...
>
> > "My feet are killing me. Honest -- every night I wake up in bed, and they're wrapped around me neck!"
>
> Now he's striking matches, which won't light; now he's wrestling with a covered dish, to produce a grotesque cloth turkey. Throws it off in disgust...
>
> > "I've got something in my eye ... It's my finger!"
>
> (Staveacre, 1987: 79)

Simultaneously with the persistent evidence of his incompetence on stage --the manic laughter, disrespect of the audience, wild appearance and movements, failed tricks, incoherent patter, shows of anger and disgust-- Cooper throws in the following bits of humour:

- A practical joke with an inflatable pile of plates, which causes the audience to panic inappropriately (i.e., to mismanage their social frames).
- An instance of illogical reasoning: "The reason for the white tips is to separate the centre from the ends." This absurd explanation may cause amusement at Cooper, and/or at the perceiver who momentarily accepts the explanation as reasonable.

- A visual gag involving a trick table. Here Cooper treats the audience to a real magic trick --for a split second, a miraculous parting of matter seems to have taken place, causing self-amusement.
- A conventional double-meaning joke: "My feet are killing me...". Here the listener is tricked into maintaining an absurd notion --Cooper's feet actually trying to kill him-- due to the initial acceptance of a conventional expression.
- A clever bit of verbal and visual foolery: Cooper puts his finger in his eye, and states, quite truthfully "I've got something in my eye." The audience --deceived by the mimic and the conventional meaning of the phrase, mistakenly takes this to mean that some tiny speck has entered his eye, despite the 'plainness' of Cooper's words. Most incredibly, however, Cooper himself seems surprised at finding that the bothersome object in his eye is none other than his own finger, shattering his own self-claims to the universal skills of language production and frame management.

Such combinations of technique are typical, rather than extraordinary.

6. Conclusions: The Full Hypothesis

In this chapter, the proposed causal hypothesis of amusement has been polished and rounded off, bringing Part Two of the thesis to a close. I have considered a number of factors crucial to the emergence, degree, and perceived quality of amusement, permitting a more sophisticated understanding of actual humorous experience. These factors, moreover, have emerged naturally from the possibilities of social and perceptual experience relevant to self-claim discredits.

Firstly, in cases where the discrediting of a self-claim has been detected, the relationship of perceiver to claimant --specifically, the **identity distance** between them-- will determine whether embarrassment or amusement (or what degree of each) will be provoked in the former. The individual discredited, as a perceiver of his own situation, will normally suffer embarrassment. If he considers himself distanced from the part of his self that has been discredited, however, he may be amused. The passing of time has been mentioned as one important factor in allowing such distance. For many observers of a discrediting, therefore, amusement will be possible, and thus 'the embarrassment of others' constitutes a major theme of intentional humour. A combination of these two complementary emotions may arise if closeness and distance to the discredited individual are alternated by the perceiver.

Secondly, the degree of **involvement** in the perception of the funny stimulus will clearly influence the resulting degree of amusement. Excessive attention to any competing perception may reduce or suppress hilarity entirely, of which certain types are common: the independent discredit of the perceiver, a misfortune suffered by the claimant, other implications of the discrediting fact which impinge on the perceiver's interests, consciousness of the amusement process, intentionally-provoked distractions, and mental activity carried over from previous events.

Thirdly, the cognitive and emotional consequences of such side-involvements may coexist with amusement itself, colouring the experience with any number of subjective feelings, sensations, and cognitions. These **amusement modifiers** account for some of the apparent differences between intuitively distinct 'types' of funniness.

Finally, among the side-involvements of one amusing stimulus may be another such stimulus. Various elements within a single strip of perceived reality may provoke amusement, resulting in **combinations of funnies** which are nevertheless experienced as undivided episodes of hilarity. Producers of humour commonly concoct sophisticated structures, incorporating numerous funny elements, with which to entertain their audiences.

At this point, it becomes possible to state the proposed causal amusement hypothesis in full:

1. Amusement is provoked only and always when a perceiver observes that a self-claim put forward by a claimant has been discredited provided that,

    a) the perceiver does not identify himself as the claimant at the moment of perception.
    b) the perceiver is sufficiently involved (in both intensity and length of time) in a definition of events which places the discrediting in the foreground.

2. The degree of amusement experienced at any given moment varies,

    a) positively with the shortfall between self-claim made and reality implied by the discrediting fact
    b) negatively with the degree of identification between perceiver and claimant
    c) positively with the intensity of involvement by the perceiver in the relevant definition of events.
    d) negatively with the length of time expired since the perception of the discrediting

3. The quality of experience of any given moment during the manifestation of amusement varies with,

a) the degree of amusement experienced.

b) the degree and quality of each other sensation, emotion, and cognitive activity experienced, including additional amusement from other sources.

As suggested in Chapter Two, the validity of this account will depend in great measure on how useful it is found in describing the experience of amusement in everyday life. Another test, however, can be made of its usefulness in explaining varied phenomena within the discipline of humour research. In Part Three, I will derive a theoretical description of laughter and humour, the other two members of the laughter triad, from this causal explanation of amusement. The explanatory power of this alternative approach will hopefully be demonstrated by integrating broad areas of scattered research within a single conceptual scheme.

Situating Laughter:

Amusement, Laughter, and Humour in Everyday Life

PART THREE

In this concluding part of the thesis,
I provide an account of laughter and humour as communicative signs, describe and classify the effects of amusement, laughter and humour, and attempt to 'situate' the 'laughter triad' and its field on the basis of results.

Chapter Seven

A Hypothesis of Amusement

Chapter Eight

Effects of Amusement, Laughter, and Humour

Chapter Nine

Situating the Laughter Triad

Chapter Seven: Laughter and Humour

1. Introduction page 51

2. The Meaning and Deployment of Laughter Displays page 57

2.1. Laughter as Communication page 51
2.2. The Audience of Laughter page 58
2.3. The Meaning of Laughter page 61
2.4. Main Connotations page 67
2.4.1. The ‘Discredit’ Connotation page 67
2.4.2. The ‘Knowledge’ Connotation page 68
2.4.3. The 'Identity' Connotation page 70
2.4.4. The 'Involvement' Connotation page 71

2.5. The Display of Laughter page 73
2.5.1. The Natural Display page 74
2.5.2. The Officially Appropriate Display page 76
2.5.3. The Desired Display page 80
2.5.4. The Achieved Display page 83

3. The Meaning and Deployment of Humour Displays page 85

3.1. Humour as Communication page 85
3.1.1. Humour Pieces page 85
3.1.2. Humour Displays page 91

3.2. The Audience of Humour page 93
3.3. The Meaning of Humour page 94
3.4. The Display of Humour page 97

4. Conclusion page 99

1. Introduction

Part Three of the thesis, including this and the following two chapters, broadens the focus of inquiry from the emotion of amusement to the whole of the laughter triad, with a particular emphasis on the expressive signs of laughter and humour. It may be recalled that in Chapter One, these three terms were defined as follows:

Amusement: the pan-human emotion responsive to 'funny' or 'comical' objects.
Laughter (display): its visible and more-or-less faithful expression.
Humour (display): the attempt to stimulate amusement.

Imagine a superior told you a poor joke to which you laughed more loudly than you might have. According to these definitions, the telling of a joke would constitute the humour display; the resulting weak bodily reaction of hilarity (perceived subjectively as funniness and a tendency to smile or chuckle mildly) would be the episode of amusement; and the observable partly-feigned laughter emitted would be the laughter display.

The shift from amusement to laughter and humour signifies a step from more psychological to more sociological realms, from the private and abstract to the observable and concrete, from cause-effect explanation to the world of human decision-making and rational action. In Part Two, no single case of amusement was offered for dissection. Rather, a concept of this elusive emotional state was distilled from innumerable real-life events, and from our own subjective experience of similar events. On the other hand, laughter displays --the ‘ha-ha’ sounds, the shaking body, the open mouth, the upturned lips-- and humour displays --telling jokes, pulling faces, being sarcastic, performing a stage comedy-- are objective phenomena commonly encountered in everyday life and easily subject to recording and analysis. The following transcript from a recorded conversation provides examples of both:

Lynn: Do you need me to help you dry?
Joe: If you want to get in the *dish*washer. [humour display]
Penny: Heh *heh* heh heh. [laughter display]
Gail: Huh huh oh yeah. [laughter display]
Lynn: Oh you're putting them in the dishwasher. Okay.

(Norrick, 1994: 22; bracketed comments added)

Amusement here is not visible, though we might suggest three elements of Joe's humour display which could conceivably trigger off hilarity: (1) the mild discredit of Lynn's universal self-claim to correct social frame management, by asking to dry dishes despite the existence of a dishwasher at their disposal[1]; (2) the serious discredit of a fictitious Lynn's self-claim to correct social frame management, by the absurd request to get into the dishwasher and 'help with the drying' there; (3) the serious (but temporary) discredit of the perceiver's self-claim to correct social frame management, by accepting the absurd notion that Lynn actually meant her offer to help in the sense suggested by Joe. We can imagine and identify with the amusement which might result from such a joke; perhaps even experience some of our own. The displays of humour ("If you want to get in the *dish*washer") and laughter ("Heh *heh* heh heh"; "Huh huh"), on the other, hand, are readily observable. The data of social scientists --particularly those employing ethnographic methods and those most concerned with social interaction and communication-- is often scattered with such examples.

Another difference concerns the type of explanation required for these phenomena. Whereas episodes of amusement were attributed to an automatic, unconscious, inherited psychological reflex mechanism, laughter and humour are (or can be) deployed consciously. From the above conversational snippet, we cannot know whether Penny and Gail experienced any actual amusement, or to what extent their displays of laughter reflect felt emotion. But we can imagine that they *may have* altered the timing, volume, extension, intensity, and form of the display, for all sorts of reasons: for instance, appreciating the joke to stay in Joe's favour, limiting expressed mirth to

[1] Lynn additionally appears to be aware of its availability, as she later comments "Oh you're putting them in the dishwasher" rather than "Oh there's a dishwasher".

avoid offending Lynn, or adapting volume to the size of the room. In the case of Joe's teasing remark, it can be seen even less problematically as an intentional communicative act. Laughter and humour displays may be influenced by personality, culture, goals, norms, power, and other pressures on willed behaviour. They may be used strategically by groups and individuals, and they may be shaped by the forces of cultural and socio-structural change. It is also worth noting, though it will become evident in the coming pages, that these phenomena have been the object of substantial empirical research.

In this chapter, I will expand upon the initial definitions given for humour and laughter displays, which will be treated as communicative expressions. I will comment on the relationship between the displaying individual and his audience; suggest the meanings which, as signs, they transmit to observers; and examine the process by which an individual carries out a display move. This will prepare the ground for an analysis of the effects and uses of amusement, laughter, and humour in Chapter Eight.

Laughter and humour displays can be analyzed as signs with nearly synonymous meanings. Both refer to an alleged episode of amusement either experienced at the time of display or possible at some time for the displaying individual and/or for others.

> Laughter (at X) = "I am experiencing amusement at cause X"
>
> Humour (directed at X) = "I can experience amusement at cause X (and so can you)"

In the preceding example Penny's "Heh *heh* heh heh" and Gail's "Huh huh" commit them to claims that they have experienced some amusement at the immediately preceding comment. This comment itself, "If you want to get in the *dish*washer," which in context cannot be taken as a serious proposal, is a humour display which also commits Joe to the claim that he himself finds this notion funny. The dual reference to amusement provides a common link to the concepts discussed in the previous chapters. It also suggests that a full understanding of the effects and uses of laughter and humour --which follow from the interpretation of their meanings-- requires their grounding in a theory of amusement. If every participant of social interaction intuitively 'knows' the conditions for amusement (perceiving a self-claim discredit, not being identified as the claimant,

being involved in the discredit frame,...) then the meaning of laughter (an expression of supposed real amusement) and the meaning of humour (an expression of potential amusement) include such implications as:

- The **discredit connotation**: "According to my current interpretation, claimant C's self-claim S has been discredited by fact F"
- The **knowledge connotation**: "I possess the knowledge necessary to appreciate the amusing elements referred to by the laughter"
- The **identity connotation**: "I do not feel identified as the claimant(s) discredited"
- The **involvement connotation**: "I am (or can be) sufficiently involved in the funny elements of the situation to enjoy amusement"

Humour displays include an additional submeaning:

- The **entertainment connotation**: "I am delivering a communication which can produce amusement at cause Y in my target sharing audience"

With their displays of humour and laughter, any of the following meanings can be read into Gail, Penny, and Joe's displays, either by the observing social scientists or by each other:

- (Discredit): the real Lynn's offer to help with drying mildly discredits her universal mental self-claims; (and/or) the fictional Lynn's offer to get into the dishwasher to help dry seriously discredits her universal mental self-claims; (and/or) my fleeting belief that Lynn actually meant her offer in this sense discredits my own universal mental self-claims.
- (Knowledge): I know enough about the functioning of dishwashers, the meaning of 'helping out with the drying', about Lynn's sanity, etc., so as to appreciate the various funny elements of the situation.

- (Identity): I do not feel identified as the fictional irrational Lynn, the real Lynn, or the irrational part of myself that erred.
- (Involvement) I am involved in the ongoing conversation and (in the case of the audience) in the funny aspects of Joe's comment.
- (Entertainment -- for Joe only) My comment will be found funny by Gail and Penny (and perhaps by Lynn?).

The fact that Lynn does not exhibit laughter (or at least audible laughter that was integrated into the transcript), could also be analyzed in terms of these connotations. In this case it is most likely that the fact part of the humour is directed at herself may have prevented her from enjoying the joke (i.e., the identity condition does not hold).

These various elements of meaning may result, through the process of communication, in any number of interpersonal and social effects. Consequently, they must enter the reckoning of actors as they monitor and manage their expressive output in line with their goals. Effects and uses of laughter and humour, the subject of much humour research, will be treated in Chapter Eight. This third part of the thesis can thus be viewed as an additional test of the model of amusement presented. I will seek to demonstrate the usefulness of the explanation in organizing the field of humour research and interpreting its findings within a single coherent scheme.

The actual process of display will also be discussed. For both laughter and humour (as for any public act), an actor should take into account the requirements of the official framework of interpretation shared with other participants before making his move. Thus we may speak of an **officially required** display ('what laughter/humour is appropriate'?), which may be in conflict with the display **desired** by the actor ('what laughter/humour do I want to exhibit'?) --influenced additionally by his aims and the distribution of power. In the case of laughter, expression is complicated by the **natural** display ('what amusement do I feel?'), the bodily signal which would be expressed spontaneously due to the current level of aroused amusement. These and other factors finally converge to produce what I will call the **achieved** display ('what laughter/humour did I actually exhibit?'), the display which actually arises and becomes available for observation: "Heh *heh* heh heh." In the case of Joe, Peggy, and Gail's displays, as in

many informal interchanges between friends, it is likely that natural, official, desired, and achieved displays are closely equivalent. At formal parties and encounters between persons of different status, such an equivalence is relatively rare.

2. The Meaning and Deployment of Laughter Displays

2.1. Laughter as Communication

Amusement, like all emotions, shakes the human body into actions which --unless hidden or suppressed-- are legible by other human actors. I have reserved the term **laughter** or **laughter display** to identify the visible and audible signals of apparent uncontrolled amusement: the grin and (in cases of relatively intense amusement) the quivering lower jaw, the spasmodic movements of the upper body, and the 'ha-ha' sounds. These signals, however, are not only the endpoint of a physiological mechanism; they may also be the starting point of interpersonal communication. Laughter, to observers, conveys meaning. It can be analyzed as a communicative sign[1].

As signs, emotional expressions are interesting in two ways. Firstly, because despite the appearance of spontaneity, they are in fact subject to voluntary control by actors. Laughter may be manifested in the complete absence of amusement, or may fail to correspond faithfully with the degree and temporal development of the emotion:

> Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
> At all his jokes, for many a joke had he.
>
> (Oliver Goldsmith;
> in La France, 1983: 1)

Amusement itself may also be 'managed' to increase or decrease the production of laughter according to the actor's purposes (see Hochschild, 1979). Secondly, emotional expressions are interesting signs in that, unlike linguistic signs, they are only *partly* controllable by actors. Adjusting bodily reaction to desired response is a learned skill that must work within the limits of the individual's cognitive and bodily faculties. Attempts to control the display of laughter may be unsuccessful. It may 'burst out' against the subject's wishes.

[1] Numerous social scientists have independently proposed such a view (Martineau, 1972: 102).

For this reason, observers attribute a greater credibility to such signs than to words and overt gestures. Emotional expressions are considered less controllable, less intentional, and thus, more trustworthy signals of actual attitudes and mental states. In case of incongruence between spoken word and feeling display, it is the latter that will be trusted. Actors, however, are aware of such interpretative strategies, and may devote substantial energy to improving their emotional control. Such efforts, in turn, reduce the trustworthiness of visible facial and bodily expression (See Goffman, 1969: 58-70).

2.2. The Audience of Laughter

The audience (i.e., the set of perceivers) of a laughter display can vary in size from a single member --the actor himself--, to a small group of participants in the situation, to untold masses through televised images or published verbal descriptions. In the typical case, actor and audience are co-present in the same situation --i.e., simultaneously within each other's observational range-- and even within the same encounter --sharing the same focus of attention. Nevertheless, it is possible for observation to occur at a distance, or merely without the laugher's awareness. In Chapters Five and Six, for instance, the laughter displays of several individuals were recounted, such as the giggling of Jo Anne Williams Bennett and her friend Jackie while discussing the “embarrassments of being female” or the explosion of hilarity in the pool hall where D.M. Clark tried to purchase his first condoms. A few minutes of watching television or the diners at a restaurant will provide further examples. Even in more conventional situated interaction, however, targeting displays can be complicated by the possibility of 'virtual' participants. These include eavesdroppers, non-present friends of observers, or others who may come to know of the events that take place in the situation (i.e., through gossip).

It is possible, therefore, to distinguish between the **target** and the **effective** audience of laughter. The target audience is the set of observers whom the laugher hopes will perceive the behaviour and interpret it as such; the effective audience, those who

actually do. Unintended laughter, brought on by amusement which is not successfully suppressed, can be defined as a display which has no target audience.

The target audience of a laughter display is commonly equivalent to the subset with whom the laugher claims or wishes to share the alleged amusement: the target **sharing** audience. This may include the humourist who brought about or identified the amusing stimulus, like-minded individuals sharing the same focus of attention, or those laughing already. The equivalence of target and target sharing audience does not always hold, however: a display may overtly exclude the butt of a joke, or a section of the audience who would not be able to share the amusement. A distinction can similarly be drawn between the effective audience and the effective sharing audience --those members of the effective audience who actually experience the amusement at the object pointed to by the laugher.

The American President William H. Taft was once giving a speech when a cabbage was thrown at him from the audience, missing its mark. Taft's witty reply, "It appears that one of my opponents has lost his head," was greeted with a roar of approving laughter. This laughter was meant to be heard throughout the hall, its target audience being everyone present in the situation. Its target sharing audience, on the other hand, was restricted to the subset who would agree that Taft's political opponents could be referred to as 'cabbage heads,' excluding at least the thrower of the vegetable and perhaps other like-minded individuals present. The effective audience of this display was in fact much larger than those present in the hall, as it includes many persons who did not attend the political speech, including the present reader of this thesis. The effective sharing audience of this roar of laughter includes those, both in the hall and without, who also found Taft's joke amusing. It may also have included some of Taft's opponents, not included in the target sharing audience, who found his quip amusing despite themselves; and it may have excluded some members of the target sharing audience who despite supporting Taft did not appreciate the joke. (See Table 1 for a summary of this example).

Type of Audience	*Identity of Audience*
Target	All those present in hall
Target Sharing	Taft supporters in the hall
Effective	All those present in the hall + Others who came to know of events
Effective Sharing	Observers who were amused, within and without the hall

Table 1. Identity of the four audience types for the laughter display which took place in response to William H. Taft's 'cabbage head' joke.

2.3. The Meaning of Laughter

If we consider laughter as a sign, we encounter the problem of its interpretation: What does laughter mean? Or rather, as the interpretative possibilities are varied, what might it mean? As will be seen, the question of meaning is tied to a number of further basic issues in the field of humour studies, including the effects which laughter displays might have when deployed in public, the uses to which they may be put, and the dilemmas facing an actor when considering what emotional displays he wishes to deploy.

Language is a system of relatively arbitrary relations between certain sounds -- 'house'-- and certain culturally-specific concepts --'a building for dwelling in, usually inhabited by a single nuclear family' (Saussure, 1916). Translations of words from one language to another are never exact, as words apply to concepts within local systems of cultural classification. There is no universal 'meaning' for some word such as 'house,' as nomadic hunter-gatherers use only temporary huts (or nothing at all), and in other societies dwellings provide shelter for large extended families, or are used for additional purposes. In the case of pan-human signs of feeling and emotion, however, a universal meaning can be provided, even though these displays can be used consciously and intentionally in a way similar to language. Cries and facial grimaces indicating 'pain' refer to experiences similar in all corners of humanity, no matter what additional interpretations or values are associated with the concept. I will not dwell for the moment on the variety of cultural meanings and associations relevant to laughter[2], but rather on this universal root present in all cultural understandings of the sign.

The meaning of laughter can be stated simply. Whatever else it may imply, a laughter display by a given individual signifies "I am experiencing amusement of X degree [at cause Y]," or, to be more complete, "I am experiencing the bodily process of amusement (of X degree), including both pleasant subjective sensations of funniness and any spontaneous bodily manifestations visible to yourself (and evident also to me)."

This bodily statement will be either close to the true state of affairs, more or less incongruent with reality, or completely false. Amusement may or may not actually have taken place; it may have been of greater or lesser intensity than would seem from the

display; it may have been due to the alleged cause or to a different source. Laughter represents a biographical self-claim regarding bodily events which no ordinary observer can confirm with full certainty. Regardless of its truth, however, as a statement its meaning is constant. I will refer to this most evident surface meaning as the **denotation of laughter**.

The fact and degree of claimed amusement is indicated by the characteristic facial expression, bodily movements, and sounds of laughter, which correspond to greater or lesser intensities of the emotion (See Chapter One, 3.2). The cause of the alleged amusement may be pointed to by the direction of the actor's gaze, the immediate context (i.e., salient events directly preceding the laughter), and/or additional communications (a pointing finger, the upraised or otherwise displayed source itself, a verbal identification). Though it is possible for the source of amusement not to be indicated by the laughing individual, or for this indication not to be clear, in practice most laughter does refer to an explicitly identified or otherwise obvious cause. Moreover, when this aspect of the laughter is not understood, an observer feels that his understanding is incomplete. Full reception of the message requires comprehension of the alleged cause of claimed amusement.

It will be noticed that in order to fully understand the denotation of laughter, comprehension of the term 'amusement' is central. Most individuals probably do not develop a sophisticated cognitive description of this concept --i.e., a description that could be shared and verbalized. Nevertheless, all possess a profound intuitive understanding of what is or is not funny, why something might be or not be amusing, and what funniness consists of at the experiential level, among other relevant features. Each of us ‘knows,’ at some primitive level of knowing, what the state of being amused signifies and entails.

A theory of amusement (such as that proposed in Chapters Four to Six), as an attempt to formalize some aspects of such intuitive knowledge, consequently makes certain claims regarding the meaning of specific laughter displays to observing individuals. For a superiority theorist, laughter presumably signifies to people that the laugher suddenly feels superior to some diminished other; for an incongruity theorist, that

[2] Some discussion of the variety of cultural interpretations will be provided in Chapter Nine, 3.3.

an incongruity has been detected or resolved. But these presumptions will fit more or less well with how people actually do interpret laughter, according to their first-hand experience of amusement. Such corollaries of amusement theory can be tested against the actual meanings attributed to laughter by actors, and by the effects and uses which result from these interpretations.

From the denotation of laughter suggested, and according to the causal hypothesis developed in the previous three chapters, a number of separate and noteworthy secondary meanings can be derived. These **connotations of laughter** are implied in every display of this type:

- The **discredit connotation**: "According to my current interpretation, claimant C's self-claim S has been discredited by fact F"
- The **knowledge connotation**: "I possess the knowledge necessary to appreciate the amusing elements referred to by the laughter"
- The **identity connotation**: "I do not feel identified as the claimant(s) discredited"
- The **involvement connotation**: "I am sufficiently involved in the funny elements of the situation to enjoy amusement"

These connotations could be expanded upon, and others arrived at, by specifying more fully (as has been done in Chapters Four, Five, and Six) the various implications of terms such as 'self-claim,' 'discredit,' and 'involvement.' It suffices, however, as a starting point for the analysis of laughter uses and effects.

Clearly, an observer of laughter does not receive its message in such a cumbersome and explicit format. Indeed, he would be unable to verbalize much of this information, or might express it in radically divergent terms. Nevertheless, participants of interaction do appear to assimilate the various elements of this message when interpreting the meaning of a laughter display. This fact becomes especially apparent when misunderstanding or disagreement exists over the funniness of a specific alleged cause of amusement.

For example, a news item recently filled the pages of the Italian press for a number of weeks (January 1997), the throwing of rocks from a motorway overpass by an unidentified group of youths, causing the death of Letizia Berdini as well as danger and damage to other drivers and vehicles. One newspaper entitled a story "There were three of them, throwing stones and laughing", quoting from an eyewitness report (La Repubblica, 3/1/1997)[3]. In the article, the image of the "killers" on the overpass, cheering and laughing after every 'hit' is juxtaposed with the human tragedy of the Berdini family. The laughter of these individuals here, as all laughter, communicates to observers that the laughers are sufficiently involved in the funny aspects of a scene to be amused, disregarding or unaffected enough by others (See Chapter Six, 3.2.2). In this case, the actual killing of another human being, as well as the general possibility of death and damage to property, trust, and health of numerous individuals, are included within the disregarded 'other aspects' of the situation. Thus, to readers of this article, the involvement connotation of this laughter display is particularly salient, as most of them would not have been able to experience such emotional distance from suffering --in fact would see it as immoral. The laughter of the stone-throwers seems (and is meant to seem) the epitome of heartless cruelty and evil. The fact that the intended readers should react in this way, however, reflects not only their moral attitudes, but also the intuitive knowledge of what amusement entails --including emotional distance from the misfortune of others, when relevant.

Most individuals would not describe the cause of alleged amusement pointed to by a laughter display in terms of 'discredited self-claims'. Nevertheless, their intuitive knowledge of the causes of amusement may be congruent with such terms. For example, if I witness another's tickling, I might offer 'tickling' as the cause of observed laughter, as might all other participants in the scene. If I tell a joke and others laugh, both they and I might agree that 'the joke' or 'the punchline' was the source of humour. Though sufficient for ordinary purposes, these attributions are superficial. In each case, all observers have a further intuitive understanding of what 'tickling' or 'being amused by a joke' entails. These intuitive understandings are built on years of personal subjective experience with

[3] With reference to the previous discussion, this newspaper article brings readers into the effective audience of a laughter display originally targeted by the stone-throwers for each other. Needless to say,

the emotion of amusement, and of observing signs of a presumably identical experience in others. As each of us 'knows' that being tickled is amusing, understands exactly in which way this is so, and assumes others do as well, there is little need to trace the causes of amusement further during ordinary social interaction. The existence of a deeper understanding, however, is supported by the facts that (1) professional and lay humour theorists can (and do, at times) argue over how to characterize the specific elements in the interpretation of a joke or in the experience of tickling that produces amusement; (2) participants of interaction often engage in debate and reflection over what a particular instance of laughter reveals about the laugher. A good theory of amusement should provoke in its readers the recognition of their intuitive understandings of what 'funny' refers to, and this should provide a solid basis for an analysis of laughter's meanings.

A laughter display may be qualified by additional verbal or non-verbal messages. For example, it may be delivered explicitly as 'fake' (i.e., acted) laughter, as both Ken and Al do in the following transcript of a conversation after the punchline of what they consider to be a 'bad' joke:

45.Ken:	...third girl, walks up t'her --why didn'	
46.	ya *say* anything last night. W'*you* told me it was	
47.	always impolite t'talk with my mouth full,	
	(2.0)	
48. Ken:	hh hyok hyok,	
	(1.0)	
49. Ken:	Hyok.	
	(3.0)	
50. Al:	HA-HA-HA-HA-HA,	(Sacks, 1974: 339)

Sacks characterizes the laughter of these two participants as "mirthless" and "specifically mocking". How is this fakeness apparent to Sacks (or to other participants of interaction)? Presumably, the rhythm, intonation, and perhaps facial expression of the laughings were too distant from a typical response to be taken seriously. Indeed, the transcript itself conveys some of the cues provided by the imitators of laughter. 'HA-HA-HA-HA-HA' seems much too close to the stereotype of laughter, with a beat much too

---

most of the effective audience will be non-sharing.

precise. ‘Hyok’ is an even more evident transformation of the natural sounds of laughter. Comparison with more spontaneous examples reveals the difference:

8. Roger:	Ehhh//hehh hhh hhh	
(...)		
51. Ken:	ehh heh heh // hehhh	
52. (Al):	hehhhehhheh hhh	(Sacks, 338-339)

When a laugh is qualified in this way, the original meaning of laughter continues to be relevant, but undergoes a transformation: “I pretend that ("I am experiencing amusement of X degree [at cause Y]")”. The implication of such an utterance, indeed, is that the laugher is positively *not* amused.

There are other ways in which laughter may be qualified, by intentional or unintentional signs. Difficulties or incompetence in feigning a display may be evident to observers, who may doubt its authenticity. In response to a 'sick' (but allegedly amusing) joke or occurrence, a participant may combine laughter with signs of disgust such as a grimace or 'yuk'/'ugh' sound. Cruel or tragic elements could be appreciated with similar expressions or even with verbal statements such as "that's not funny," "that's awful," or "poor thing." By covering his eyes with his hand and lowering/shaking his head, a laugher could convey simultaneous embarrassment. Explicit pointers to the source of amusement may also be offered, verbal or non-verbal, particularly when the source is ambiguous or when an apparent source wishes to be denied: "No, Butch, I wasn't laughing at your car, I was just thinking about something that happened to me the other day.".

2.4. Main Connotations

Specific instances of laughter can be given countless meanings. If Tom laughs after Jill's mocking comment about Frank, different observers could give a range of interpretations: 'Tom is amused,' 'Tom likes Jill', 'Tom is trying to get something from Jill', 'Tom and Jill have similar ideas about people,' 'Tom thinks Frank is ridiculous in some way,' 'Tom hates Frank', 'Tom is drunk', 'Tom has forgotten his troubles', 'Tom is heartless' (for laughing at such a cruel joke), 'Tom's English is quite good' (or he would not have understood the clever play on words), 'Tom has no tact' (or he would not have laughed in front of Frank's friend Brian), 'Tom is listening to the conversation', 'Tom is pretending to have understood the joke', 'Tom is hiding his distaste for such a comment'.

It will be my contention, however, that such interpretations can be derived from the denotation of laughter proposed above, and from our intuitive understandings of amusement, when considering a specific situation from a specific angle. What follows is a short description of the four fundamental derivations introduced in the previous section, the ‘discredit,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘identity,’ and ‘involvement’ connotations. The most commonly cited effects and uses of laughter displays can be traced directly to these four sub-meanings, as will be done in Chapter Eight (4).

2.4.1. The 'Discredit' Connotation

A laugher communicates that he has found something funny. Following the given definition for amusement (See Chapter Four), he thus declares to have detected the discredit of a self-claim made by a specific claimant. One meaning of a laughter display, therefore, can be stated as follows:

> "According to my current interpretation, claimant D's self-claim C has been discredited by fact F".

An observer may be already aware of the values for D, C, and F, or they may be immediately apparent given the current circumstances. For example, immediately

previous to the laughter, a friend may have clumsily dropped an entire tray of food on the floor, with much clattering of cutlery and smashing of plates. In this case, the abstract formulation is fleshed out along some such lines: "According to my current interpretation, Jamie's universal self-claim to competence in handling objects has been discredited by the dropping of his tray on the floor."

On the other hand, it could happen that the source of amusement is not immediately clear, the values for D, C, and F remaining unknown. The above meaning structure would then for the moment remain in some such abstract form for the observer who --if interested-- could investigate further. Partial information may be available. The laugher may be seen to direct his gaze or even his pointing finger at a passing group of foreign tourists, apparently amusing in some respect, even if the exact nature of the alleged discredit remains temporarily unclear. The laugher may conversely reveal the nature of the discredit before the discrediting facts are known: "Look at Bill in this photograph; you can pick him out by his ridiculous haircut!!". If a common focus of attention is shared by a group of participants (i.e., in an 'encounter'), laughter generally refers to the current or immediately preceding event in the common focus of attention: the revelation of a 'full house' by a poker player, the last words spoken by a speaker in a conversation, the unfolding comedic shenanigans on the television set[4]. Sometimes, of course, such situational clues are insufficient for the observer to understand the full significance of the laughter, even when the source of alleged amusement has been pinpointed with some precision. Loud laughter by a whole group may strongly indicate that the 'punchline' to a joke has taken place, without the observer having yet understood what precisely is to be found funny.

2.4.2. The 'Knowledge' Connotation

[4] Harvey Sacks comes to the following conclusion on the basis of a close examination of recorded conversations: "laughings are very locally responsive -- if done on the completion of some utterance they affiliate to last utterance and if done within some utterance they affiliate to its current state of development." (Sacks, 1974: 348)

Laughter, as a claim to having been amused, implies the existence of certain mental possessions --i.e., frameworks of interpretation (See Chapter Four 3.1.1). A second sub-meaning of laughter can be stated as follows:

> "I possess the knowledge necessary to appreciate the amusing elements referred to by the laughter."

Let us consider, for instance, the following opening sentence from a (serious) novel by Bulwer-Lytton, which Scott Rice considers laughably poor writing:

> It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents --except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness.
>
> (Rice, 1986: ix)

A person who laughs after reading this passage, as an example of cliched and melodramatic prose, expresses his possession of (1) a good understanding of the English language, (2) the ability to read, (3) knowledge of the self-claims attaching to a writer of prose, including economy, dramatic restraint, and originality, and (4) a code by which to assess the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of such self-claims.

Laughter always implies the knowledge of both the making of relevant self-claims and of the conditions for their fulfillment: in the case of independent self-claims, the fact that the relevant claim was made, and its content; in the case of role self-claims, the requirements of the relevant role; in the case of universal self-claims, the basics of human competence (as judged by the laugher's culture).

Laughter at satire, caricature, irony, puns, tricks, and jokes expresses knowledge of the relevant frameworks inappropriately mixed or distorted:

Where does electricity come from?

The wall. (Doug Kehoe, in Davis 1993, 75)

Someone who, by a display of laughter, claims to 'catch' this joke, thereby claims to know that (1) Electricity is cabled to our buildings (and walls) from power stations, which generate it in various ways; (2) Most people's main outlet to electric power is from sockets in the walls of buildings; (3) Questions of the type 'where does X come from?' (especially when delivered with an air of puzzled mystery) require answers relative to 'final causes' (in this case about the nature of electricity, its generation, etc...) and not to immediate ones which are well-known by everyone.

Interestingly, laughter at this joke may also imply an admission of a *gap* in the listener's knowledge: his ignorance of where electricity does actually 'come from' in the final analysis. It is this ignorance which allows him to accept the initial question as puzzling, setting him up for a risible assent with the erroneous notion that electricity is actually generated in the wall behind the socket (or, alternatively, for a risible failure to come up with the answer to an obvious question).

As well as these specific bits of knowledge or ignorance, of course, the listener further claims to understand the conventions of joke-telling, without which he might have failed to adopt the necessary 'fool-me' attitude.

Non-laughter in a situation which an observer perceives as amusing does not necessarily signify that the serious individual lacks some of the vital mental possessions. Nevertheless, this is one possible interpretation.

2.4.3. The 'Identity' Connotation

A person who laughs expresses his identity-distance from the target of alleged amusement. He states,

"I do not feel identified as the claimant(s) discredited."

He purports to be unaffected or insufficiently affected by embarrassment, and thus to be able to enjoy amusement at the discredit of another (See Chapter Six, 2).

In a large number of cases, such a meaning will be too obvious to warrant notice. When two friends laugh over a new piece of gossip regarding a third party, there is normally little question of either being touched by the discredit. This connotation of laughter achieves its relevance when the person laughing has some potential link with the discredited party: when he gaffes or causes a 'scene,' when he is the butt of a joke, belongs to a mocked social category, has familiar or other ties of affinity with a dishonoured individual, or makes similar self-claims which might well be challenged. In such cases, the laughter display expresses distance from the associated self, role, or person.

Chapter Five (2.3.4), for instance, included the example of ‘wind-up’ victims, who commonly laugh upon discovery that they have been deceived. Their laughter communicates, among other things, that it is not the victim’s ‘real self’ who has been gullible and has behaved improperly, that normally his interpretations of events are accurate and trustworthy, and his actions appropriate and measured. A victim who, on the other hand, merely blushed and displayed mortification at the end of such a joke, would disclose that he considers himself identified as the discredited claimant.

2.4.4. The 'Involvement' Connotation

Laughter expresses a certain level of engrossment in the framework within which discredit has taken place (See Chapter Six, 3). The following is communicated:

> "I am sufficiently involved in the funny elements of the situation to enjoy amusement"

Again, this signification is often unremarkable. It becomes salient when laughter is exhibited in spite of clear obstacles to involvement. One example has been provided in the previous section, the newspaper report of the jeering motorway stone-throwers. In this case, involvement in the funny side of events jarred with additional emotion-relevant elements of the situation, namely the death of a young woman and the potential damage to property, physical injury and/or death of other human beings. Thus, the display was portrayed as a sign of cruelty and heartlessness. It could be speculated that to the stone-throwers themselves, this sub-meaning of involvement may have been equally salient, the distance shown from potential victims interpreted as signs of 'toughness' and a valued disregard/disdain for others.

2.5. The Display of Laughter

The meaning of a laughter display refers to its *alleged* cause: i.e., unmanaged amusement. A further question concerns its *actual* cause: 'when and how is laughter displayed?'. Laughter does not transparently reveal an individual's emotional state, the granting of such information not always being in his best interests. The margin of control human beings have over emotional expression allows for numerous additional influences to become relevant.

The question of laughter's expression is a complex one[5], involving a number of conceptually distinct levels: emotional, situational, cognitive, and factual. Each is relevant to a potential or attributed expression of laughter, a stage in the process of display (See Figure 1). The final and observable laughter display I will refer to as the **achieved** display, which may differ from the **desired** display of an actor, the ideal expression towards which he strives but does not always reach. We can also distinguish between this personal ideal and the situational ideal, the **officially required** display, which is the expression or range of expressions that would be considered appropriate to the current social situation. Finally, it is possible to speak of the **natural** display of laughter, the level of laughter which would emerge spontaneously due to any amusement present at the time (See Chapter One, 3.1).

Imagine, for instance, that a joke is told in a group situation which a certain participant finds extremely funny. His natural display, if unmodified, would be very intense. This display would fit well with the officially required display for joke audiences, which is generally a certain level of appreciative laughter. This particular listener, however, may aim for a desired display of seriousness, for example to insult or show dislike for the joke teller (perhaps after a recent argument). His achieved display, therefore, might be more intense than he might have desired, less intense than it might have been if amusement had been freely released, and within the acceptable limits of the official definition of the situation. Actors often consider these various levels of display

[5] This complexity has not often been recognized or treated in the literature (La France, 1983: 2). In much traditional humour theory and research, observable laughter seems to be equated with genuine amusement. In the field of conversation analysis, on the other hand, amusement often seems to be ignored altogether, and laughter treated as a sign which is unproblematically employed by speakers at will.

quite consciously, and even bring them into conversation, as when struggles to 'keep a straight face' in the classroom, or attempts to laugh at 'awful' jokes, are recounted.

In the following four subsections, each of these levels of display will be discussed in turn: natural, officially required, desired, and achieved.

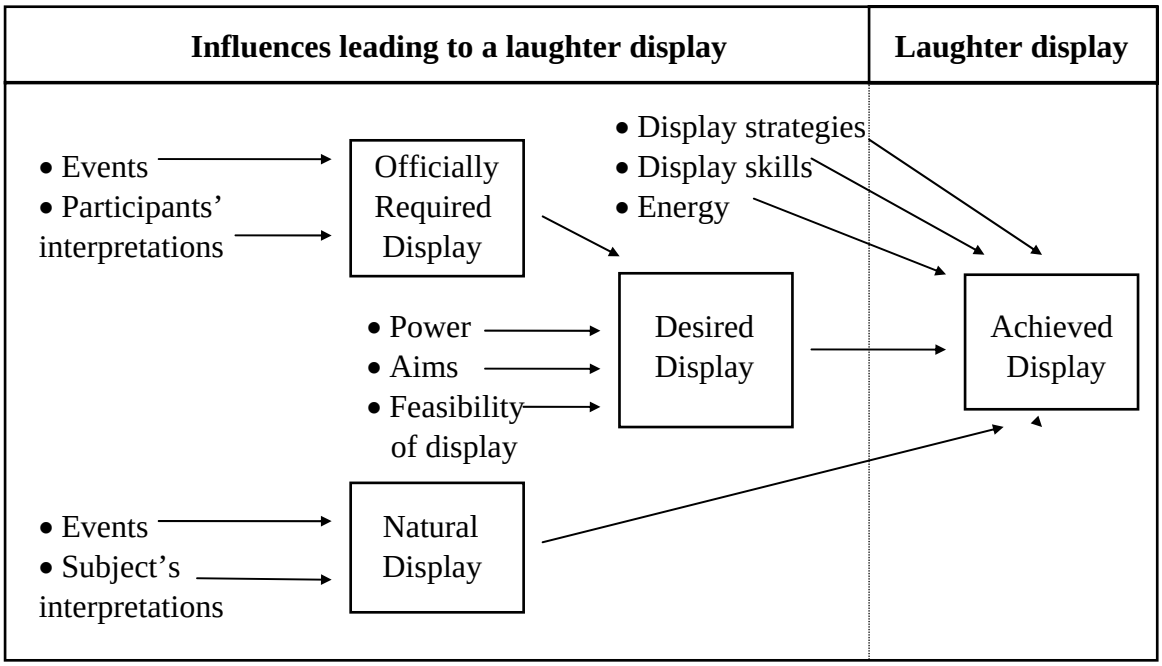

Figure 1. The display of laughter.

2.5.1. The Natural Display[6]

Amusement has been defined as an emotion which includes both a subjective feeling of 'funniness' and a set of bodily events, some of which are readily observable. The 'natural display' of laughter refers to the latter, most evident, signs of amusement. This natural expression, of whatever degree, is only a potential manifestation. Like the ideal flight path of a feather, it develops fully only in a vacuum, in this case a social and

[6] The adjective 'natural' here refers to the innateness and universality of the amusement emotion itself. Though no less unsatisfactory than other choices (ie, 'genuine', 'emotional', 'transparent'...), some of the undesirable connotations of the term should be specifically mentioned.

As has been seen in Chapters Four to Six, the cognitive process which sets off amusement relies on socially inherited and situationally relevant frameworks of interpretation. Thus, this 'natural' expression is in fact an expression of a 'social' judgement.

It is ironic also that the 'natural' display should be most observable under highly artificial -- 'unnatural'-- conditions.

emotional vacuum. Though it is one of the major influences that may affect an achieved display of laughter, the natural display is never or very rarely visible or audible, for two reasons.

Firstly, it is most likely to be observable when least likely to be observed: when the individual believes himself to be alone (or perhaps in the exclusive presence of highly trusted participants). In these cases achieved expression may closely resemble natural expression, laughter being more 'spontaneous.' As amusement most often occurs in social situations, however, numerous pressures normally interfere with the spontaneous flow of emotion.

Secondly, the common presence of simultaneous emotion during an occurrence of amusement (See Chapter Six, 3-4) will distort an otherwise 'pure' laughter display. Competing emotions and other somatic processes (i.e., pain, digestion, nervous tension) affect the same face and body on which the movements and sounds of laughter are displayed.

Amusement, and thus also the natural display of laughter, is the result of a particular interpretation of events by a subject (See Figure 1), an assessment which has been specified in detail in chapters Four to Six.

There seem to exist highly localized areas of the brain which either trigger off or convey the neural signals which result in amusement. According to Duchowny, stimulating the hypothalamus and diencephalic region provokes "well-developed laughter" (1983: 97). The natural display of laughter at any one moment could be defined as the observable bodily manifestations provoked by the neural signals from such a localized amusement centre/pathway, in the absence of additional neural activity.

The distinction can perhaps be made more clear with a real-life example. Joy Fielding (in Kurc, 1990) has written an autobiographical account of an embarrassing situation that happened to her during a play in which she was performing. At a certain moment of the play, a song was supposed to be heard on a radio --but the tape which was to supply the music did not work. Fielding improvised by singing the song herself, despite having a poor singing voice:

> Occupying centre stage, my shoulders thrust proudly back, my head loftily raised, I belted into that fragile little hymn for all I was worth. The audience grew absolutely still. And then, mid-way through my performance, I became aware of muffled sounds from somewhere behind me. I turned around --still singing-- to see [co-stars] Hersh and Nomi absolutely doubled over with laughter.
>
> (p. 42)

In this case, it is clear from the 'muffled' character of Hersh and Nomi's laughter that Fielding's fellow performers were struggling to conceal a natural display which could not be repressed despite their efforts. Fielding's poor singing, and her false claim to be following the script, constituted hilarious circumstances of discredit which elicited amusement too strong to conceal.

2.5.2. The Officially Appropriate Display

Laughter, as a signal that a self-claim's discredit has taken place, is the expression of an alleged individual cognitive judgement (See Chapter Four, 3). It has been suggested that this judgement is subject to social influence through the frames of interpretation central to the assessment process. For instance, Hersh and Nomi's laughter, mentioned above, referred to amusement that depended on ideas of what constitutes 'good singing' and what constitutes a 'proper performance' of the play in course. These cognitive frames are to a greater or lesser extent social in origin, and become relevant to the individual according to the social situation in which he locates himself. Additionally, however, the expression of the judgement through laughter undergoes further social pressure, as dictated by the 'official' framework of interpretation (See Chapter Three, 3.3).

During social interaction, each participant adjusts his behaviour to numerous situational requirements, in line with certain shared understandings of what is going on, who each actor is, and what role each is playing within the various active proceedings. These shared understandings comprise the official framework or definition of the situation, constructed on the basis of the unfolding events and the interpretations of these

events by participants (See Figure 1), including general social understandings, overt role membership of participants, time and setting, past self-claims and arrangements made by participants, and current decisions regarding rules and selves (See Goffman, 1974). In Joy Fielding's anecdote, for instance, the situational context was defined as 'the public performance of a stage play,' with all the behavioural norms and expectations associated with the theatre, audiences, and related features of such events.

Participants who outwardly commit themselves to the official framework often also adopt their version of this frame as their own cognitive outlook on the situation, at least to some extent and for the duration of interaction. They attempt to become involved in the perspective openly agreed to by all participants, so that there will be minimal discord between their individual cognitive frame and the official frame. Nevertheless, any individual will occasionally be unable or unwilling to adopt some aspects of the official definition as his own at a cognitive level, even while committing himself to it outwardly. Some individuals may routinely maintain such a distance in certain situations (Secret service agents representing an extreme example).

Laughter, as a behaviour, is subject to regulation by the official framework, in three related ways. Firstly, these shared understandings include guidelines regarding which elements within a situation are to be relevant or irrelevant to the proceedings. Laughter at (or indeed any attention to) objects outside of the field of relevance may be considered out of place. Cackling at an irrelevant memory association during a two-party conversation, for instance, would require some sort of explanation or excuse. Secondly, the permissible level of emotional expression, or of a subset of emotional expression, or specifically of laughter, may be circumscribed by the official framework. Someone may be 'too serious' at a party or comedy club, or 'too merry' at a funeral. Thirdly, the official definition of a situation determines what it would take for any element within the frame to be found funny or not. A superior's speech deficiency might be considered laughable among colleagues, but not in a gathering including the superior himself. The official frame includes understandings regarding all of the relevant variables of amusement: the self-claims made by specific individuals, role-members, and people in general; what it would take for these self-claims to be discredited; the level of identification of

participants with each other and outside entities; the appropriate levels of empathy to be plied in cases of misfortune; etc.

Whatever cognitive frame actually used by a single participant to interpret events at a given moment, he must be aware of and take into consideration the official definition of events before acting or blurting out his thoughts and opinions --at least if he is to achieve any level of social competence. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, the individual judgement to which laughter refers may be re-judged by observers as more or less relevant, more or less accurate, more or less fair, more or less thoughtful, and more or less congruent with the laugher's claims about himself. Participants adjust their displays of laughter accordingly, or else risk losing face.

The degree of adjustment required varies with the gap between the natural display forthcoming and the amount of laughter appropriate at the time; this gap, in turn, varies with the distance between the individual and official frameworks. Often, of course, there may be a close congruency between actual amusement and interactional requirements. At other times, however, actors may be sharply aware of an effort to maintain an appropriate exterior show.

In the case of Joy Fielding’s ad-libbed singing, we can safely say that the official framework strictly forbade laughter at on-stage errors, which during a theatrical performance lie well outside the boundary of attendable objects. Any attention to events outside the fictional frame being enacted on a theatrical stage is a serious threat to the illusion which the theatre creates, and which (paying) audiences expect and come to enjoy. Normally, unscripted laughter by the actors of a play will ruin its magic.

The official definition of a situation is not, of course, a fixed entity, nor one independent from the participants affected by it. Participants usually have some leeway towards modifying the framework during interaction, and sometimes conflict and negotiation over definitions becomes an ongoing, active process. Any act of doubt or deviance is a threat to the frame as currently defined and could potentially lead to its reframing --though mechanisms of control may reassert the previous understandings.

Clearly, some elements of a frame are more subject to change than others. The fact (observed by all participants) that the cat is on the mat is less vulnerable in this sense than the judgements of whether the mat is in need of cleaning, who owns the cat, whether

the animal is a 'cute' member of its species, or whether cats should be allowed into the house. Even the initial 'fact' could be doubted however: the apparent cat-on-mat could be a stuffed fake, a hologram, or a hypnotically- suggested illusion. Interestingly, the laughter by Hersh and Nomi in Joy Fielding's anecdote managed to change the official definition of events. This was possible because the dramatic production in progress was not well-known and moreover belonged to the theatre of the absurd, where unexpected events and incoherence which even challenge the very framing of the play itself are often scripted. Thus, the laughter, which in normal circumstances could have spoilt the play as an unacceptable intrusion, in this case was accepted by the audience as an intentional and keyed intrusion. As Fielding writes, "the audience, bless their confused little hearts, had no idea what was going on. Because the action seemed no less puzzling than anything else in the play up until that point, many thought my singing and the accompanying laughter was part of the show" (42-43).

Not all participants have an equal influence on the official definitions. A totalitarian dictator by sheer threat of violence may skew public displays of opinion, practice, and belief in desired ways: tormented citizens may be heard to use only the official language, profess the national religious (or non-religious) faith, praise their 'benevolent' leader, and even assert historical inaccuracies ("no cat has ever touched a mat!") --often in contradiction with private ideas and practices. A school bully may achieve a similar outward conformity, at least while he is physically present to enforce it.

Power, in any form, is the principal mediator of interpretative influence. Any relationship of dependence entails an imbalance in the relative inputs towards official frameworks. To a shopkeeper, who depends on customers for his livelihood, 'the customer is always right.' Similarly, it might be said that for an employee 'the boss is always right' and that for a wife/child in a traditional household 'the husband/father is always right.' An interesting study of a hospital setting by Coser (1960) suggests that within a hierarchy, joking is used most often by the upper ranks, and that all humour (or at least that which is deployed before the targets of humour themselves) tends to be 'directed downwards' --those above mock those below.

Persons or entities of achieved and/or recognized authority on specific topics may be allowed a greater influence on the definition of certain events: scientists on

science, historians on history, 'holy men' on moral behaviour, well-established newspapers on current events, the 'well-educated' on a variety of topics, a trusted friend on facts of his own life. Such authority may depend, in turn, not only on personal talent and achievement but also on external factors, including access to relevant education and cultural definitions of social roles and prestige. Situational roles are also endowed with varying levels of definitional influence. A public speaker or performer on stage has a tremendous degree of influence on the current goings on --within certain limits of the genre. Other powerful situated roles include hosts, moderators, referees, organizers, 'masters of ceremonies,' and (as in Fielding's anecdote) stage actors. To a lesser extent, any speaker during conversation may sway interpretation while he holds the floor.

At a broader level, of course, economic and/or directive control over scientific research, artistic production, educational institutions, and communications media allows a more subtle influence on the frames of interpretation adopted by society at large. Culture defines reality both directly (i.e., 'lightning comes from Thor's hammer', 'people should get married before their thirties') and indirectly, by laying out structures of rank and authority which will determine the distribution of interpretative influence (i.e., 'babies born to this group will be mute slaves', 'our holy leader speaks the divine truth').

Individual skill, however, cannot be overlooked. Though not easy to disentangle from issues of power, there are elements of charisma that go beyond mere natural beauty and prestige. The arts of self-presentation and rhetoric can in themselves have an effect on prevailing definitions, generating power out of sheer communicative dexterity. Politicians, advertisers, missionaries, intellectual pioneers, and salespersons of every description have employed similar techniques to lead their audiences for as long as possible on their persuasive pitch. When unusual skill in this respect is combined with the solution to some incongruence or failing in prevailing definitions, large-scale change may be provoked, even by the 'powerless.' In practice, however, it is the initially powerful who obtain the best training and outlets for such power-generating talents.

2.5.3. The Desired Display

The official requirements of the situation constitute one element which the individual should take into account when deciding on a display. In Joy Fielding's anecdote, we can imagine that Nomi and Hersh were mainly considering this aspect when attempting to suppress their highly inappropriate outburst. Another three elements may affect the actual expression an individual will attempt to produce, however: his relative power, his guiding aims, and his assessment of the feasibility of the display task (See Figure 1).

Power allows for greater interactional risks to be taken. A participant in a subordinate relation to another will have more to lose from an improper display than the latter would. For example, a stonefaced shopkeeper who fails to appreciate customer humour may not be making the most of his business. On the other hand, a jarring emotional expression by a superior may simply revise the previous official understandings. Customers may rebuff salesmen's jokes with relative impunity. To continue with the example of Fielding's play, it can be imagined that for a struggling professional actor during the opening night of an important production, where career prospects could depend crucially on an engaging performance, breaking frame by laughing at a stage error could spell disaster. On the other hand, if the actor were the son of a theatre impresario and the play were a little attended production in its final days of a long run, a relatively comfortable power position could allow this individual to take greater risks.

The participant's guiding aims may also affect the expression desired. As we have seen, laughter displays carry with them a number of connotations: the fact of someone's discredit, the displayer's mental contents, his involvement in the funny elements, and a certain level of identity distance from the discredited individual. Each of these potential meanings may enter into the displayer's reckoning process, as each implies a set of interactional effects which may be beneficial or harmful to his interests. For example, while laughing at another's joke might normally be seen as 'proper', a person who feels hostile towards or threatened by the joke-maker may wish to avoid the affiliative implications of laughter (See Chapter Eight 4.2.2) and therefore minimize or abstain from a laughter display. In the circumstance of Fielding's improvised singing, it could be imagined that her co-stars could have maliciously engineered the whole situation merely

to embarrass Fielding or ruin the play, the open laughter serving as an additional element of sabotage. Strategic use of laughter will be discussed further in Chapter Eight, where many of the effects and possible uses of laughter displays will be enumerated.

Finally, once a desired level of expression has been arrived at, the individual may also consider the realistic probability of the expression being achieved, considering the strength of emotional resources and pressures, the physical energy available for voluntary modification, and an assessment of emotional management skills. At the point when a certain level of amusement is desirable, actual mirth may be:

1. Nonexistent, in which case the desired level of laughter should be counterfeited entirely.
2. Available for display through laughter, though not to a sufficient degree. In this case, laughter should be overstated, exaggerated, more of the expression being produced than would naturally emerge.
3. Available for display through laughter, though to a degree exceeding desired levels. In this case, laughter should be understated, partially suppressed, less of the expression being produced than would naturally emerge.

A final possibility concerns events which are perceived as funny by the participant when display is undesirable. In this case amusement is:

4. Available (and pressuring) for display through laughter, when such laughter is unwanted. The expression of amusement should be suppressed.

The balance of emotional resources and pressures on the one hand, and of physical and mental skills and energy on the other, will determine the possibilities of effective display. An exhausted and irritated individual may find situational demands to feign laughter beyond reasonable effort. Conversely, intense urges to laugh may be deemed impossible to suppress or conceal for long enough too avoid detection. This in fact turned out to be the case with Hersh and Nomi's strong feelings of amusement during Joy Fielding's stage bluff, though under the circumstances, they attempted in vain to achieve their desired

display. In other cases, if a desired display is judged unfeasible, an alternative strategy may adopted (See next section).

2.5.4. The Achieved Display

The achieved display is the observable display, equivalent to the unmodified term a **laughter display**. As anticipated in Chapter One, there are two methods which social actors commonly employ to achieve a desired emotional expression (Hochschild, 1979).

Shallow acting involves either interference or interaction with the output process of the relevant emotional system (i.e., amusement). The individual may consciously manipulate facial, vocal, respiratory, and bodily organs in order to replicate the target display mechanically. Superfluous laughter movement and sound may be suppressed by opposing motor activity: clenching the mouth shut, tensing abdominal muscles, resisting exhalation. It may also be concealed behind hands or other screens such as books, walls, or fans. Insufficient laughter activity may be supplemented with voluntary movements and sound production/modulation.

Deep acting, on the other hand, can be used to directly stimulate or reduce amusement itself. It is unclear exactly how this might be achieved, and specifically what level(s) of the amusement process might be vulnerable to influence from the conscious will. One procedure might be a simple concentrated effort to direct attention at the relevant elements of the official framework. At this level, deep acting hardly resembles 'acting' at all, approaching equivalence with mere situational involvement. Another could be to consciously frame these elements within an imagined sequence that would lead to an appropriate expression (i.e., as a caricature, exaggeration, or understatement of the original events). A third might include the deliberate introduction of unrelated ideas (i.e., family deaths to reduce amusement; the nakedness of fellow participants to increase it) which might set off the desired level of laughter. Finally, it may be possible for individuals to develop the ability to access the neural pathways of 'involuntary' amusement itself.

Either deep or shallow acting, or a combination of the two, may be employed by an individual in order to execute a desired expression. These may be additionally supplemented by verbal signs, before, during, or even after the relevant reaction. For example, insufficient laughter can be modified with such phrases as "good one," "very funny," or "that's hilarious," or excused with reasons such as a sudden thought, tiredness, or having 'heard the joke before.' Superfluous laughter can be minimized with offerings like "that's no laughing matter," "oooh --awful," or "what a stupid joke," or it can simply be attributed to a different stimulus, such as a passing thought or an event behind the co-participant's head.

Joking may also be used to deflect an apparent source of amusement, either after an outburst or to allow for a release of amusement. For example, a television presenter has recounted to me an anecdote regarding the interviewing of a holy man of the ancient Indian Jain religion. The interviewee arrived to the location of the filming completely naked, which for many of the crew was in itself a risible violation of appearance and territorial self-claims. When the sacred man, mid-interview, lifted his leg and relieved his flatulence with a loud burst, the interviewer doubted that either his or the crew's hilarity could be contained for very long. He quickly intervened with a joke to allow for a general release.

Achieved expression is a function of (1) the emotional display desired, (2) the quality and intensity of the natural display (available as resources or hindering display goals), (3) the acting strategies and procedures employed to achieve the desired display, (4) the level of competence acquired in using these strategies and procedures, and (5) the energy resources available (See Figure 1). Returning to Fielding’s anecdote, Nomi and Hersh’s achieved display (including ‘muffled sounds’ and ‘doubling over’) was influenced by (1) their desire to maintain a ‘straight face’ as demanded by the script, (2) intense amusement, and thus an intense tendency to laugh, (3) the use of muscular suppression of the bodily reaction, and either (4) insufficient skill or (5) insufficient strength to achieve their target.

It should be noted that efforts to achieve a desired expression may be more or less conscious. In Fielding’s anecdote, Nomi and Hersh were undoubtedly well aware of their own inner struggle, but more routine (especially successful) attempts can pass by less

noticed by a participant of interaction. Being such a routine interpersonal activity, the controlled display of emotional expression becomes habitualized to such a degree that actors may carry it out with little or no awareness of the control applied. The situation is similar to such response cries as 'damn!' or 'ouch!', which appear automatic and uncontrolled and yet display features (i.e., appropriate volume, language, and type of expression) clearly adjusted to the audience present (Goffman, 1981: 78-120).

3. The Meaning and Deployment of Humour Displays

3.1. Humour as Communication

Humour has been defined in Chapter One as 'communicative presentations intended (by the communicator) to provoke amusement,' following the most common explicit or implicit use of this term in the humour research literature. The notion can be much refined.

As a type of communication, this concept can be divided into either units of abstract meaning or units of concrete usage[1]. Beginning with the latter, a situated presentation of humour by a participant, bounded in space and time, can be referred to as a **humour display**: the making of an ironic comment by Bill to his friends, the inclusion of a political cartoon in a daily newspaper, or the playing of a prank by a group of students on their schoolteacher. This can be distinguished from a **humour piece**, which is the actual content of a display, independent of specific instantiations: the ironic statement, the graphic caricature, the prank. Consider, for instance, the following exchange:

Jason:	That painting in our livingroom of the *boat* in the-
Margaret:	Yawl in the channel? Maine?
Jason:	There's a little boat and an island.
Roger:	Y'all in the channel? Huhhuh.
Jason:	Yawl. [Yawl.]
Margaret:	[It's a] boat, y'all.
Roger:	What are y'all doing in the channel. Huh huh huh.
Margaret:	I need a little port.
Roger:	Huh huh huh *huh* huh.
Trudy:	Haw haw haw haw.
Margaret:	Y'all in that channel huh huh huh.
	What ar y'all in that channel for. I know.
Roger:	Sorry. Who painted yawl in the channel?
Jason:	It's a painting by a painter named... (Norrick, 1994: 416)

[1] The distinction is congruent with Ferdinand de Saussure's *langue*/*parole* --language/speech (1916).

Here the same pun on the words ‘yawl’ (a small boat) and ‘y’all’ (i.e., American [Southern] slang for ‘you all’), which can be considered a humour piece, is repeated in at least five separate displays by both Roger and Margaret.

This distinction represents one inner boundary within the field of humour research[2]. Psychological, linguistic, cultural, gender, and literary analyses of humour have tended to focus primarily on humour pieces --the mechanisms which bring about amusement, the techniques used, the skill of the performer or author, the beliefs and attitudes of the humourist or his social class/identity group, the meanings of a piece, the historical development of genres and styles. Sociological research, on the other hand, has concentrated on humour displays: the effects of joke-use on social norms, the use of teasing to maintain conformity, the cohesive and divisive results of humour use (See, for reviews, Martineau, 1972; Fine, 1983).

Humour pieces and displays are structures of greater or lesser complexity. A comic play can be considered a humour piece, but each of its acts, dialogues, and one-liners can count as sub-pieces at various levels of nestedness. A performance of the work, as a humour display, could be subdivided in a similar manner.

3.1.1. Humour Pieces

A humour piece is the meaningful content of a humour display, the amusing composition or creation considered independently from the display situation itself. A joke about an Irishman in a brothel, a plastic flower that squirts water, a pun on the words ‘grisly/grizzly’, Monty Python's ‘parrot sketch,’ Jeremy’s ‘burnt beans’ story --these potential triggers of amusement can be deployed at different times by different actors. Hot gossip and verbal jokes on current-event topics 'spread' from one person to the next. Professional comedians 'lift' material from each other and repeat the same routines night after night. Friends exchange the amusing catch-phrases of popular comedy shows.

[2] A full outline of this field, with its various borders and distinctions, will be provided in Chapter Nine (4.3).

These abstractions cannot, however, exist independently of some humour display. A humour piece must be exhibited as such at least once if it is to count as humour at all[3]. The amusing unintentional pratfall of a novice skier does not in itself qualify as a humour piece --only its causation by an agent of discredit or its subsequent recounting as an anecdote would so qualify.

The humour piece is a subset of the range of funny stimuli as classified in Chapter Five. It includes all amusing transformations which are intentional displays with amusement as one of their purposes: funny anecdotes, humorous fictional novels, film parodies, gossip, theatrical comedies, distorting caricatures, satirical imitations, 'clowning around,' ironic speech, improvisation games, and intentionally imagined discredits. It further includes all funny stimuli caused by an agent, types II and IV in the classification: verbal and visual 'double-meaning' jokes, wind-ups, practical jokes, stories with 'twist' endings, tickling, magic tricks, pranks, exposes, and debunkings. It excludes, therefore, spontaneously occurring claim-discredits which are observed directly (types I and II).

Humour pieces can be more or less **contrived**, in the sense of planned or invented. Originality, fictionality, exaggeration, elaboration, preparation, complexity, length, and ingenuity are some of the elements which might be said to characterize the contrivedness of a particular piece. A theatrical comedy, a deliberate prank, or a standardized joke are all highly contrived pieces, in the sense that their amusing quality originates from the results of a creative effort by some author or performer, rather than simply arising independently from events in untransformed reality. This effort could relate to the arrangement of specific semantic elements, imitatory prowess, drawing skills, perceptive discernment of self-claim or claim-discredit information, ingenious trickery/argumentation, or other areas of artistic or communicative dexterity. A true funny story, accurately retold, would be an example of a relatively uncontrived piece of humour. Even less contrived would be the verbal mention, in a group situation, of some funny event currently within the potential view of all participants. Finally, a mere laugh or meaningful glance could be considered a pointer to a funny stimulus (i.e., 'intended to provoke amusement') and thus qualify as a humour piece, though of minimal contrivance.

[3] It is possible, in marginal cases, that a humour piece is never displayed with the intention to amuse (for example, when created as an example in a humour theorist's essay). Nevertheless, to be understood as

The question of contrivedness points up an ambiguity in the definition given for humour: when considering a specific humour piece, what is it that is 'intended to provoke amusement', the communication or its referent? Is the humour piece funny in itself or does it serve merely as a pointer? It would seem that in the latter case, the humour piece becomes less humour-like, if it can be considered humour at all. If a statement or action merely identifies an obvious feature of reality which can be considered funny in itself, it is the latter rather than the former which provokes amusement.

The distinction between a communication intended to be funny and one pointing to the funny is not, in practice, clear-cut. There exists a continuum of contrivedness from mere transparent symbols to elaborate interpretations or distortions, and thus a continuum of humour from examples which are less to more 'humourlike.' For example, books which list 'embarrassing stories' constitute a relatively uncontrived genre, as they report on 'reality.' Nevertheless, the selection, arrangement, framing, and narrative style of such works provide a great margin for creativity and difference. Martha Kurc's book (1990), in which professional authors recount a personal embarrassment over several pages and in their literary prose[4] seem more contrived than the 'bare bones' accounts of similar collections.

In the present thesis, while bearing in mind the differences in the degrees of contrivedness, I will treat even relatively empty pointers of amusing stimuli as humour pieces. The 'humour'/'funny events' distinction seems to me a useful one, despite the intervening gray areas.

'humour' the piece must be imagined as having been displayed with such an intention.

[4] Excerpts from this collection were provided in Chapter Six, 2 --D.M. Clark's condom-buying story-- and in this chapter, section 2.5.1 --Joy Fielding's theatre story.

3.1.2. Humour Displays

A humour display is the actual presentation of a humour piece by an actor to an audience of observers.

Whether a behaviour counts as a humour display for a given observer depends on his assessment of the intentions underlying it. Specifically, varying opinions may exist on whether a statement or an action was meant to provoke amusement or not. In some cases, the humour status is deemed obvious by all participants, based on their understanding of the official definition of the situation. In the following conversation, three individuals are engaged in the task of cutting paper, when one makes a teasing pun:

Arnold:	An exact cut. (2.5) Oh no. This one is a little off centre.	
Judy:	That's because you're a little off centre.	
Beth:	Heh *heh* he heh.	
Arnold:	No it's Tom's print.	(Norrick, 1994: 414)

Judy's remark to Arnold makes an absurd link between Arnold's imperfect cut and his supposed eccentricity or insanity, based on a double meaning of the phrase 'off centre'. Moreover, in the transformed reality created by accepting this improper link, Arnold's self-claims to universal mental abilities are discredited. Among friends, such a statement can only be interpreted as humour, and in fact Beth immediately laughs in response to the tease.

Often, unambiguating evidence is provided by the displaying individual: humour cues. Numerous authors have noted the use of such signs, which inform observers that amusement is being sought (Fry, 1963: 138; Zillman, 1983: 100-104). A performance within a comedy club predisposes an audience to interpret statements as 'intended to be funny'. Similarly with conversational talk prefaced by such statements as 'have you heard the latest joke?' or 'Something really funny happened to me...'. Standard joke formats can perform a similar function:

"There's this American, this German, and this Frenchman..."

"What's grosser than gross?"

Humourist: Knock! Knock!
Audience: Who's there?
Humourist: [name]
Audience: [name] *who*?
Humourist: [punchline]

Certain facial movements, such as a wink, a raised eyebrow, or a sudden and exaggerated change of expression, can also denote humorous intentions. Most common of all, however, is the inclusion of a laughter display, ranging from an ironic smile to full-blown explosive laugher:

(UTCL D6a. Face to face)

Kate: Betchyou sound really stupid on tape too.
(2.0)
Kate: Bhh hah huh huh (in Glenn, 1995: 48)

(TCI(b):7:1:SO)

C: We:ll I::, heard about your accident I'm sorry to hear that.
L: Oh:::: tha:nk you it's sure been the most painful (.) of all my li:fe put together a:ll my: pain does not compa:re to this foo:t eh heh-heh,
(in Jefferson, 1984:347)

With such laughter displays, the humourist claims to be amused by the funny elements of his delivered communication, simultaneously providing information of his humorous intentions. When such cues are lacking, and the behaviour in question is ambiguous, observers may be unsure of its humorous status. Actors may even deliberately provide ambiguous behaviours to avoid committing themselves to a particular line (See Mizzau, 1984: 73-102; and this thesis, Chapter Eight 4.3).

A humour piece can also be presented without intentions to amuse, for instance as an illustration in a humour research text or as an example of a 'bad' or 'tasteless' joke from which the teller distances himself. Such actions would not qualify as humour displays, but rather as variously keyed retellings of them.

3.2. The Audience of Humour

As with laughter displays, the audience of humour displays can vary in size, and generally involves co-present participants. For many displays, however, observation is inherently one-way, and synchrony between display and observation may also be lost. The author of a humorous book, for instance, never meets most of his audience, cannot be sure who they might be, and writes months or years before the humour is appreciated. Each reading of the book constitutes a separate observation of a single display. Again, virtual participants complicate the counting of an audience even in ordinary face-to-face displays.

The target audience of a humour display is the set of observers whom the humourist wishes will perceive the behaviour and interpret it as humour; the effective audience, those who actually do.

As with laughter, the target audience of humour is typically congruent with the target sharing audience --the subset for whom amusement is intended. Again, however, exceptions do arise to this norm. The victim of a bully, for instance, is included within the target audience of the bully's vicious pranks. Nevertheless, the humour is not intended for his enjoyment, nor is he likely to appreciate it. Another example is provided by Jefferson (1984), who has analyzed laughter during talk about 'troubles' and found the following recurrent phenomenon: “A troubles-teller produces an utterance and then laughs, and the troubles-recipient does not laugh, but produces a recognizably serious response” (p. 346). The conversational humour display (cited above, 3.1.2) regarding the 'painful foot' ("put together a:ll my: pain does not compa:re to this foo:t eh heh-heh") was included in this study, and is followed by the listener's sympathetic question "Can you wa:lk good now?". In these cases the target sharing audience is limited to the troubles-teller himself, who expresses with humour, to the target audience at large, that he is coping with his problems (see Chapter Eight 4.4.1).

3.3. The Meaning of Humour

When considering the meaning of humour, a distinction can be drawn between that of the humour piece and that of its display.

The meaning of a humour piece varies radically from joke to joke, let alone from pun to theatrical comedy. It regards the content of humour, the sense of the various words or other symbols which together constitute the humorous production. The meaning of the humour piece is that which --when decoded by the right sort of audience-- may result in amusement. There is little more that can be said of such a meaning in general terms.

The meaning attributable to the display of a humour piece, on the other hand, is a stable one. A humour display, as a sign, evokes in observers a meaning nearly synonymous to that of a laughter display. Indeed, one sense of the expression 'to laugh at' is 'to make fun of' (Chambers, 1990: 808), to intentionally present in such a way as to provoke amusement.

Both humour and laughter identify an alleged source of amusement. In the case of laughter, actual amusement corresponding to the display is claimed. In the case of humour, only a potential amusement is referred to, though very often laughter is appended to the display (see Section 3.1.2).

A humour display signifies the following:

> "I am delivering a communication which can produce amusement at cause Y in my target sharing audience"

This meaning is independent of the particular humour piece presented, though its content will determine further meanings. Throwing a cabbage at a politician constitutes a humour display, as does the reply “It appears one of my opponents has lost his head” (See 2.2). Each of these displays can be given a particular meaning in context, but both signify, at the very least, that the humourist finds something funny in the piece displayed, and expects certain others to share in the amusement. It should be noted also that to understand a humour display fully, an observer must identify the intended cause of

amusement. Usually, this cause is readily apparent, even when amusement is not provoked in the observer.

This meaning of humour varies with the identity of the target sharing audience, those for whom amusement is intended. Every display, however, includes the minimal signification, "I can be amused by cause Y" which is closely congruent with (and included in) the denotation of laughter (See 2.3). It communicates the following:

- I can experience the bodily process of amusement in reaction to cause Y, including both pleasant subjective sensations of funniness and any spontaneous bodily manifestations which may become visible.

As with the meaning of laughter, the reference to amusement included in this meaning implies a number of additional connotations, including the same four already discussed in section 2.4:

- The **discredit connotation**: "According to my current interpretation, claimant C's self-claim S has been discredited by fact F"
- The **knowledge connotation**: "I possess the knowledge necessary to appreciate the amusing elements referred to by the humour"
- The **identity connotation**: "I do not feel identified as the claimant(s) discredited"
- The **involvement connotation**: "I can become sufficiently involved in the funny elements of the humour to enjoy amusement in reaction to it"

Comparison with the meanings of laughter reveals two differences. Firstly, it is only *potential* amusement and involvement that are claimed; no claim is made about either actual amusement or involvement. Secondly, the degree of amusement is not specified. It should be recalled, however, that such information is often included by an accompanying laughter display (See 3.1.2).

A further submeaning of humour which is *not* implied by laughter, regards the assertion that the communication will provoke amusement in others. This can be referred to as the **entertainment connotation** of humour displays:

- "I am delivering a communication which can produce amusement at cause Y in my target sharing audience, not including myself."

Reference to this connotation is evident in the conversational snippet cited on page 65, where Ken finishes a joke which is followed with mocking laughter, both by Ken himself ("hyok hyok") and by Al ("HA-HA-HA-HA-HA"). This ironic appreciation, while labeling the joke as not particularly funny, alludes to the fact that a joke is *supposed* to be funny. It is significant that the joke-teller himself is the first to ridicule this claim of funniness (after two full seconds of silence), as if to protect himself from the discredit of his self-claim to amuse[5].

[5] See Chapter Eight, 4.3.1, for a discussion of such defensive uses of self-directed laughter and humour.

3.4. The Display of Humour

When is humour displayed by an actor? The answer to this question involves many of the same considerations relating to the display of laughter, and thus will not require much additional discussion (See Figure 2). In the case of humour, of course, there is no 'natural display,' and thus no bodily impediments to achieving the desired expression[6]. The official framework, however, similarly determines the overall tolerance for humour in the situation, relevant and irrelevant types and sources of humour, and what humour is to be considered funny. The goals of the individual, including his possible desire for conformity with the official framework, as well as the possible effects of humour pieces and displays (See Chapter Eight), will determine his display of humour, with more powerful individuals having a greater freedom to transgress and modify requirements with impunity. There may also exist a gap between the desired and the achieved display, depending on the humourist's skill and the contingencies of performance.

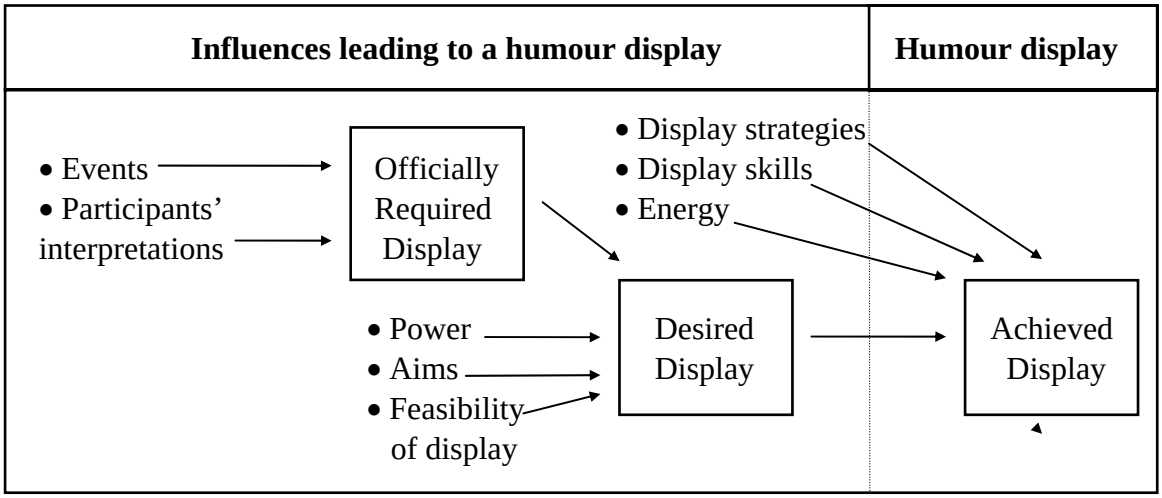

Figure 2. The display of humour.

Whereas laughter displays are merely responsive to allegedly amusing stimuli, however, humour displays actually create them. Thus, there exist fewer 'official' constraints on the expression of humour than on laughter, which should simply follow

either humour or a spontaneous funny event. Humour is a framing tool itself: it provides a particular interpretation and/or selects certain elements of a scene for attention. It allows, for example, for an individual who detects an amusing stimulus to frame events for others so that they too will perceive it, preparing the official definition for acceptance of his own emotional release. In the following excerpt from a transcribed conversation, a minor speech error which might have gone by unnoticed is picked on by other participants and transformed into (relatively uncontrived) humour:

Joe: How much our shister *wastes* money,
Lynn: Your *shis*ter?
Joe: needlessly-
Penny: Our shister hehhehheh.
Gail: My *shister* Penny. Ha ha ha.
Penny: All right. Is that my wine glass.
Heh heh *ha* ha ha. (Norrick, 1994: 423)

Though such minor linguistic faults normally lie outside of the official framework of interpretation, here the desire to obtain some enjoyment from the teasing of Joe may have inspired Lynn and the others to focus on his incorrect pronunciation of the word 'sister' as 'shister.' The work of satirists and caricaturists, both professional and amateur, often involves a similar focus on and exaggeration of faults normally outside the bounds of official attention. It is worth noting here also that informal situations, such as friendly gatherings, are characterized by relatively malleable official definitions, so that attention to 'outside' activity can easily be given without a major threat to the goings on.

[6] A strong natural impulse to laugh could, however, pressure the individual to offer a humour display in order to give his laughter display a meaningful context. It may also provide the individual with an opportunity to share amusement with others through laughter, by sharing a private joke.

4. Conclusions

I have described laughter and humour displays as communicative signs which refer to alleged real or potential amusement.

As communications they may have an intended or **target audience** as well as an **effective audience** --those who actually do observe the display. A distinction has also been drawn between the target and the **target sharing audience** --those expected to share in the amusement referred to by the display.

These two displays have closely synonymous meanings. A laughter display signifies "I am experiencing amusement of X degree [at cause Y]"; a humour display, "I am delivering a communication which can produce amusement at cause Y in my target sharing audience [i.e., including myself]." From these basic meanings, I have derived a number of submeanings latent in the features of the emotion to which they both refer:

- The **discredit connotation**: "According to my current interpretation, claimant C's self-claim S has been discredited by fact F"
- The **knowledge connotation**: "I possess the knowledge necessary to appreciate the amusing elements referred to by the laughter"
- The **nonidentity connotation**: "I am not closely associated with the claimant(s) discredited"
- The **involvement connotation**: "I am (or can be) sufficiently involved in the funny elements of the situation to enjoy amusement"

Humour displays carry not only these four submeanings, but also the following additional implication:

The **entertainment connotation**: "I am delivering a communication which can produce amusement at cause Y in my target sharing audience"

A description of the process of display, applicable both to humour and laughter, has also been suggested. During social interaction, at any display-relevant moment, there

will be a range of **officially appropriate display**s which co-participants would consider normal or acceptable, related to the official shared definitions of events. These expectations are one of the major influences on an individual's choice of a **desired displays**, the communication he selects to actually attempt. Other influences include the situational distribution of power, his guiding aims, and his perception of the odds relevant to achieving the desired expression. This desire, modified by the individual's abilities and resources will determine the **achieved** (i.e., actually observable) **displays**.

In the case of laughter, an added complication concerns the existence of a **natural display**, that which would spontaneously accompany a given instance of amusement, in the absence of any interference. The existence of bodily pressure to express a particular degree of laughter complicates the process of display: such pressure may be used as a resource facilitating the achievement of a desired display, or may be suffered as an obstacle towards achievement.

In the following chapter, a description of some of the effects and uses of amusement, laughter, and humour will be provided. In the case of the latter two phenomena, 'effects' will be based on the meanings they communicate to others, as listed above. These effects, in turn, may be included among the 'guiding aims' of individuals when selecting a desired humour or laughter display, becoming 'uses.'

Chapter Eight:

Effects of Amusement, Laughter, and Humour

1. Introduction page 103

2. Effects of Amusement page 107

3. Effects of Humour Pieces page 113

4. Effects of Laughter and Humour Displays page 117

- 4.1. Derived From the 'Discredit' Connotation page 121
  - 4.1.1. Broadcasting Discredit page 121
  - 4.1.2. Provocation of Amusement and/or Laughter page 125
  - 4.1.3. Transmission and Reproduction of Social Norms page 128
  - 4.1.4. Maintenance and Reinforcement of Social Norms page 136
- 4.2. Derived From the 'Knowledge', 'Identity', and 'Involvement' Connotations page 155
  - 4.2.1. Social Classification page 156
  - 4.2.2. Affiliation page 160
  - 4.2.3. Disaffiliation page 171

(Continued on next page)

4.3. Derived From the 'Identity' Connotation page 177

4.3.1. Protection From Unintentional Self-Discredit page 178
4.3.2. Protection From Intentional Self-Discredit page 180
4.3.3. Protection From Discrediting Attacks page 184
4.3.4. Consequences of Excessive Defensiveness page 187

4.4. Derived From 'Involvement' Connotation page 189

4.4.1. Revealing Callousness/'Toughness' page 189
4.4.2. Revealing Moral Character page 192
4.4.3. Denying a Particular Interpretation page 194
4.4.4. Revealing the Focus of Attention page 197

4.5. Derived From the 'Entertainment' Connotation page 199

4.5.1. Self-claim of Ability To Amuse page 199

5. 'Functions' of Amusement, Laughter, and Humour page 203

5.1. Functions in Sociology page 203
5.2. Functions in Humour Research page 205
5.3. Biological Functions page 207

6. Conclusions page 211

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will attempt to link the amusement theory developed in Chapters Four to Six with the considerable research literature concerned with the effects (and by extension with the uses, 'functions,' habits, and institutions) of amusement, laughter, and humour, the three components of what I have called the 'laughter triad.'

It was suggested throughout Chapter Two that the cause of amusement had generated plenty of theory but little empirical research, given the intractability of emotional processes to traditional scientific paradigms. The bulk of work in this field, consequently, has focused on more easily observable and measurable phenomena, notably among these being the **effects** of amusement, laughter, and humour on individuals, interpersonal encounters, and society as a whole. The study of effects, moreover, is also at least implicitly the study of strategic **uses** that can be intentionally made of effects, as well as of the personal **habits** and social **institutions** which may spring up from patterns of such uses (and vice-versa, the study of institutions, habits, and/or uses is in root the study of underlying effects on which these may be based). For example, if the ridicule of a co-present individual may have the effect of eliciting his public discredit and embarrassment, then it may be intentionally used by individuals or groups to control the behaviour of others, and such use may become institutionalized in practices such as ritualized public mockery or satirical cartoons in print media.

It may be noted that the study of effects of amusement, laughter, and humour is also relevant to the study of their *causes*. As we have seen, humour displays are intentional behaviours, laughter displays are semi-intentional, and amusement, though unintentional, may be stimulated indirectly by the skillful employment of humour. Thus, their release or deployment is a question, to various extents, of individual decision-making. In Chapter Seven, I listed the aims of an individual among the influences relevant to his desired display of humour or laughter. These aims, however, must be calculated in relation to the possible utility these displays may have towards attaining them, and thus in relation to the effects which displays may have.

The majority empirical work on effects has been done in the spirit of functionalist analysis, which assumes and emphasizes an additional effect-cause link: the effects of a

particular phenomenon are (unintentionally) responsible for its very persistence[1]. Thus, instead of merely describing the affiliative effect which a joke may have between two guests at a party, or between two disputants brought together by an arbiter, the analyst would describe that in these cases humour served an affiliative 'function,' implying that the beneficial side-effect of affiliation was responsible for the practice of joking, or of this type of joking. In this thesis, I have preferred to avoid such terminology in favour of 'effects,' 'uses,' and 'institutions.' Though I will not deny that certain patterns of humour or laughter use may have functional significance, such are empirical questions and not simply to be assumed, as has often been done. When it is claimed, for instance, that "dozens, if not hundreds, of specific functions of humor might be proposed" (Fine, 1983: 173), the value of the 'function' concept cannot be but questioned. This I will do, in greater detail, in Section 5 of this chapter.

First, however, I will provide a catalogue of the primary phenomena on which any such function might be hypothesized: the possible effects of the three components of the laughter triad. I will describe, in turn, the consequences arising from instances of amusement, from the interpretation of humour pieces, and finally from the interpretation of humour and laughter displays. Where relevant, I will discuss how recurring patterns of such consequences allow social actors to manage these phenomena in order to obtain desired results --i.e., putting them to strategic use. I will also note some cases where uses become habitualized by individual actors, transmitted across individuals and even institutionalized to become cultural practices.

Consequences of amusement, laughter, and humour are effected across various causal channels. Amusement has direct effects on the amused individual, causality being purely mechanical. Laughter, the pleasurable sensation of 'funniness', various physiological changes, relaxation, improved health, and the facilitation of further amusement can be counted among the consequences which amusement produces in this direct manner (See section 2).

Humour and laughter, on the other hand, must be perceived and interpreted to provoke their effects --the causal channel here involving symbolic communication and cognitive processing. Humour, by definition, is intended to result in the audience's

[1] Examples include Stephenson, 1951; Hertzler, 1970; Martineau, 1972; Fine, 1983; and Ziv, 1984.

amusement. This effect (when it occurs) arises from interpretation of the humour piece, and it allows for the strategic use of humour to indirectly obtain the 'direct' effects of amusement (See section 3).

The interpretation of the humour display, however, is related to a much wider range of possible effects, most of which are also applicable to laughter displays: the broadcast of discredit, the provocation of amusement and/or laughter in others, the transmission and maintenance of social norms, social classification, affiliation or disaffiliation, protection from discredit, revealing the displayer's moral character and attention focus, rejecting an interpretation offered by another, and claiming the ability to amuse.

Discussion of the effects of laughter and humour displays will be guided by the list of connotations which these displays imply, as set out earlier. Achieved through the communication of meaning, these effects must be derivable from the significations which laughter and humour consistently give off. And indeed, each of the five connotations described in Chapter Seven (2.4, 3.3) --'discredit,' 'knowledge,' 'identity,' 'involvement,' and 'entertainment'-- can be naturally associated with a set of interactional and/or social consequences. Though the same effects have long been documented and investigated within the field of humour research, often by separate theoretical schools or without an substantial theoretical base, the forthcoming discussion will integrate the relevant areas of scattered research within the single scheme that has been developed in preceding chapters. The derivation (in Chapter Seven) of display connotations from the hypothesis presented in Chapters Four to Six provides a link between effects, uses, and institutions of laughter and humour with the character and workings of the amusement emotion itself.

The present chapter can therefore also be considered a further test of the idea that amusement reacts to the perception of a self-claim's discredit, when the perceiver is not identified as the claimant and is involved in the discrediting events themselves. A valid account of amusement should further be able to account also for the meanings (and thus for the effects (and thus for the uses, habits, and institutions)) related to laughter and humour. In the following pages, I will seek to demonstrate that the 'claim-discredit' tradition can meet the challenge.

2. Effects of Amusement

Of the three elements of the laughter triad, amusement is the only which has direct 'mechanical' effects on the individual who experiences it. These effects are therefore unrelated to the causal process preceding an episode of amusement or to the causal theory of amusement proposed. In fact they are compatible with (though irrelevant to) any of the competing accounts of amusement[1]. I list them in this thesis for the sake of completeness, as a suggestion of how and where such effects might be placed within the general field of humour research. They include (1) laughter, (2) pleasure, (3) physiological changes, (4) relaxation, (5) improved health, and (6) the facilitation of further amusement.

Amusement consists of a set of cognitive stimuli related to a set of bodily changes, which have been described in some detail in section 3.1 of this Chapter One. These bodily changes, with some license (as they form part of 'amusement' itself), can be considered 'effects' of amusement:

(1) Laughter.

Sounds and movements which can be interpreted by observers as 'laughter,' of varying degree (i.e., the 'natural display' of laughter; see Chapter Seven, 2.5.1).

(2) Pleasure

The pleasurable subjective sensation of 'funniness,' the particular quality of which we can only know from personal experience.

(3) Physiological Changes

Epinephrine secretions, changes in heart rate, muscle tension, respiration, brain activity and other less observable manifestations of amusement.

[1] 'Tension release' theorists would might argue for a special claim to such effects as 'relaxation' and 'improved health,' but these consequences can be traced to the characteristics of the emotional manifestation itself (see below), which are independent from any account of amusement's causes.

Beyond these immediate events, three further effects can be posited for amusement itself: the state of relaxation which follows an episode of the emotion, the long term health benefits attributed to its release, and the increased susceptibility to further amusement which an initial episode creates.

(4) Relaxation

It is commonly held that amusement, especially strong amusement which is freely expressed and observable as laughter, results in a state of physical and psychological relaxation: reduced tension and stress, feelings of equilibrium or 'well-being,' and the like[2]. This view has been supported by a growing body of research. Arousal during amusement "is followed by a relaxation state in which respiration, heart rate, and muscle tension return to below normal levels" (Robinson, 1983: 118).

In one study (Yovetich, Dale, and Hudak, 1990) experimenters falsely led subjects to believe that they would receive an electric shock during the procedure. Subjects who were exposed to a humorous audio tape of prerecorded comedy reported feeling less anxiety than those in a control condition, and were found to have lower heart-rates[3]. Svebak (1975; 1977) has also found that amusement stimulates both cerebral hemispheres simultaneously, resulting in an unusually balanced brain state which may be partially responsible for the subsequent sensation of well-being.

These effects may be partly due to the physical exertion of laughter itself:

> Haberman (1955; cited by Fry & Stoft, 1971) noted European research that showed that vigorous laughter provides an average of over 75% increase in energy expenditure relative to a resting state. Given the many muscle systems involved in laughter, it should be an effective means of reducing arousal or felt tension.
>
> (McGhee, 1983: 20)

[2] This reduction in tension has sometimes been considered a *cause* of amusement, but the evidence from physiological measures refutes the notion (See Chapter Two: I.A.3).

However, the release of *any* physical or psychological impulse --hunger, sexual desire, aggression, cravings for a drug, urges to urinate, the 'need' to see a friend-- may result in a subjective feeling of catharsis. Amusement can be considered a member of this set. Uninhibited engagement in the emotion of hilarity leads to a release from the urge to laugh, which, as has been suggested in the previous chapter (2.5.1), is often contained, rather than channelled into a display.

The specific respiration pattern characteristic of laughter, "a deep inspiration followed by short, interrupted, spasmodic contractions of the chest, and especially of the diaphragm," (Darwin, 1902: 154) may also be partly responsible for subsequent relaxation. This pattern shows a marked resemblance to one of the most important breathing exercises practiced as part of the Hindu *hatha yoga* system of physical, mental, and spiritual development. *Kapalabhathi* is described in one best-selling text as follows:

> The exhalation should be done quickly and forcibly by contracting the abdominal muscles with a backward push. This sudden contraction of the abdominal muscles acts upon the diaphragm; then the diaphragm recedes into the thoracic cavity, giving a vigorous push to the lungs, expelling the air from the lungs.
>
> This is instantly followed by a relaxation of the abdominal muscles, allowing the diaphragm to descend down to the abdominal cavity, pulling with it the lungs. This allows the air to rush in. In *kapalabhathi*, inhalation and exhalation are done by action of the abdominal muscles and diaphragm.
>
> (Vishnu-Devananda, 1960: 246)

Numerous benefits are attributed to the practice of such exercises (known generally as *pranayama*) by their practitioners, including stress relief and mental harmony: “Pranayama is the link between the mental and physical disciplines. While the action is physical, the effect is to make the mind calm, lucid, and steady” (Vishnu-Devananda, in Sivananda, 1991: 20).

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[3] See the same paper for further examples of research in this area.

(5) Improved Health

In the long term, amusement may have positive effects on health, a theory which has attained recent popularity in the medical world, though is hardly new:

> A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.
>
> (Proverbs 17:22)

> Mirth...purgeth the blood, confirms health, causeth a fresh, pleasing colour, prorogues life, whets the wit, makes the body young, lively and fit for any manner of employment.
>
> --Robert Burton, 1621, (cited in Russell, 1969: 320)

Norman Cousins (1979) was primarily responsible for the revival of the view of spontaneous laughter as "internal jogging" and "that apothecary inside you." An outburst of amusement increases blood pressure, oxygenates the blood, massages vital organs, facilitates digestion, and causes the release of pain-killing endorphins (Goodman, 1983: 3)[4]. The most crucial evidence for the therapeutic value of amusement, however, is provided by the well-established link between stress (which, as argued above, is effectively reduced by outbursts of the emotion) and a wide range of illnesses such as heart disease, cerebral vascular accidents, cancer, depression, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, peptic ulcer, essential hypertension, bronchial asthma, Graves' disease, and rheumatoid arthritis (Robinson, 1983; Silberman, 1986). The physical and psychological relaxation provided by amusement may indeed act against such maladies in the long term.

(6). Facilitation of Further Amusement

[4] A comparison with some of the effects attributed to the *kapalabhati* breathing exercise reveals further similarities: "As the lungs are cleansed, excess carbon dioxide is eliminated. This permits the red-blood cells to suck in more oxygen, increasing the richness of the blood.... The abdominal contractions...massage the liver, spleen, pancreas, stomach and heart, thus invigorating them.... Abdominal muscles are strengthened; digestion is improved.... It creates a feeling of exhilaration....The regular practitioner...enjoys blooming vigor and health." (Sivananda, 1991: 19)

I would suggest that amusement may have an additional effect on the individual: the facilitation of further amusement. Public speakers and comedians are aware of the fact that audiences 'warm up' gradually to humorous reception[5]. All of us have experienced this progressive readiness for hilarity, built up by a succession of laughs, and ranging from a strong emotional resistance to amusement, to a continuous state of 'giggliness' where almost anything seems funny.

This effect can be attributed to at least two factors. Firstly, the mental and physical relaxation provided by an initial bout of amusement reduces some of the potential obstacles to involvement in subsequent funny stimuli (See Chapter Six, 3.1). Secondly, the perception of one self-claim's discredit may contribute to a mental attitude of alertness towards additional discredits, or of critical assessment of participants in terms of self-claims.

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Six ‘mechanical’ effects which amusement can have on the amused individual have been listed. Due to the unconscious and automatic functioning of this emotion, however, these effects cannot be exploited strategically by direct and unmediated stimulation. As an unconscious reflex, amusement requires a stimulus of a particular type --which I have argued can be described as the perception of a self-claim's discredit. Thus, actors who wish to produce one or more of the effects of amusement must resort to humour. The use of humour pieces to elicit amusement (and its effects) will be the focus of the following section.

[5] This phenomenon is also partly due to interactional features of group situations, such as the level of trust granted the performer and the level of uncertainty regarding the appropriateness of laughter in the relevant context. See this chapter, section 4.1.2.

3. Effects of Humour Pieces

As seen in Chapter Seven (3.1), it is possible to distinguish between the meaning of a humour piece --the content of humour-- and that of a humour display --the action of exhibiting this content. In this section I will treat the possible consequences of interpreting a humour piece, and the uses to which it may therefore be put.

The main consequence unique to interpreting a humour piece is the amusement of the interpreter[1]. Humour pieces vary widely: political cartoons, anecdotes, dirty jokes, pranks, insults, gossip stories, comic films. By definition, however, they are designed for the provocation of amusement, so this is at least one possible outcome common to all. In this task they may be more or less successful, depending on factors detailed in Chapters Four to Six. Nevertheless, the potential effect of hilarity is essential to the concept.

The most obvious use of a humour piece, therefore, is to elicit the amusement of an audience, possibly including the humourist himself. This application can be guided by any number of further motives, in turn related to the effects listed above in Section 2 for amusement: (1) laughter, (2) pleasure, (3) physiological changes, (4) relaxation, (5) health, and (6) further amusement.

(1) Laughter

The mere production of laughter may be sought by a humourist. A photographer who wishes to obtain a genuine smile from his subjects, for instance, may employ humour with such a goal in mind. Similarly with a stage actor attempting to achieve 'realistic' laughter for a theatrical scene by presenting himself with ridiculous ideas or funny memories. As I have mentioned in Chapter Seven (2.5.4), everyday actors may also

[1] This must be qualified.

Sick jokes may provoke disgust, sexual jokes excitement --but these effects are irrelevant to the analysis of these productions *as humour*. Though the content of humour pieces can vary widely enough to encompass any cognitive or emotional reaction imaginable, these are not effects which need detain us here.

The actual process of interpreting humour additionally provokes cognitive effort, suspense, interest, sometimes puzzlement, and often disappointment. These effects, however, are not merely characteristic of interpreting humour but also of many other types of percept, and especially artistic displays.

Humour may also provoke outrage at the act of telling an offensive joke, and other reactions which refer to the display itself or the humourist behind it. These will be analysed below in section 4 of this chapter.

use such tactics. For example, the friends of a singer in a choir may seek to cause his laughter by 'pulling faces' from the audience, in order to playfully spoil his performance. Further motives can be derived from the effects of laughter displays as described in Section 4 of this chapter, below.

(2) Pleasure

The pleasurable aspect of amusement may be another goal. A humourist may wish to provide himself with enjoyment, or he may extend the gift of amusement to friends or to fellow human beings, for the more or less altruistic reasons gifts might be said to be given more generally. Advertisers, for instance, often use humour --as they might use a promotional gift-- in order to attract attention to their messages (Brown and Bryant, 1983: 164). Similar attention-grabbing practices are common in the educational world: textbooks, educational television, and, of course, the classroom itself (Zillman and Bryant, 1983). Humour has also been shown effective in reinforcing children's behaviour, as a post-task reward (Brown and Bryant, 1983: 161).

The exchange of humour, as all economic transactions, has undergone a great degree of commercialization in Western society. It is possible to purchase funny stimuli in a number of formats: printed books, comics, and magazines; tickets to live comedy acts and films; audio recordings; home video cassettes. Creators of amusing stimuli are paid to invent and/or perform pieces which will provide an unknown audience of consumers with enjoyment. The business of comedy, a major sector of the entertainment industry, moves vast amounts of money --a single Hollywood comedy can earn more than one hundred million dollars in a single year (Brown and Bryant, 1983: 143).

(3) Physiological changes

Seeking to generate the less-observable bodily processes associated with amusement --in themselves-- seems a less likely objective of humour. Nevertheless, at least researchers interested in the physiological aspects of hilarity have been moved by such a purpose to present jokes and comic films to their subjects.

(4) Relaxation

The psycho-physical relaxation which amusement appears to induce is another common aim of humour use. It might be sought to combat the ordinary accumulated day-to-day stress of modern life, or more specific sources of tension. As with the 'pleasure' aspect of amusement, this effect can be produced on the self or as a gift to others. Joel Goodman (1983: 2) has recounted the tension-relieving deployment of humour by a hotel-to-hospital shuttle bus driver:

> The driver had the wonderful ability to joke with, tease, and invite laughter from people wrapped in fear and tension (as they went to visit relatives and friends who were hospitalized). His sense of humor helped others to come to their senses...of humor. It didn't take long for the laughter to melt through the people frozen with fear and tension. People facing (in some cases) grave situations were discovering humor as a beautiful giver of hope and reliever of tension.

Several studies have examined humour use in tragic or precarious situations, such as Obrdlik (1942) in the context of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and Coser (1959) in a hospital ward. Undoubtedly, much of the consumption of humorous products mentioned above is fueled by the desire to 'unwind' from the psychological strains and conflicts of daily existence in our society.

As was argued in Chapter Six, appreciation of amusing stimuli depends on the ability of a subject to concentrate on the relevant funny elements, to the exclusion of other emotionally-engaging percepts. A tense, angry, or fearful audience, therefore, represents a challenge to the humourist. And indeed, those who are able to systematically break through the 'ice' of such audiences can be considered extraordinary. The bus driver described above, named 'Bellman of the Year' by his employers, is clearly regarded as such by Goodman. The skills required to achieve this effect include the sufficient communicational influence to either 1) alter definitions of events so as to demonstrate the inappropriateness of negative emotions felt by the audience; or 2) strongly involve the audience in specific elements of the current situation or of a recreated framed universe.

The relaxation of the audience can be sought for ulterior motives. For instance, teachers might use humour to "free up the attention [of students] by allowing for the

release of stressors that might otherwise have preoccupied them" in order to improve retention of information imparted (Goodman, 1983: 4).

(5) Improved Health

Humour can be used explicitly to improve the state of a person's health, as has been done at least since the Middle Ages (Moody, 1978). Norman Cousins (1979) applied on himself a structured programme of laughter sessions to combat ankylosing spondylitis, a collagen disease, with apparent success. In recent years, with the increasing recognition of the close relationship between mental and bodily processes, and the shift from health care to health promotion, 'laughter therapy' has become an increasingly popular form of alternative medicine, attracting a substantial amount of media attention (Robinson, 1983; Baza, 1994; Granados, 1995).

(6) Facilitation of Further Amusement

The knowledge that current amusement facilitates subsequent amusement permits comedians and humorists to structure their acts in specific ways. For example, 'safe' self-denigratory or absurd humour might be used to open a performance, reserving topical, risqué, black, aggressive, sick, and other potentially offensive material for when the audience has 'warmed up' to the show.

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Interpreting a humour piece may result in amusement, and through amusement produce one of the six common effects of the emotion itself. Thus, as pornography can be used to obtain sexual pleasure or a semen donation, comedy can be used strategically to achieve laughter, humorous pleasure, or a decrease in stress. The deployment of a humour piece, however, further constitutes a humour display, which may be subject to interpretation in itself as a meaningful act. Humour displays as such have their own set of possible effects and subsequent uses, a set almost identical to that of laughter displays. This set of effects will be the subject of the following section.

4. Effects of Laughter and Humour Displays

Displays of laughter and humour produce their effects through the communication of meanings. An observer of such a display must interpret the event in its context, and his interpretation will be the starting point for interactional consequences[1]. Indeed, calculation of such consequences --in relation to the subject's aims-- is normally part of the decision to display laughter or humour (See chapter Seven, 2.5.3, 3.4).

The potential meanings of laughter and humour displays, therefore, including the five major connotations described in the previous chapter, will be relevant to the current analysis:

1. The 'discredit' connotation: "According to my current interpretation, claimant C's self-claim S has been discredited by fact F,

2. The 'knowledge' connotation: "I possess the knowledge necessary to appreciate the amusing elements referred to by laughter"

3. The 'identity' connotation: "I do not feel identified as the claimant(s) discredited"

4. The 'involvement' connotation: "I am (could be) sufficiently involved in the funny elements of the situation to enjoy amusement"

5. The 'entertainment' connotation (humour displays only): "I am delivering a communication which can produce amusement at cause Y in my target sharing audience, not including myself"

[1] It could be argued that the communication of meaning is in itself a consequence --the primary consequence-- of displays. It is. Nevertheless, I have preferred to treat communication as preliminary to more substantial effects, in order to simplify the 'structure' of effects (primary/secondary/...) in discussion, by bracketing the first and most obvious level.

A group of effects resulting from laughter and/or humour displays, most of which have been extensively treated in the literature of humour research, will be derived directly from one or more of these connotations. The discredit connotation relates to (1) the broadcasting of a discrediting event to all co-participants, perhaps eliciting embarrassment and reparatory face-work from the affected claimant if he should be present; (2) the subsequent provocation of amusement and/or laughter in co-participants; (3) the transmission and reproduction of social norms of propriety; and (4) the maintenance and reinforcement of these social norms (See sections 4.1.1 - 4.1.4).

From the knowledge, identity, and involvement connotations can be derived the effects of (1) placing the displaying individual within schemes of social classification according to his mental contents, as revealed by the display; and thus either (2) affiliation between displayer and audience, if mental contents are shared; or (3) disaffiliation between displayer and audience, if mental contents are not shared (See sections 4.2.1 - 4.2.3).

Effects relating to the identity connotation apply when the displaying individual is at risk of being identified as the discredited claimant. A laughter or humour display in these circumstances, by negating this identity, may protect him from (1) unintentional discredit; (2) a discrediting course of action knowingly taken by himself; or (3) a discrediting course of action taken by an agent of discredit. Additionally, abuse in seeking these effects may lead to (4) the giving off of an impression of evasiveness or insecurity (See sections 4.3.1- 4.3.4).

Audience interpretation of the involvement connotation may lead to a fourth group of consequences: (1) the displayer's giving off of an impression of 'callousness' or 'toughness,' when discrediting events are associated with tragedy or misfortune; (2) the displayer's giving off of an impression of moral 'looseness' or 'depravity,' when discrediting events are associated with facts which should elicit moral condemnation; (3) the denial of an interpretation of reality, when such an interpretation is the very discrediting fact; (4) in the case of laughter displays, the revelation of the displayer's focus of attention (See sections 4.4.1 - 4.4.4).

Finally, the entertainment connotation places the humourist in the position of having to fulfill his self-claim to amuse his audience (See section 4.5.1).

Within the discussion of effects, reference will often be made to strategic uses of laughter and humour to achieve desired consequences. The potentially 'affiliative' or cohesive effect of humour and laughter, for instance, is often exploited by salesmen to establish a friendly bond with a prospective client, in order to further a sale (See section 4.2.2). Patterns and institutions of display related to such effects and uses may also be alluded to. An example (also included in 4.2.2) is provided by the highly formalized 'joking relationship' -- observed in several human societies-- where habitual recourse to the affiliative effect of humour and laughter reduces tension between potentially conflictual categories of individuals.

4.1. Effects/Uses Derived from the 'Discredit' Connotation

Laughter and humour displays, among other things, imply that someone's self-claim has been discredited (See Chapter Seven 2.4.1, 3.3). Such a statement can have important consequences for the immediate interactional situation. It **may broadcast the fact of discredit** throughout the situation, alerting those who might be unaware of the relevant events. Moreover, if the claimant discredited can be counted among the co-participants, his embarrassment and perhaps some face-saving maneuvers may be elicited on his part. The broadcast of such information may also logically lead to **the amusement and/or laughter of those present**. Further effects can be posited at the aggregate level. Laughter and humour displays communicate what is found ridiculous by the members of the relevant society, thereby **informing new members (whether foreigners or children) of the social norms of propriety**, and simultaneously **reinforcing and promoting conformity to these norms**. Laughter and humour can thus be used strategically to control the behaviour of others.

4.1.1. Broadcasting Discredit

A laughter or humour display indicates to those within its observational range that a self-claim's discredit may have taken place. As self-claims make up the selves that populate social interaction, such events are of no small importance, especially if the claimants are real and well-known individuals (as opposed to fictional characters or strangers). As a visible and/or audible signal, a display of this type draws attention to the self-claim's alleged discredit and encourages further valuations by those present.

If the display is directed at a co-present participant[1], the self he had been enacting is called into question, and reparatory face-work will be called for if the self is to be salvaged. As seen in Chapter Three (3.2), a discrediting event may set off a corrective process consisting of four 'classic moves': the challenge which calls attention to the infraction, an offering by the offender, acceptance of the offering by those present, and

gratitude by the offender (Goffman, 1967: 19-23). There are various ways in which these moves may be made, verbal or non-verbal, original or standardized, but they appear to be based on emotional reactions which are or 'should be' present:

> Emotions function as moves, and fit so precisely into the logic of the ritual game that it would seem difficult to understand them without it. In fact, spontaneously expressed feelings are likely to fit into the formal pattern of the ritual interchange more elegantly than consciously designed ones.
>
> (p. 23)

Goffman's essay on 'Embarrassment and Social Organization' seems to develop the emotional substratum of the second move, the offering made by the discredited individual. When attention is drawn to a participant's fault by a challenge (or by chance), it is seen as proper that he should fluster and stammer:

> Embarrassment is not an irrational impulse breaking through socially prescribed behaviour but part of this orderly behaviour itself....[By flustering, the individual's] role in the current interaction may be sacrificed, and even the encounter itself, but he demonstrates that, while he cannot present a sustainable and coherent self on this occasion, he is at least disturbed by the fact and may prove worthy on another occasion.
>
> (ibid.: 110)

Amusement could be viewed as underlying the first 'classic' move of the corrective process, the challenge. It is a spontaneous reaction to the perception that someone (perhaps even the perceiver himself) has failed to maintain some element of his self-presentation. And laughter/humour, the visible and audible flags of alleged amusement, announce the supposed fault to everyone in the situation, including the deviant himself if he be present.

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[1] It should be noted that much if not most humour and laughter is directed at non-present actors, and indeed often at fictitious or nonspecific targets. Laughing 'behind the back' of a victim is more common than direct

Indeed, if any observer suspects that laughter or humour may be directed towards himself, it may provoke self-consciousness and a search for failings he may be exhibiting, perhaps with some preparatory embarrassment and/or amusement. If he knows to be at fault already, the display may bring on or heighten embarrassment at being discovered. For example, in D.M. Clark's condom-buying story (see Chapter Six, 2) the laughter of the men in the pool hall informed the teenager that his bluff had been seen through, leading to intense embarrassment.

These expressions work, in this sense, as alarm signals announcing a crack in the fabric of 'normal appearances': “When one individual emits a distress cry or shows sudden alert in consequence of becoming alarmed, his sound and appearance are likely to serve as powerful evidence to the others that something might be wrong”(Goffman, 1971: 243). In the case of laughter/humour, of course, the 'something' that 'might be wrong' is not a direct threat to safety. Nevertheless, the minor improprieties of social life are themselves signs of danger: “When an individual finds persons in his presence acting improperly or appearing out of place, he can read this as evidence that although the peculiarity itself may not be a threat to him, still, those who are peculiar in one regard may well be peculiar in other ways too, some of which may be threatening” (ibid.: 241).

The challenge of derision may be answered by a co-present participant in several ways. One option is for the participant to accept the discredit openly, offering an admission of the undeservedness of the relevant self-claim, and perhaps displaying embarrassment openly. Another is to display laughter, placing a distance between his 'real' self and the self discredited (See this chapter, section 4.3, below). A third is to question the judgement made by the mocking participants:

(Northridge: 2: JP/DP: 1)

Del: What are you doing at ho:me.
(1.7)
Paul: Sitting down watching the tu:[be,
Del: [khnhhh:: ih-huh .hhh

derision, mocking, or teasing. Nevertheless, these do occur.

Del: Wa:tching n-hghn .h you-nghn (0.4) watching dayti:me stories uh?
(.)
Paul: No I was just watching this: uh:m: (0.7) .h.khh you know one of them ga:me shows,

(Drew, 1987: 226)

In this excerpt, it is clear that Paul and Del consider the watching of 'daytime stories' (i.e., soap operas) improper in some way, perhaps because they consider such programs unintelligent or appropriate only for 'women' or 'housewives.' When Del playfully attempts to discredit Paul by accusing him of this impropriety, Paul denies the fault.

Turning to the negative case, when events have discredited a co-participant, non-laughter may be intentionally attempted even against great physical urges to express amusement. This negative expression, signifying 'no discredit has occurred', can be used in order to protect the dignity of the claimant in question. During most interactional encounters, there is a strong pressure for participants to respect each other's selves as presented. Thus, open challenges, especially of important self-claims, are often avoided. Unsuppressed and unqualified derisive laughter is experienced as a hostile and aggressive act, and in fact may discredit the laugher as a respectful participant. Very often, observers of discredit will await the laughter of the person affected --revealing his distance from the discredited claimant (See this chapter, 4.3)-- before displaying their own emotion.

4.1.2. Provocation of Amusement and/or Laughter

Whether directed at a co-present target or not, laughter and humour displays may have a contagion effect, by calling attention to a self-claim's discredit. A humour display by definition encourages and may trigger off the more or less spontaneous laughter of its target sharing audience, through the deployment of the specific humour piece. Laughter itself, however, is also capable of reproducing further instances of its display. In either case, there are at least four separate elements involved in this generation of laughter:

a) An episode of humour, or an initial outburst of hilarity, by signalling a source of the displayer's amusement, *draws attention* to an event which may well be found funny by others.

b) Moreover, the event denoted is presented to observers prejudged, thus *guiding interpretation* along a key of amusement. The observer is not merely invited to turn his eye to a specific object, but to assess it with a critical, skeptical eye.

c) Once amused, or on the verge of amusement, an observer who witnesses the laughter or joking of others at the same object finds his suspicions or outright interpretations *confirmed*. This may strengthen his tendency towards amusement.

d) Finally, whether or not the observer is amused to the appropriate extent, the laughter displays of others contribute to the official definition of events, and pressure him to conform to the general line adopted. Also, it allows laughter to be displayed when the appropriateness of such an expression is not certain.

Several research findings are relevant to these points. Anthony Chapman and Hugh Foot (See Chapman, 1983) have conducted numerous experiments demonstrating the influence of others' laughter on a single subject's reactions (i.e., both observed laughter and subjective amusement). This influence is stronger if communicational distance between participants (i.e., physical distance, orientation towards each other,

frequency of eye-contact) is minimized. Also important are whether the subject and companion are friends, whether they share the social situation, and whether they are of a similar age. In other words, the greater the physical and cultural closeness of the two participants, the greater the contagion effect.

It may be supposed, as suggested above, that a part of this effect may be due to conformity with the companion, and another to actual opinion modification. In the social psychology literature on social influence on opinion formation and sharing, both elements have been widely documented[2]. On the one hand, the reaction of a companion, especially if trusted or belonging to an in-group, is likely to affect the assessment of such questions as the discredit of a self-claim (See also Chapter Four, 3.1.3), thus affecting amusement itself. On the other, the definition of the situation as more-or-less funny establishes the official requisites of display, placing pressure on a companion to conform with a similar display.

The 'canned laughter' that accompanies intentionally funny moments during televised comedy represents one use of this effect. Conversation analysts have also noted that laughter by a speaker is often used as an 'invitation' for others to laugh:

> We can observe that some utterances which we might intuitively understand to be candidates of subsequent laughter get laughter, and get it in a particular way: speaker himself indicates that laughter is appropriate, by himself laughing, and recipient thereupon laughs.
>
> (Jefferson, 1979: 80)

Intriguing examples provided by Gail Jefferson include those where the speaker, after displaying humour, pauses as if waiting for audience appreciation, and finally laughs himself, obtaining the desired response from the listeners:

(1)
Dan: I thought that wz pretty outta sight didju
hear me say'r you a junkie.

[2] Relevant research programmes include Sherif's group influence studies, including the celebrated 'stationary light' test (1936) and Asch's majority opinion studies (1956), both cited in Jones (1985: 64, 79).

(0.5)
Dan: hheh heh[
Dolly: [hhheh-heh-heh

(2)
Joyce: Cuz she wz off in the bushes with some buddy, tch!
(0.7)
Joyce: ehh[hhhhhhh!
Sidney: [Oh(hh)h hah huh! (Jefferson, 1979: 80)

Such laughter invitations can be considered a subset of what have been called 'humour cues' (See Chapter Two 2.1.4), signals used by humourists to let their audience know that amusement is being sought.

4.1.3. Transmission and Reproduction of Social Norms

Communicating that a discredit has taken place simultaneously conveys the criteria of assessment used by those who joke or laugh, including the self-claims judged to apply to the relevant individual and the conditions necessary for discredit of such claims. As discussed in Chapter Four, 2.4, such criteria are often shared widely throughout a social group regarding self-claims attaching to standard roles within society, and also those which attach to all persons universally. These associations of self-claims with particular categories of person constitute what have been called ceremonial norms of 'demeanour' (as opposed to norms of deference and of substance --see Chapter Four, 2.4). Displays of humour and laughter may therefore lead to the transmission of these norms of demeanour or propriety to new or potential members --children, immigrants-- as well as to any curious observer --social scientists, interested rivals. Humour and laughter mark out a set of boundaries of acceptable appearance, thought, and behaviour for specific individuals, social categories, and members of the group as a whole. For those who value and claim membership, moreover, the learning process is driven by the intrinsic rewards of conformity to these norms: avoidance of painful embarrassment and acceptance as a full and valued member, with all the rights and benefits the latter might entail. Thus, laughter and humour continuously communicate, reproduce, reinforce, and maintain the standards of social life.

Socialization of Outsiders

Strangers to any society will be the object of laughter (and subject to frequent embarrassments). Lacking the competencies, knowledge, values, and/or appearance adequate for fulfillment of applicable self-claims, they quickly become aware of these deficiencies as direct shows of amusement are witnessed or echoes of hilarity reach their ears through gossip. They may also become aware of social expectations by observing displays of laughter and humour directed at others.

Anthropologists in the field, as strangers to societies which are often radically divergent from their own, learn much about their natives by observing laughter: "In anthropological circles, it has long been recognized that the study of humour in a society

(via fables, legends, myths, proverbs, poetry, songs, jokes and riddles) will lay-bare core values, philosophical tenets, and beliefs in that social system." (Hopen, 1977). Though specific anecdotes are often edited out of the finished ethnography, Nigel Barley's less academic accounts of fieldwork supply many relevant examples. The following three, taken from *The Innocent Anthropologist* (1983) reveal aspects of the Cameroonian Dowayo's gender-role beliefs, oath use, and funeral practice, respectively:

> Dowayos told me with wonder about an American missionary in Dowayoland whose wife would run from the house to greet him when he returned from a trip. They cackled with amazed amusement at Dowayos having to ask the missionary's wife for lifts instead of the husband, and at the way he never seemed to beat her.
> (...)
> Uncircumcised males who use it ['Dang mi gere', the strongest oath in Dowayoland] are mocked mercilessly and beaten if they persist; it was considered hilarious whenever I did it.
> (...)
> To one side of the special enclosure for male dead sat the widows, staring stonily ahead of them. Foolishly, I sought to greet them; they are not allowed to speak or move. The men considered this a great joke and giggled and sniggered as they wrapped the cadaver.
>
> (1983: 76; 74;123)

Barley's observation of laughter can be considered part of the process by which he learned about the self-claims attaching to particular roles within Dowayo society: 'men' claim control over their wives, using certain oaths constitutes a self-claim to 'initiated' status, 'everyone' claims to avoid trespassing the interactional territory of widows at a funeral. Most if not all of us, as strangers to some new social environment, have undergone a similar process of learning by trial and (often laughable) error.

Socialization of Children

This transmission of knowledge has particular bearing on the issue of primary socialization. Children, as 'foreigners' to their own culture, can and do learn many facts and standards relative to their social environment by observing laughter and applying humour. Several developmental psychologists have noted the close relationship between learning and amusement. As soon as a child masters a particular fact, rule, or skill, he begins to find funny any relevant deviation. Some of the first objects of amusement regard the most obvious differences between appropriate behaviour for babies and that appropriate for adults:

> Once the baby is used to having a dummy, at about nine months old, it will giggle if the mother puts it in her own mouth...Similarly, 10-month-old infants who crawl are likely to laugh when they see adults crawling. They are too young to speak, but not too young to spot adults acting absurdly.
>
> (Cohen, 1994: 65)

Amusement at discredit, therefore, quickly follows the acquisition of knowledge about the self-claims attaching to various roles. The relation is not merely a passive one, however. As these examples suggest, adults (and especially parents) are willing to undertake such acts of 'silliness' to amuse the youngest of social actors. Recognizing the level at which the infant understands the world, they are able to produce jokes which violate the rules operating at this level, and which the child can therefore appreciate. Though not always intended for this purpose --the enjoyment derived from sharing in the child's amusement is motive enough--, these playful interactions may result in the reinforcement of recently acquired social knowledge.

It is not only adults, of course, who make reference to social norms through playful humour. During play, children themselves consolidate (and transmit to each other) the lessons learned by creating rudimentary jokes and distortions which separate error from non-error: “Once a child becomes confident of the normal relationship between stimulus elements or achieves a new level of understanding through acquisition of new cognitive skills, he/she enjoys distorting that knowledge or understanding in the guise of a joke” (McGhee, 1983b: 115).

Though it has been less studied, the disagreeable experience of being 'laughed at' by parents, peers, or older children should not be underestimated as a source of learning. A lesson learned with embarrassment under the stings of mockery is not quickly forgotten. Children can be quite cruel in their open jeering of each other (See chapter Six, 3.2.2), and as they become confident in new knowledge and skills, they begin to laugh at younger or less advanced children (Schultz and Robillard, 1980). Arnold Buss (1980: 231-232) considers laughter, teasing, and ridicule to be "the most potent verbal punishment" used in the socialization of young children:

> The earliest class of behaviour to be treated with teasing concerns self-control. During the second year of life, children are initiated into toilet training. By the third year of life, they are often teased for 'accidents' involving bladder or bowels.
>
> Laughter and ridicule also start early in the area of modesty. Children are taught to conceal certain body parts in public and to reserve nakedness for certain occasions (bath) and certain rooms (bathroom, bedroom). When children violate the taboo, they are often made to feel silly and foolish. Somewhat later in childhood, usually starting with grammar school, children are teased and ridiculed for another kind of immodesty: bragging or conceit....
>
> Starting at grammar school age, children are also introduced to manners and etiquette. They are taught appropriate social behavior in more formal contexts, and they quickly learn about 'front-parlor' and 'eating out' manners. Again, the penalty for mistakes is often ridicule and teasing, and children become embarrassed when others laugh at them.

Throughout the early years, the link between public discreditings and open jeering seems to persist. In a study of embarrassing moments suffered by 11-year olds, 53% of respondents answered that onlookers of their plight responded with laughter or teasing (Stonehouse and Miller, 1994).

Most fascinating is the active use of humour by children to test their newly-acquired knowledge. Horgan (1981; in McGhee, 1983b) conducted detailed observations

of her daughter Kelly's humour use from 16 to 48 months of age. A few days after learning the word 'shoe', one of her first twenty words,

> she put her foot through the armhole of a nightgown, saying 'shoe,' accompanied by shrieks of laughter. Later that day, she put her foot into a tennis ball can, saying 'shoe' and laughing".
>
> (...)
>
> Throughout her development, the acquisition of a new word would stimulate a joke attempt of this type. When she was 1;11 I told her I was proud of her. She correctly surmised that only people are proud of you. She used a joke to 'show off' (and to test) her knowledge: *Daddy's proud of you. Grandma's proud of you. Uncle David's proud of you. Hamburger NOT proud of you. Ha, ha.* Of course, sometimes her analyses were incorrect and her jokes failed. After asking me why men could not wear dresses and contemplating my response about customs, she concluded that customs were something that only men had. *Daddy has a custom. Uncle David has a custom. Mommy has a custom! Ha, ha, mommies can't have customs! The clock has a custom! Ha, ha, clocks can't have customs!*
>
> This sort of joke-telling is a very effective strategy for a language learner: you hear a new word, make a hypothesis about the semantic restrictions, and test your hypothesis by violating those restrictions. Thus, Kelly learned from our responses that she had correctly analysed *proud*, buy had incorrectly analysed *custom*.
>
> (Horgan, 1981: 218-19)

Linguistic competence, of course, is one important aspect of a much broader range of universal and role-related self-claims learned at these early ages. Indeed, "socially unacceptable behaviour" has been found by Kenerdine to be the second most common source of all nursery school children's laughter, and the most common among three-year-olds (cited in McGhee, 1979: 131).

Humour and laughter can be used explicitly by educators to facilitate the learning of material by their students. The participation of parents in children's play probably includes, at least for many parents, some recognition of the relevance of playful deviance for learning rules and practices taught. Even at secondary school and university level courses, such a recognition is occasionally put to use. One example is the annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest (see Rice, 1986), for which entrants attempt to pen the "opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels" (p. vii). Sponsored by the English department at San Jose State University, the contest rewards "*good* bad writing, writing so deliberately rotten that it both entertains and instructs" (p. xi). And indeed, the hilarious departures from acceptable prose which have been collected and published in Rice's book are as good a starting point for a study of English writing as a dry list of rules, and much more entertaining. Covering a different topic, but in a similar vein, *Blunders In International Business* (Ricks, 1993), the author's third publication listing true avoidable disasters in the world of trade, is touted as "a useful and enjoyable teaching tool [which allows students to] remember the concepts...[and] learn more about international business" (p. vii).[3] These two books can also be profitably studied by social scientists as catalogues of the self-claims attaching to authors and businessmen, respectively, and of the conditions for fulfilling them.

Direct mockery of poorly behaved, blundering, or failing students is also used by educators. The 'dunce cap' was an institutionalized method of singling out 'stupid' children for ridicule in the recent history of our own society. Such methods are now frowned upon as cruel and harmful to the ridiculed victims, but informal controls of this type continue to persist in the world of education (as most of us know from experience). Some examples can be found in an article reporting the use of humour during the staff meetings of a psychiatric hospital (Coser, 1960). In this context, the 'junior staff members' of the hospital were in the role of students learning from the psychiatrists and associate psychiatrists who led the meetings and directed the activities of the institution (p. 90-91):

[3] See Chapter Five for examples from Scott (1986) and Ricks (1993).

> When a junior member reported that he had used the therapeutic technique of accepting a patient's delusions of having killed, the senior member presiding asked him: "When was it that you reassured her that she was a murderess?"

When the junior member quoted previously informed the meeting of his new method of 'participant' therapy, the chairman told him:

> Let me mention that there were precedents of your method. There once was a patient who went around barking like a dog [laughter starts here] and the therapist barked back ...[The rest of the sentence is drowned in laughter]

More extreme examples can be found in ethnographic and historical archives, such as the following from ancient Greece:

> Laughter was also deeply appreciated within the framework of the Spartan education as a corrective weapon against those who were not sufficiently successful in coping with the challenges of the *agoge* [educational system] or were guilty of some misbehaviour. In these cases the maidens were encouraged to mock the 'failures' in public, a method reported to have been highly successful: 'The sting of their sarcastic jokes was no less sharp than that of serious admonitions, especially as the kings and gerontes, as well as the other citizens, were present at the spectacle.' This technique was all the more efficient in view of the songs that the same maidens were instructed to sing in praise of those who had distinguished themselves.
>
> (David, 1988: 5)

Laughter and humour displays, by revealing the associations made by individuals between self-claims and particular individuals, social roles, and humanity at large, communicate to outsiders or new members of a social group the relevant standards of propriety, the norms of proper behaviour, thought, control, appearance, and biography.

These displays thus constitute at least one of the mechanisms by which norms of demeanour are reproduced from one generation to the next, promoting the stability and permanence of the expressive order. In the following section, I will treat the complementary effect of social control resulting from laughter and humour displays, which further protects the social order by maintaining conformity to the norms implicit in these displays.

4.1.4. Maintenance and Reinforcement of Social Norms

A distinction between the effect of 'educating' members of society and 'controlling' them cannot be strictly drawn. By observing and participating in amusement, laughter, and humour, children learn what is 'normal' and what is 'ridiculous.' They learn how to avoid embarrassment, how to maintain a certain amount of personal dignity, how to manage their self-presentations, how to be counted as members of society. This process of education, in turn, reproduces the standards, institutions, structures, beliefs, behaviours, practices, and thoughts of the prevailing social order. Education installs control mechanisms in each member of society, and this process of 'education' lasts a lifetime.

Many theorists and researchers have argued that laughter and/or humour promote social conformity or have a 'control' function (Bergson, 1900; Stephenson, 1951; Martineau, 1972; Powell, 1977; Jauregui, 1995). Among adults, and within a single cultural setting, humour and laughter continue to remind individuals of what is normal, known, and expected of each other, as individuals, role-holders, and members of society. They furthermore maintain these members up-to-date as standards evolve --young children already begin to laugh at their parents for being 'old fashioned' in their tastes.

I will argue in these pages that despite the ‘subversive’ appearance of some types of laughter and humour, their effect tends to be one of conformity to and reinforcement of the social standards of propriety. Humour and laughter act against the deviance of the madman (as opposed to that of the criminal), those failures in the upkeep of demeanour which threaten the fragile worlds of social interaction. The ultimate punishment for such violations is the insane asylum, but on the way laughter and humour --in forms such as gossip, ridicule, or teasing-- represent minor and intermediate sanctions. In the struggle over the official definitions of the situation which make up the fabric of social interaction, they will also be shown to play an important role. Even in their absence, the mere threat of laughter and humour may have a passive controlling effect on behaviour.

The Illusion of 'Subversive' Humour and Laughter

Though laughter and humour have sometimes been portrayed as more or less radical tools of social change, in reality they tend to mirror existing patterns and institutions. Stephenson (1951), for instance, found that anthology jokes dealing with status and economic differentials tended to reinforce traditional American values such as equality, ambition, and opportunity. Husband (1977) has shown that racist humour in a number of BBC sitcoms, while intended to be satirical, may have actually served to "exacerbate racial feeling" already present in British society (p. 271). A joke which is to have an appreciative audience will not be found funny without reference to self-claims attributed to some actor(s) by the audience members. Such shared attributions are among the foundations of social structure.

Umberto Eco has expressed the illusory nature of this 'subversive' aspect of the phenomena most lucidly:

> The comic seems to belong to the people, liberating, subversive, because it gives license to violate the rule. But it gives such a license precisely to those who have so absorbed the rule that they also presume it inviolable. The rule violated by the comic is so acknowledged that there is no need to reaffirm it. That is why carnival can take place only once a year. It takes a year of ritual observance for the violation of the ritual precepts to be enjoyed.
>
> (Eco, 1987: 275)

Indeed, carnivals --where behavioural expectations are typically reversed or violated in numerous ways-- have been particularly common in traditional agricultural societies, where very fixed sets of self-claims attach to role members and to members of society as a whole. Such reversals of practice are very common cross-culturally during rites of passage, whether from one calendar year to the next, or from an individual's initial status to a new one. By eliciting laughter at such 'wrong' behaviour --sexual transgression at a pre-wedding 'bachelor party', role-reversals during carnival--, they actually celebrate proper behaviour.

Michael Mulkay (1988) has analyzed this paradox in modern society. In Mulkay's view, it is not only mainstream commercial humour which is conservative, but even explicitly critical satire such as political cartoons. Cartoons, though apparently designed to provoke change in the real world, in fact follow the editorial line of their home newspapers, reaching audiences whose opinions concur with the points expressed in the humour. They are ‘conservative’ within the particular virtual society of readers, no matter how radical this readership may be. Thus they tend to "confirm existing views and to strengthen the established political structure" (p. 210).

Critical humour merely reflects the existence of critical sectors of society, subgroups who share amusement at certain individuals or institutions they collectively consider ridiculous or enjoy ridiculing. Undoubtedly, the boss, the king, the president, the teacher are laughed at within certain circles (especially in private), and will certainly be subject to general mockery if their independent, role, or universal self-claims are not fulfilled (often a tall order in the upper ranks). Nevertheless, it is generally those in power positions who set the laughter agenda. In a study of humour use during hospital staff meetings, Coser (1960) found that senior staff members made many more witticisms (53) than junior staff members (33), even though juniors spent much more time talking at the meetings. He also noted that women made a remarkably low number of witticisms, and that humour tended to be directed 'downwards' (p. 85, original emphasis):

> The most frequent targets of the senior staff were junior members; the humor of the latter, however, was more frequently directed against patients and their relatives, as well as against themselves.... Humor tends to be directed against those who have no authority over the initiator. In two cases in which senior members were the targets of the juniors, the targets were absent from the meetings. *Not once was a senior staff member present a target of a junior member's humor*.

Even humour which is directed at power holders or well-established institutions must be founded on other institutions, namely, the social norms and expectations held by the

target sharing audience. It will be radical at large, but conservative (and perhaps even funny) at home.

The Deviance of the Insane

Humour and laughter delineate boundaries of deviance. Specifically, they thrive on the deviance of the madman and the freak, rather than the deviance of the criminal. Blundering once is funny; blundering twice may be twice as funny; but blundering three or more times will begin to threaten everyday interaction, and such threats risk exclusion from society. Goffman's analyses of self-claim maintenance in public invariably alluded to the depository of interactional failures: the mental hospital (See Goffman 1961; 1963: 231-248; 1967: 137-200).

> More than to any family or club, more than to any class or sex, more than to any nation, the individual belongs to gatherings, and he had best show that he is a member in good standing. The ultimate penalty for breaking the rules is harsh. Just as we fill our jails with those who transgress the legal order, so we partly fill our asylums with those who act unsuitably --the first kind of institution being used to protect our lives and property; the second, to protect our gatherings and occasions.
>
> (Goffman 1963: 248)

In the back wards of mental homes we find individuals who, for whatever reason, regularly fail to keep up their own and others' public masks. Here we are made aware, by shocking contrast, of the vulnerability and fragility of daily interaction, of all the myriad details of behaviour usually so ingrained and automatic as to be taken for granted. Consider the following description of mealtime behaviour:

> A patient would often lunge at an extra piece of food or at least eye an extra piece covetously. Even when each individual at table was allowed to receive an equal share, over-eagerness was shown by the practice of taking all of one's share at once instead of waiting until one serving had been eaten. Occasionally a patient

> would come to table half-dressed. One patient frequently belched loudly at meals and was occasionally flatulent. Messy manipulation of food sometimes occurred. Swearing and cursing were common. Patients would occasionally push their chairs back from the table precipitously and bolt for another room, coming back to the table in the same violent manner. Loud sounds were sometimes made by sucking on straws in empty pop bottles.
>
> (Goffman 1967: 79-80)

Such a description could serve as the basis for a comedy routine. Each of these improper behaviours could be seen as funny if the individuals performing them were not labelled 'insane,' a classification implying disease or damage which incapacitates an individual for normal interaction. In our society, such a state of affairs is considered tragic, an unjust deprivation of the basic human right to a happy and productive life. We expect such things to evoke empathic pity (See Chapter Six, 3.2.2). However, this attitude is not shared universally, and a few generations ago, laughing at madness was considered acceptable. Morreall (1982: 244) notes that in the eighteenth century, "it was common for the rich to amuse themselves by taking a coach to an insane asylum to taunt the inmates". The insane asylum is also the 'funny farm.'

In this context, it is interesting to note the shift in the interpretation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* that took place in the nineteenth century, as documented by P.E. Russell (1969). The classic treats at length the delusions, outrageous pretensions, and failed exploits of a skinny old man who, having read too many chivalric romances, loses his sanity and believes himself to be a heroic paladin. In 1813, Sismondi described *Don Quixote* as "the saddest book ever written" (Russell, 1969: 325), initiating a romantic interpretation of the work which has continued to the present day. According to Russell (p. 323-24), this view derives from "the modern reader's ability (and desire) to identify with the knight...as a would-be, though very unsuccessful, do-gooder." For over one and a half centuries before Sismondi, however, readers of the book "accepted without cavil that *Don Quixote* was simply a brilliantly successful funny book" (p. 312), following

what seem to have been Cervantes' own intentions --"to move the melancholy man to laughter, and the gay man to increased merriment"[4].

Today, the empathy we extend to the mentally handicapped normally prevents our amusement at their improper or unacceptable ideas and behaviour. Nevertheless, such empathy is a moral ideal not always achieved in practice. Even among the staff of psychiatric hospitals, laughter and humour which is directed at patients' behavioural anomalies is common (Coser, 1960; Goodrich, Henry, and Wells, 1954). More generally, it is the 'mad' behaviour and ideas of 'normal' people which inspire our amusement, or else the lunacy of fictional characters intended to elicit no empathy. The world of comedy abounds with explicit references to insanity, particularly in the genres where one or more characters exhibit numerous, extreme, and/or recurrent faults: clowning, slapstick, and 'screwball' comedy. Indeed, the lexicon of madness is one of the most common identifying tags for humorous entertainment. Examples abound: *The Crazy Gang*[5], *Crazy People*[6], *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*[7], *Mad Magazine*[8], *The Doctor Demento Show*[9]. The madman, fool, zany, or loony is a staple comedy character, from which outright confessions of insanity are not rare:

> I'm not all there
> There's something missing.
> I'm not all there--
> So the folks declare.
> They call me Loopy, they call me Loopy--
> Nothing but a great big BOOPY!
>
> Eric Morecambe (in Staveacre, 1987: 121)

[4] "Que...el melancolico se mueva a risa, el risueno la acreciente." (Cervantes, Don Quijote de la Mancha, I, Prologo. Cited in Russell, 1969: 312.)

[5] A hugely successful British comedy troupe organized by Fred Karno in 1932 and retiring in 1962.

[6] The original title of the classic BBC radio series *The Goon Show* (1952-1960).

[7] (United Artists, 1963) --A slapstick film which brought together many of the most important American comedians of the century.

[8] The most successful American humour magazine, published by E.C. publications since 1952, recently turned into a Fox Broadcasting Co. television program.

> Conyers [aggrieved]: Here, are you puttin' it about that I'm barmy?
>
> James: Why --are you trying to keep it a secret?
>
> The Crazy Gang (ibid.: 122)

> I'm mad, I'm mad,
>
> It's sad, but it's true,
>
> I froth with wrath,
>
> Bite chair legs in two.... Max Wall (ibid.: 124)

> It's fifteen years since I went out of my mind. I'd never go back.
>
> Ken Dodd (ibid.)

Even more telling is the relationship between real mental unfitness and the taking up of comedy as a profession. In certain societies, institutions of humour have served as social outlets for mentally disturbed individuals. Among the Native American Crow, for instance, the *thanigratha* or tribal clowns, were chosen from the naturally eccentric or unruly (Staveacre, 1987: 121). In a complex society such as our own, with its competitive markets and tightly structured schedules and procedures, it is less likely that a seriously deficient individual could become a professional comedian. Nevertheless, "there is a widespread stereotype that comics are depressed people who are more psychologically disturbed than the average" (Fisher and Fisher, 1983), and at least some evidence supports this view. Eighty-five per cent of professional comedians who participated in a study by Janus (1975) had at some time in their lives sought psychotherapeutic treatment. Research has also established that they are more likely to have been brought up in broken families and to come from a low socio-economic class than other types of performers. Moreover, many comics themselves attribute their talent to psychological problems:

> Some performers think that psychiatry would destroy their art. They'll never consider it, for fear that sanity would take away what makes them good performers.

---

[9] A popular and long-running American radio program in which Barry Hansen plays recordings from his collection of "mad music and crazy comedy."

(John Cleese, in Staveacre, 1987: 124)

Laughing with others draws a boundary between 'us' --the normal, the sane, the proper-- and 'them' --the abnormal, the insane, the improper[10]. Each episode of laughter and/or humour is not only a reminder of the constraints within which we all live, but also a marker which stigmatizes those who fail or refuse to live by them. Though occasional faults of propriety are excusable in everyone, any single fault is a memorable event which may be added to subsequent ones. Frequent or persistent infractions may lead to the labelling of the perpetrator as 'scatterbrained,' 'eccentric,' 'weird,' 'having a screw loose,' 'thick,' 'awkward,' 'tactless' and the like. Such individuals may become frequent targets of humour in a group or 'laughingstocks,' living symbols of the social expectations applicable to each member of the group. The institution of the 'village idiot' in many traditional societies is an extreme example of the "fool-making process" which is omnipresent in society and includes such phenomena as teasing, satire, clowning, and ridicule (Klapp, 1950: 159-160).

Laughter, Humour, and Conformity

As we have seen, the endpoint of such a process, the final punitive sanction for impropriety, is the insane asylum. On the way to the 'loony bin,' however, humour and laughter may have important normalizing effects on the behaviour of others, and indeed may be consciously designed to do so. The fear of embarrassment, of becoming the butt of all jokes, of losing social worth and esteem, of suffering partial or total discredit --as well as these feared experiences themselves when they occur-- appear to be strong enough sanctions to bring most individuals in line with accepted practice. Emile Durkheim cited laughter as one of the coercive mechanisms by which a 'social fact' imposes itself on the individual: “If I do not conform to ordinary conventions, if in my mode of dress I pay no heed to what is customary in my country and in my social class,

[10] Incidentally, it is in this sense that one may speak of a laughing individual as 'feeling superior' to the target of amusement. Such feelings (or, rather, beliefs) of superiority do not *cause* amusement; they are simply revealed or signalled by the laughter, who has (more or less presumptuously) cast himself in the role of critic and judge.

the laughter I provoke, the social distance at which I am kept, produce, although in a more mitigated form, the same results as any real penalty" (1982: 51).

This effect of humour has been widely claimed in many empirical studies, especially in the anthropological literature. Gossip, as widely practiced a phenomenon as it is denounced, is an indirect but powerful variant. Such private talk about another's private affairs "must concern something that does not agree with the subject of gossip's self-presentation and whose 'public disclosure' for the subject of gossip would probably evoke a feeling of embarrassment or shame" (Bergman, 1987). Thus, in cases where an aesthetic (i.e., embarrassing, amusement-provoking) rather than a moral (i.e., shameful, outrage-provoking) issue is at stake, gossip is a form of highly uncontrived humour. In the following conversation (p. 94), Mrs. R. and Mrs. P. share their amusement at the luridly recounted self-discrediting actions of an acquaintance[11]:

[High-Life: GR: 33]

R: So Breckmann says, "Let's get her drunk.

---

[11] It might be suggested in reference to the above discussion that the typing of individuals as insane seems commonplace within such gossip, the supposed 'crazies' or 'weirdos' of each social milieu being favourite targets:

[High life: GR: 32]

H: Yeah, that woman's not normal anymore.
And her old man is crazy too.
R: On our block, in every house, there's a nut.
P: <laughing faintly>
R: It's true.
H: There's that flat-footed floo[zy the--, the Schuren woman]
R: Yeah [( )]
R: Flat-foot floozy
(P): <laughing faintly>
H: Further down the street there's
R: Brollo.
H: Brollo doesn't have all his
marbles either.
R: And then there's--, the--
H: the Jaspers woman
R: the Jaspers woman and then there's--, the--
H: Krysmanski?
R: Krysmanski
H: Yeah,[(that's)
R: [And all five on one (block) (Bergman, 1987: 127-28)

Then she'll strip for us."
P: <faintly laughing>
R: She was wearing those neat Yokohama-pants, tsk, tsk.
P: <faintly laughing>
R: So there she sat.
and we, uh, we were fooling around=
=pretty soon she was lying on the billiard ta--able.
The more she drank, the wilder she got.
A guy goes over to her and opens his pants and puts his thing in her hand.
But I ( ) <boasting>
P: <faintly laughing>
R: And without blinking an eye--she--when she's drunk she's so, well, so (loose)

Undoubtedly, such talk defines and reinforces the standards held by the participants who engage in it. Their sharing in such opinions and laughter commits them even more strongly to the relevant norms. It may also affect the subject of gossip himself. Though it circulates, by definition, 'behind his back', gossip often does nevertheless 'reach the subject's ears' in one way or another: through a confederate's words, an overheard snippet of conversation, a graffiti left on the walls of a public toilet, the 'looks' that others give him, etc.... Even when he does not have proof of it, the subject of gossip may 'know' or suspect that others speak of him, thus exerting pressure on his behaviour.

Open laughter and humour can also lead to similar effects. In everyday interaction between friends, such direct teasing and mockery are commonplace. For example when, in the following scene (p. 105), Mrs. R defends her claim that the Theissen family are dirty and unkept, she reveals a tendency to pry that is immediately rejected --and laughed at-- by her fellow participants:

[High-Life: GR: 23/Simplified]

G: ...It was always rather well kept
R: Yeah,[when you walked in and looked around I would
G: [( ]
R: say it was always well [kept.
G: [Hm
R: But you have to look in the corners too.
P: <laughing>

?: ([ )
H: [You can't really go there
and look in the [corners.
P: [Hehehehehehehe
G: ( )
R: I'd do that even if I didn't want to.
G: Hm
R: Whenever I go into anyone's place [automatically
G: [<softly laughing>
R: my eyes look everywhere.
G: Pau[l! {The conversation takes place in Paul's apartment.}
H: [Have you checked out the corners [in Paul's pla]ce=
?: [( )]
H: Hahahaha[haha
G: [Hehe

The above lines exemplify a real discredit of Mrs. R, who might well have felt some embarrassment despite her attempts to maintain her position. Teasing, however, generally involves a mention of some participant's discredit which is more or less exaggerated. The more caricatured the deviance, the more a tease qualifies as 'nonserious,' allowing jokers to deny believing the tease literally and permitting the target of humour to achieve distance from the discredited self and thus share in amusement and/or avoid embarrassment (See this chapter, 4.3, below). In some cases, the tease is so far-flung as to not apply much or at all to the nominal transgressor. To the extent that the tease makes reference to a real impropriety or implausible self-claim, however, it may count as pressure to curb the deviant act:

[Campbell: 4: 5]

Arthur: ...you feeling <u>be</u>tter now.
Bill: Uh:m mNo:.
Arthur: Oh you poor cunt, .hh
(0.4)
Bill: ee I think it <u>was</u> food poisoning (last night) 'cause
I was
Arthur: (look)
Bill: I'm still gettin:g you know, hh .hh stomach pains I
sp<u>ewed</u> <u>l</u>ast ni:ght, ...<u>chr</u>onic diarrhea as we-e-ll,
just before I went to <u>b</u>ed and ... this <u>m</u>orning
(well) I've had this bad stomach. So I guess the same's

gonna happen tonight.... I've been getting funny things
in fron of my eye:s actually..hh A bi:t, just slightly,
Li:ght flashes.
:
Bill: But uh, (0.3) tsk (sti:ll.)
Arthur: Well you probably got at least a week.
Bill: What of thi:s:.
(0.3)
Arthur: No a week before you die:,
(0.7)
Bill: Ohh yhhe heh heh uh--.hhh[hh
Arthur: [It's a rare disea:se. see,
Bill: Yeh yeh yeh.

(Drew, 1987: 224/237)

In this conversation, Arthur teases Bill for overdoing the drama of his malady by 'reassuring' his friend that death is at least another week away --implying Bill was worried it would come sooner. Though Bill was certainly not guilty of such an absurd thought, the joke allows him to see his real worries and complaints as improper, even ridiculous --and pressures him to cease such 'whining' behaviour, now and in the future.

Conformity To Official Definitions

In such exchanges, the importance of laughter and humour as tools in the shaping of everyday definitions becomes evident. During interaction, these communicative acts question and sometimes curtail attempts to portray events or persons in a way which violate official understandings as defined by the displaying individual. One of the most common cases, unsurprisingly, involves a speaker who makes an unconvincing claim about himself. In a study of audience reactions to political debates (Clayman, 1992), such claim-making moments produced the vast majority of audience laughter reactions which were not 'affiliative' (i.e., responding to the speaker's joke, etc...):[12]

[Bentsen-Quayle: 0:12:53]

JRN: Senator since coming to the Senate you have voted

[12] In audience responses, series of 'h' correspond to laughter, with hyphenated sequences (ie. 'h-h-h') corresponding to milder responses.

against environmental protection legislation about
two thirds of the time..hhh These include votes
against pesticide control:s, the toxic waste
superfund, .hhh and health and safety protection
from nuclear wastes..hhh Senator, do you: consider
yourself (.) an environmentalist, (.) and if you do
how do you reconcile that with your voting record.
(2.0)
DQ: I have a very strong (0.7) record (0.4) on the
environment. .hhhh[hh[in the United States Senate.]
AUD: [hh[h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-]=
=hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-h-h-h-h (4.1)
DQ: I have a record where I voted for the superfund... (p. 46)

Senator Dan Quayle's bald and unsupported claim of being an environmentalist, after hearing ample evidence of the contrary, produces in Democratic Party supporters a wave of laughter, who thereby reject the Republican's portrayal of himself. Quayle may attempt to maintain his self-claim, but the audience reaction has warned him that he had better provide some solid facts and argumentation to support it.

The description of other events or people can also bring on critical displays, as in this conversation transcribed by Drew (1987: 223):

[NB:II:4:R:14] (Nancy is describing a man she recently met)

Nancy: VERY SWEET. .hhh VE:RY: (.) CONSIDERATE MY
GOD ALL I HAD TO DO WAS LOOK AT A CIGARETTE
AND HE WAS OUT OF THE CHAIR LIGHTING
(h)IT YhhhOU KNO(h)OW=
Emma: [I: KNO:W IT]
Nancy: [.hehh.hh One of th]ose kind .hhhhh=
Emma: [Yes
Nancy: [A::nd so[:but we were]
Emma: [THEY DO THAT][BEFORE AND A:FTER]
Nancy: [eeYhhehee AHH]
Emma: THEY DO:n't.
Nancy: HAH HAH.hhhh
Emma: (Or he's)
Nancy: NO:? e-MARTHAHAS known Cli:ff, ...((a good 30 years
and he's an absolute boy scout))

Martha's tease "THEY DO THAT BEFORE AND A:FTER THEY DO:n't" throws some doubt on Emma's characterization of Cliff as considerate and well-intentioned, by suggesting possible ulterior motives of a sexual nature. The line is no more than a joking interpretation --a different reaction would have been a well-informed, "Hahaha, yes, well he's been pulling that trick for years, the scoundrel!". Nevertheless, it serves as a warning against a naive and possibly dangerous acceptance of appearances. As it happens, in this case, Emma appears to have good evidence of the man's trustworthy nature, but such skeptical moves are a fundamental part of defining and coping with our ever uncertain social reality.

Meetings at any frontier of disagreement provide the researcher with excellent opportunities for studying the effects and uses of laughter and humour in the realm of defining reality. Speeches in the British Parliament, for instance, are frequently responded to with laughter from opposing camps, a practice common in such fora since our earliest records of them:

> Derisive laughter could be used in Spartan politics also as an alternative to discussion, particularly in the assembly. An example of such use is suggested by Xenophon's account of the 'debate' preceding the adoption of the fatal decision to dispatch Cleombrotus' army on the mission which ended in the disaster of Leuctra. Prothous, a Spartan whose name is known only from this occasion, tried to convince his fellow citizens to adopt a different (and more prudent) course of action. Xenophon relates that the Spartans thought he was talking nonsense.
>
> (David, 1988: 16)

Control Campaigns

Certain unacceptable self-claims or deviant characteristics of particular individuals or groups may become the object of long-running series of jokes by a social group: a colleague's habitual lateness, a politician's poor grammar, an artist's over-hyped but actually worthless productions, a religious sect's 'bizarre' beliefs, an ethnic group's stinginess. Holdaway (in Powell and Paton, 1988) reports some of the humorous campaigns waged against fellow officers within a police team (p. 115):

> A constable who is prone to the frequent, highly exaggerated telling of stories is 'sent up' with equal frequency because he is so immersed in the excesses of the occupational culture that he almost discredits it. Here, as he begins a story about a car chase, ready to lace his account with lavish drama of danger and speed, a colleague interjects: 'Tell us about it, Bill. Dangerous I bet. Great chase, eh?'. Another officer who has a reputation for driving at very fast speeds whatever the nature of the incident he is heading for, is subject to similar remarks, which always draw laughter from colleagues. This PC has just returned from a call to premises where suspects might have been attempting to enter illegally. Inspector: 'No "Suspects On" then?' PC: 'No.' Other PC: 'Your imagination then?' Inspector: 'But he was there first.'

Such campaigns of attrition are not necessarily intended as such, of course --at least consciously-- but some people do engage in ridicule with an awareness of the 'improvement' in others or in society which may result. In Chapter Five, for instance, I mentioned the works of such defenders of science as Martin Gardner and James Randi, who have written books and articles exposing the emptiness of pseudoscientific theories and debunking claims of paranormal ability by various charlatans. Gardner believes that ridicule can be more effective than mere argumentation (1983: xv-xvi):

> In discussing extremes of unorthodoxy in science I consider it a waste of time to give rational arguments. Those who are in agreement do not need to be educated about such trivial matters, and trying to enlighten those who disagree is like trying

> to write on water. People are not persuaded by arguments to give up childish beliefs; either they never give them up or they outgrow them. If a Protestant fundamentalist is convinced that the earth was created six thousand years ago and that all fossils are records of life that flourished until Noah's Flood, nothing you can say will have the slightest effect on his or her ignorant mind-set.
> (...)
>
> For these reasons, when writing about extreme eccentricities of science, I have adopted H.L. Mencken's sage advice: one horse-laugh is worth ten thousand syllogisms.

Many caricaturists and satirists, both professional and lay, consider their work productive in so far as it may prevent or correct the vanities and deficiencies of individuals, role-members, office-holders, institutions, or society as a whole. As Highet (1962: 156) claimed in a book on satire, its purpose is, "through laughter and invective, to cure folly and punish evil." Again, however, there exist grave limitations to such effects. To be effective within a given social context, humour must be based on widely accepted standards of appearance, thought, and behaviour. In simple, small-scale societies, where many such standards are shared, institutions of ridicule such as camp clowns or songs of mockery are common means of social control:

> Rasmussen reports instances in which Eskimo nith-songs are used ... as a form of public reprimand, bringing home to someone guilty of anti-social conduct the disapproval with which his behaviour is viewed. The singer recounts the wrongdoing loudly in a public place where all can hear, hoping to shame the wrongdoer into mending his ways. Similar means of curbing disapproved conduct are very widely reported [in ethnographies of traditional societies], all of them involving some sort of ridicule, reproach or public exposure, operating to discomfort the wrongdoer and thus encourage him back to acceptable forms of behaviour.
>
> (Roberts, 1979: 61)

An example of an Eskimo nith-song gives a flavour of how even a rather serious wrongdoing --a man who abandoned his wife and child to perish in the wilds after a marital quarrel-- can be punished with words of mockery:

> Ay-all who listen,
> What do you think of him,
> Poor sort of man?
> Is he to be envied,
> Who is great in his anger
> But faint in strength
> Blubbering helplessly,
> Properly chastised?
> Though it was he who foolishly proud
> Started the quarrel with stupid words. (ibid.: 90)

Passive Agents of Control

As with other types of sanction, laughter and humour may be effective as agents of social control even in their absence. The anticipation of others' ridicule by potential deviants itself acts as a powerful deterrent. Such fear is a familiar sensation to us all, even when ethnographic details seem foreign, as in this desperate speech by a New Guinean Busama villager faced with the plight of an unprepared host (in Hogbin, 1947: 276):

> who ever heard of receiving important guests without killing a pig for them to eat? Where's that to come from? You know quite well there's not a pig in the place. When these men go home and are asked what we gave them, they'll reply that all they had was just a little taro and rice without pork. Their kinsmen will laugh at us, and we'll have to hang our heads in shame.

Recent research has confirmed that individuals will make great efforts to avoid anticipated embarrassment[13], even at a great cost to themselves and others. For example, teenagers will risk AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases in order to avoid the

[13] As seen in Chapter Six, I, the experience of embarrassment is associated by most people to the sensation of others laughing at them. Also, as seen in Chapters Four to Six, embarrassing situations are causes of amusement for us all. Thus, it is reasonable to equate anticipated embarrassment of the self with the anticipated laughter of others.

embarrassment of purchasing a condom or of using it at the critical moment (Miller, 1986: 163).

– – – – – – – – – – – –

Laughter and humour displays imply the discredit of someone's self-claim. This connotation may have effects both at the situational level and, in the aggregate, at the social level. Within a situation, a manifestation of laughter and/or humour may publicise the discredit of the claimant --perhaps eliciting embarrassment and/or face-work if the claimant be present at the scene. At the same time, it may have an effect on the amusement and/or laughter displays of participants present, who are alerted about the discredit and about its interpretation by the displaying individual.

In the aggregate, these displays have effects on the social order. They make new members and children aware of the social norms of demeanour applicable to particular individuals, roles, and humanity at large. Furthermore, they act as a pressure for group members to conform to these norms, as a preliminary and most effective sanction to a type of deviance ultimately penalized, in our society, by confinement to an insane asylum.

4.2. Effects Derived From the 'Knowledge', 'Identity', and 'Involvement' Connotations

As we have seen (Chapter Seven, 2.4.2-2.4.4, 3.3), laughter and humour displays represent self-claims about the displaying actor's own knowledge about certain particulars, social identity, and ability to become involved in certain ways of interpreting reality. These ‘knowledge,’ ‘identity,’ and ‘involvement’ connotations, therefore, reveal (or purport to reveal) a substantial amount of information about the displaying individual. A humorist who creates a clever wit on the basis of the specialized jargon of geologists reveals his familiarity with this discipline. A person who laughs at a slanderous ethnic joke reveals his ethnic background and prejudice. Showing mirth at a ‘blasphemous’ piece of humour exposes a person’s level of commitment to and respect for a particular religion or for religious belief and practice in general. Often, such information is not particularly noteworthy, merely confirming what observers already know about the displaying individual. It becomes salient when the mental possessions (or lack thereof) revealed by the display provides new or unexpected data.

Three effects can be derived from these considerations. From an abstract, outside observer’s perspective, laughter and humour displays result in the **placement of the displaying individual within schemes of social classification**, which in the aggregate results also in the creation and reinforcement of these categories. At a subjective, interpersonal level, one of two further effects is also likely. An observer may feel **affiliation** towards the displaying individual if mental possessions exposed are similar to his own, or **disaffiliation** if they diverge. These complementary effects also allow for an individual to test a relationship, or to achieve greater closeness or distance with a co-participant.

4.2.1. Social Classification

Every society carves up the world according to conceptual typologies, and among these can always be found schemes for classifying persons, according to such cross-cutting criteria as gender, age, race, class, ethnic background, religion, ideology, profession, personality type, hobby interest, and aesthetic preference. Displaying laughter or humour situates a person within such schemes of social classification, by divulging mental contents which reveal aspects of his cultural background and personality:

> A man's laugh betrays the kind of man he is. (Baillie, 1921: 268)

> Laughter [is] the cipher-key wherewith we decipher the whole man!
> (Carlyle, 1833: 24)

The social categories to which the laughing individual commits himself can be more or less specific. The joke about electricity cited in Chapter Seven 2.4.2 (“Where does electricity come from? The wall.”) reveals relatively little about an appreciating listener. Even familiarity with electricity and wall sockets does, however, exclude some remote populations of humanity, as does --probably to a greater extent-- the standard 'question and answer' format of such jokes.

A more accurate gauge of identity might be the films of Woody Allen, which for full enjoyment require familiarity with such marks of intellectual 'cultivation' as psychoanalytic theory, existentialist philosophy, Greek theatre, Russian literature, contemporary politics, and a wide variety of cinematic genres. ‘Risky’ humour (i.e., ethnic, sexual, aggressive, blasphemous, toilet), which is likely to offend or embarrass a certain proportion of a population, can also classify a displaying individual with more precision. Moving towards ever greater specificity, we find culturally local comedians who use material closely circumscribed by the world of their audience and, and finally 'inside’ jokes comprehensible to or tolerable by only a handful of people.

This classificatory effect can be considered at the interpersonal level: a laugher or humourist reveals his cultural and ethnic background, his allegiances, his ignorance or

knowledge about specific pools of information. Such an event may have any of the consequences associated with actions which disclose information about the self. An adolescent boy unable to decode a sexual joke may be discredited before his friends for failing to possess certain status-essential knowledge. More extreme cases include the forced resignation of former American Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz for telling a joke which revealed racist attitudes, or the prison sentences imposed by some totalitarian countries for the use of subversive humour (Fine, 1983: 175). Laughter and humour displays can also be used strategically to situate the self within a grid of social categories --i.e., an adolescent boy who tells many sexual jokes and/or laughs where appropriate to demonstrate his knowledge of sexual lore. Such self-claims may also, of course, be discredited.

Another possible strategic use of this effect can be made not by the displaying individual himself, but by his observer. Eliciting humour, or eliciting laughter at particular types of humour, can be a way of learning about the other. Following Freud's analysis of jokes (1905), for instance, this technique has been developed and recommended by several psychotherapists:

> There have been many studies since Freud that have dealt with the type of humour people prefer and its relation to specific problems they may have, or to personality dynamics.... My own work has experimentally and clinically demonstrated that both general personality factors and problems of personal significance find their means of expression overtly through jokes. Indeed a patient's favourite joke has been found sometimes to reveal hidden dynamics behind anxiety that is attributed to other causes.
>
> (Grossman, 1977)

Outside of specific interactional situations, and moving to the level of society, the frontiers which bind together and divide audiences of humour and laughter spring from but also create and reinforce social boundaries. Sharing laughter within a group is not only made possible by the shared knowledge and attitudes of members; it is a ritual which maintains and strengthens the group as such, as well as pressuring new or deviant

members to conform (see this chapter, 4.1.3 - 4.1.4, above). Moreover, the ritual is directed against the targets of amusement, out-groups and deviant members against whom barriers of celebrated difference are erected. In the aggregate, humour and laughter tend to reproduce existing social structures (Mulkay, 1988: 210).

The following transcript can be used as an illustration. It records part of an interview between a sociologist (G) and the mayor of Conspicua (C), a town in Malta, in the presence of two other members of the town hall (J, V). Conversation centres around the linguistic situation in Malta, an island culturally rooted in the Arab world, though recently a British colony for over one and a half centuries.

G: Mmh. .Hh, but do, do you th..., do you, ee, ...In Sliema, for example,...
J: Ha.
G: ...they speak more English than, than Maltese
V: If you can call it English [smiles].
J: Don't tell me that! It's broken...
G: Yes, it's a broken...
C: Hehe.
V: HI HI HI HI HI.
J: That's a very sour point. But you ar obli..., obliged there.
V: Hahahaha.
C: HA HA
G: Nppfff.
J: I always start swearing. Because probably, eh, you know,...
C: Ha.
(...)
G: Mmh. Yes. And, and as you said it's not even real English. It's...
V: No, no.
G: It's a mixture...
J: Mmh.-Exactly. When they find a hard word in English they use, they use the Maltese one.
C: HA HA HA HA HA.
V: Hahaha.
G: (smiles) (Gerber, 1997)

The Conspicuan mayor and his associates, with their displays of humour and laughter at the expense of the inhabitants of Sliema and other English-speaking areas of Malta, reveal their own Arab pride and Arab-speaking preferences, and make evident a cultural boundary separating an 'Arab Malta' from an 'English Malta.' According to their

interpretation, the inhabitants of Sliema are ridiculous in their claims to speak proper English, when in fact their 'true' language and culture is 'Maltese'. It might be imagined that in Sliema, a conversation on the same topic might portray Arab-speaking Maltese as laughable for being 'less civilized' and for not speaking English. Occasions such as these, in which in-group members take the opportunity to share amusement together at the expense of an outgroup, are the very occasions where group boundaries are defined, revived, and solidified. The presence of a neutral participant, an interviewer (G), transforms this particular occasion into one where group boundaries are transmitted to a new individual. Moreover, the newcomer seems to undergo pressure to adopt the beliefs of the in-group and share in the laughter, pressure to which he seems to conform, but only just.

4.2.2. Affiliation

The effect of social classification has been presented above from an abstract, neutral standpoint: an actor's laughter or humour display shows who he is. It can be further regarded, however, from a subjective point of view: who is the social actor *to me*? Two contrary and complementary interpersonal effects are possible, depending on the relationship between the social identity expressed by laughter and that of an observer: **affiliation** or **disaffiliation**. If the observer has amusement reactions[1] which closely resemble those of a displaying individual, his affiliation towards the latter will tend to be strengthened. He will consider the other to be in several ways akin to himself, part of the same in-group or groups within particular schemes of social classification. If, on the other, a joke is found cryptic, stupid, or tasteless, an outburst of laughter puzzling, tactless, or ignorant, or a seriously-delivered presentation unintentionally funny, disaffiliation will result. Many reactions of this type will lead the observer to feel alienated from the displaying individual, progressively seen (at least in the relevant contexts) as an ever more distant outsider and out-group member. In this section, I will discuss the effect of affiliation and its uses, turning to disaffiliation in Section 4.2.3.

Sharing any emotion --anger, fear, sadness, happiness, nostalgia-- creates a bond between the sharing individuals. Amusement, however, has a number of advantages over other emotions for creating and strengthening ties of affiliation: the gratifying enjoyment it produces, its short duration, and the relative ease with which it may be produced (through humour)[2]. Some emotions --i.e., fear, sadness, anger, lust-- also carry potential negative connotations for displayers, and thus open expression is only possible in rather restricted circumstances. In a book describing *The Fifty Worst Movies of All Time*, the authors justify the enterprise by suggesting that "when the conversation turns to motion pictures, people show greater enthusiasm in laughing together over films they despise than in trying to praise the films they admire" (Medved and Dreyfuss, 1978: 9). I would

[1] It is worth noting that unlike other effects of humour and laughter displays, affiliation and disaffiliation depend additionally on the experience or non-experience of amusement by a reference observer.

[2] In relation to the third point, it may be more likely that two individuals coincide in a negative evaluation (ie, a claim's discredit) than in a positive one, as failure in all fields tends to be easier, and easier to identify, than success.

suggest that such a conversational bias applies very widely indeed. The sharing of amusement is one of our most common and enjoyable social experiences.

I am aware of no research that specifically tests the effectiveness of laughter and/or humour in modifying interpersonal attitudes. Subjective experience, of course, provides ample evidence that we are drawn towards individuals we find funny or have a 'good sense of humour' and repelled by those who fail to 'catch' our wit or whose jokes annoy us or leave us cold. Some ethnographies have described such processes in action:

> [Employees in a department store] say they would not care to work in a particular department because its members 'take life much too seriously.' A member will often say how much she likes another member because the latter is 'always ready for a joke' and 'full of fun.' Those who joke readily are obviously very much more popular than those who do not. They are approached more often by other members. They elicit a more favourable reaction than others when they make an approach themselves and they are never seen to sit alone during their meal breaks.
>
> (Bradney, 1957: 186)

It is also common to share moments of closeness with complete strangers when an amusing occurrence happens in a public place --the speaker on a train station megaphone system hiccups-- or during a brief interaction of the strangers themselves --momentarily being unable to cross each other on a pavement, due to coincident movements to either side[3]. Such moments can serve as the basis for opening an encounter --i.e., a conversation--, thus creating in turn the minimal foundation for a personal relationship. And indeed, the progression from stranger to acquaintance and finally to friend or lover seems to be marked by levels of ever-more private joking and laughing. In group situations too, the sharing of jokes --especially those intelligible only by members-- seems a vital part of group life and of its identity formation.

[3] Goffman (1983: 33-35) discusses this phenomenon with regard to ‘dramatic events’ occurring before two strangers. These happenings (ie, a car crash, a blackout) allow them to “acceptably assume what is in each other’s mind” and thus initiate interaction.

Numerous researchers (reviewed by Martineau, 1972; Fine, 1983: 173-74) have drawn upon such familiar experiences as well as ethnographic materials to propose the idea that (successful) humour creates and reinforces “social cohesion” (Blau, 1955: 109-112) or “a sense of solidarity and intimacy” (Middleton and Moland, 1959; in Martineau, 1972: 108) between individuals and within groups.

Humour, Laughter, and the Development of Relationships

Laughter and humour often play an important role in the formation of personal relationships and in the acceptance of new members into a group. In studies which document this role, the relationship between shared mental contents and this affiliative effect becomes clear. Martineau (1972: 116) has noted that the type of humour employed by first acquaintances are what Pitchford (ibid.) has called "universal short cuts to consensus," inoffensive jokes and banter which do not depend on very specific types of knowledge. As relationships deepen, humour becomes progressively more 'private':

> The power of the group culture can be recognized by anyone who enters a group that has been in existence for some time. Most groups, particularly those characterized by informality, develop a set of joking references that may be unrecognizable to those outside the group.
>
> (Fine, 1983: 170)

Coser (1959) relates how in a hospital setting, the frequent 'jocular griping' that takes place at the expense of doctors, nurses, and hospital bureaucracy depends on experience with patient life which bonds patients together and bars outsiders from participating in the joking interaction (which they would not appreciate):

> Jocular talk...especially the jocular gripe, is based on shared experience.... To participate in jocular talk one has to have overcome one's worst fears and be somewhat detached, and what is more, participation in jocular talk presupposes some common experiences about which consensus is sought. Jocular talk and especially jocular griping is not being shared with a stranger.

(Coser, 1959: 178-79)

In an original study of joke use between waitresses and customers at an all-night diner, Walle (1976) developed a scale of joke-types corresponding to various levels of increasing intimacy. In their attempts to 'pick up' a waitress before the end of a shift, customers would attempt to shorten and assess the social distance through joke-telling, success or failure being marked by the reaction of the waitress. Walle observed, however, that joke-use tended to follow a continuum from the most *general* humour "dealing exclusively with subjects or topics which no member of the society would normally find objectionable" (p. 207) to ever more specific *topical* humour "that deals with a specific person or with a belief system held by one segment of the population," (p. 208) and finally to *sexual* humour which "both the raconteur and the audience must admit to a degree of sexual knowledge in order to enjoy" (p. 209).

The progression of a relationship from lesser to greater intimacy, therefore, is commonly accompanied by the use of increasingly more ‘private’ or ‘risky’ amusement, laughter, and humour, as partners come to know more about each other --discovering new subjects over which to share amusement and laughter-- and develop common pools of knowledge, experience, identity, and attitude on which to base progressively more restricted forms of humour. I will now turn to how humour and laughter can be used strategically to regulate this process of intimacy-creation

Strategic Use of Affiliative Humour

Humour use can be employed more or less intentionally to increase or decrease affiliation. Those who have most consciously employed humour to 'make friends' are those who most systematically attempt to profit from such 'friendship': salesmen. Humour is one of the main techniques of advertising, despite the once popular notion taught by Claude Hopkins that "nobody buys from a clown" (in White, 1993: 84). In a study of television ads broadcast within a single day in 1985 in the London ITV region, it was found that "more than a third were designed to make viewers laugh or smile" (Clark, 1989: 142). Though not all research has supported the contention that humour in general

is effective in persuading consumers to buy a product, certain humorous campaigns have enjoyed a huge success (in terms of consumer sales) apparently related to their amusing content. One finding put forward by several researchers suggests that funny advertising works by creating a bond of affiliation with consumers: It is humour directed at a *specific target audience* which appears to be most effective (Sternthal and Craig, 1973; Seely, 1980; both cited in Brown and Bryant, 1983). This may reflect the marketer's dilemma that to create a bond of closeness with a joke-sharing audience, the bond must be exclusive of some outgroup who would not understand or appreciate the joke. It is pointless for a brand name to assert "we are like you" if "you" refers to anyone at all. In other words, the more private the joke, the more reduced the social category committed to, the stronger the tie of affiliation. The marketing tradeoff seems to be between higher sales to a smaller group and lower sales to a larger group.

The concept of the 'salesman,' of course, can be broadened to include individuals and corporations who offer not only consumer items, but also services, political programmes, religious beliefs, scientific theories, and other goods. As many of their sales presentations or pitches are delivered at a podium of some type, these salesmen tend to converge on the activity of 'speech-giving.' Public speakers of every variety 'sell' some story or idea which may be 'bought' by the audience with their attention and perhaps even with adherence or conversion to some cause or plan of action. Consequently, humour can be observed to be a very widespread speechgiving technique, particularly common in the opening lines of a delivery, and clearly aimed at affiliating with the audience. Numerous books provide anecdotes and advice for would-be podium humourists (Humes, 1975; Brandreth, 1985; Perret, 1989; Iapoce; 1988), and references to this affiliative use of joking are often explicit:

> Humor that encapsulates the situation and defines it is the best type for earning that respect. It tells your audience quickly and concisely, 'I know what the situation is and I know you know what the situation is. Now I have something to say that's worth listening to.'
>
> (Perret, 1989: 21)

> Humor connects you to your audience...lets each audience member know that, whatever the differences in your relative power or status, you are really just like any one of them --a human being.... A humorous opening remark...can reassure listeners and function as a kind of verbal handshake that shows you want to be friends.
>
> (Iapoce, 1988: 3-5)

Another class of agents interested in affiliation are community leaders, mediators of dispute, public relations officers, debate moderators, and all those whose role demands include the defusing of hostility and/or the establishment of good relations between parties in conflict. A comparative study of this field will find humour used and appreciated as a fundamental tool of appeasement. In many simple societies, especially those in which survival depends on a close cooperation of members, there tends to exist a very low tolerance for any type of conflict, and joking emerges as a common form of dispute-resolution (Roberts, 1979: 88). The camp clown of the Mbuti Pygmies, for example, occupies the only specialized political role within this nomadic hunter-gatherer society:

> His function is to act as a buff between disputants, deflecting the more serious disputes away from their original sources, absolving other individuals of blame by accepting it himself. Frequently he will end a dispute simply through the use of ridicule, and although such ridicule may be taken as a form of judgment, the essential point is that once again its objective is to divert attention from the source of the dispute and also to divert blame from anyone who is clearly in the wrong. The major concern of all, except possibly the prime disputants, is that the dispute shall be ended, and frequently by creating or reviving another, lesser dispute the clown brings the disputants into the same frame of mind.
>
> (Turnbull, 1965: 182)

Similar techniques are used in our own complex society to reduce conflict in various environments. In recent handbooks advising businessmen on how to use humour

effectively in their work (Kushner, 1990; Perret, 1989), joking is recommended as a method for resolving disputes. Perret recounts a successful example from his own experience, about a tense argument over responsibilities held before a manager (p.30):

> I was eager to prove that I wasn't at fault and the marketing rep was just as prepared to show that it wasn't his fault, either. Our manager stopped us cold.
>
> "I want all of us to relax and work together on this problem," he said. "I'm the one who's at fault here. I hired both of you."

According to Perret, the manager's witty resolution was able to make all three participants laugh with real amusement, by discrediting all three in equal measure and in absurdly exaggerated way. The tension built up by the argument was relaxed, and the discussion was able to proceed in a more cooperative manner.

Humour may also be used by an individual who is approached by another with hostility, to defuse the other's emotional charge before dealing with the relevant grievance in a serious manner. Role-holders who are routinely faced with aggressive questions from clients or customers are advised by Perret (1989: 98-104) and Iapoce (1988: 5-7) to develop jokes for this purpose. Perret gives an example of a successfully funny and affiliative response to a hostile query commonly directed at tax collectors (p. 104):

> Q: Why are tax forms so complicated?
>
> A: They're written by the same people who write instructions for assembling children's toys.

This reply places both participants on an equal footing before a common object of derision (assuming the questioner has had experience with toy assembly or similar tasks). It also includes an absurd element in suggesting a kind of circle of incompetent or intentionally malicious writers and designers who are responsible for gibberish as diverse as toy assembly instructions and tax forms. A hostile questioner who understands and appreciates the joke is likely to consider the tax collector someone very much like

himself, possessing feelings, an awareness that tax forms are inordinately complicated and obscure, and the experience of futile struggling with toy assembly and such supposedly simple activities at the hands of the anonymous characters responsible for incomprehensible directions.

Interestingly, Perret also includes examples of possible humorous replies to the question “why are tax forms so complicated” which would not, however, have affiliative effects (p. 104):

A1: Because they're really a secret government IQ test.
A2: Don't worry, we've got a new one for people like you
--you just connect the dots.
A3: They're actually simple if you don't earn any income.

Though other tax collectors might find these jokes funny, a hostile questioner would probably be far from amused by them. The first two answers direct their humour at the questioner himself, suggesting a lack of intelligence he is unlikely to accept. The third is not directly offensive, but neither does it provide a strong affiliative tie between questioner and tax collector, some basis for a common identity. Furthermore, it includes a potentially unsettling or even tasteless reference to income-less individuals. These examples clarify the nature of humour's potential affiliative consequence. The effect is wholly dependent on the agreement between humourist and audience with regard to the premises on which the amusement referred to by the humour is based.

Strategic Use of Affiliative Laughter

In the discussion so far, I have dealt mainly with humour displays as creating or intended to create affiliation. It should be obvious, however, that the desired response to these displays (i.e., laughter) signifies an acceptance of this closeness. A salesman who incites his potential client to laughter obtains confirmation of a common identity on which to base the sale. The laughter of disputants at a mediator's jokes can be considered a sign of decreased confrontation between them. And indeed, the intended sharing audiences of salesmen and mediators often resist displaying laughter in order to maintain a distance from these control attempts (See also 4.2.3, below). On the other hand, persons with an interest in maintaining or strengthening friendly ties --inferiors in a hierarchy, salesmen, diplomats-- will reciprocate the slightest joke with laughter.

The fact that laughter displays signal affiliation can be used by individuals and larger groupings to test the state of an existing relationship. Joke deployment before a partner may act as a request for information about perceived closeness. In Walle's (1976) study of humour in an all-night diner, the laughter or non-laughter of a waitress at the jokes of a customer allowed the latter to gauge the level of intimacy achieved between them:

> Since a correlation existed between the successful performance of humorous folklore and the degree of intimacy between performer and audience, it was a common practice for people to use the folklore of humor as an exploratory device in the estimation of a potential sexual partner.... By attempting to engage the potential companion in certain types of humorous performance, the actor could gain information regarding the possibility of a pickup without ever mentioning his desires or intentions.
>
> (p. 212)

In this context, it is interesting to consider the large body of literature concerned with 'joking relationships,' defined as “a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offense” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940: 195). Social anthropologists (and some sociologists) have described their existence in many and

diverse societies, including our own (See Apte, 1983: 185-89; and Martineau, 1972: 111/17 for reviews).

Two features of the phenomenon deserve particular attention. Firstly, the 'joking' is directed in most cases at the partner of the relationship, who should display laughter at the discredit of his own self-claims: one partner steals the belongings of another, deceives him by unfair means, etc. If humour can be used to test a personal alliance, this aggressive variety represents a particularly strong (and thus trustworthy) sort of trial. Secondly, there is a specific pattern to the emergence of this type of interaction. It tends to characterize relationships which, though associated with a desire for cooperation or good relations, are subject to inherent or potential tensions and conflict (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Examples include relations between affines, potential marriage partners, and members of neighbouring settlements. Other common behavioural alternatives (i.e., to joking) typical of such ambivalent relationships include avoidance and extreme respect. Thus, it might be said that partner-directed joking --a strong test of affiliation-- tends to emerge when a desire for continuing an affiliative relationship converge with *motives for doubting its strength*.

More informal versions of the joking relationship have been studied in certain environments of our own Western society, especially among colleagues at the work place and between 'friends.' As observed in section 4.1, it is common for teasing and joking to follow the detection of some fault, mishap, or blunder of a friend or colleague. The deployment of such humour, however, is only possible where some affiliative basis exists, as its content must be based on the shared knowledge, identities, and attitudes of partners. Beside their possible control effects on ridiculed individuals, these displays and the response of laughter signal the existence of an affiliative relationship --and furthermore constitute one of the means by which the very relation is brought into being and reinforced on a daily basis.

It is also the inclusive nature of these types of humour which permits criticism to be voiced in a non-threatening way. Pamela Bradney provides an example in her study of joking interaction between department store staff (p. 184):

> When a new girl appeared to be working overhard and taking her work too seriously, one of the old hands (to whom the newcomer had put yet another query to help her with a sale) said, 'You want to sell up the shop today, don't you?' --in a friendly joking manner even though it did conceal a reprimand.

The old hand's comment, though making the newcomer aware of her deviant behaviour, assumes the latter's shared knowledge that such keenness is excessive. The discredit implied is framed as temporary and permits the newcomer to distance herself from the characterization by laughing along (See Section 4.3.3, below).

I have limited the above discussion to affiliation resulting from, attempted with, or reacting to humour and laughter displays. It is equally true, however, that an observer who identifies with another's *lack* of amusement or humour (i.e., when such a display might be relevant) will feel close to the serious individual. Agreement over the bad taste, inanity, or incomprehensibility of a comic film can be as bonding an experience as coincidence in labelling it funny. A meditated serious --or disgusted, offended, etc...-- display in certain circumstances may be used to produce such an effect. These recognizable 'absences' of display, however, are both less common and less observationally salient than positive displays, and thus have been less treated in the literature.

For example, when the Monty Python film *Life of Brian* premiered in 1979, several Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic groups expressed their condemnation of this parody of the Christian gospels. The negative feelings shared by certain religiously-minded audiences towards this film (and even by second-hand audience members who only heard or read about its contents), represented a potential basis for affiliation and sympathetic dialogue between groups which in other contexts might feel strongly divided. A newspaper title at the time, in fact, grouped these reactions together: “Religious Leaders Agree: ‘Brian’ Film is Blasphemy” (NewYork Times, 4/9/79, III, 7:1).

4.2.3. Disaffiliation

Laughter and humour displays (or non-displays) reflecting substantially divergent mental contents result in an observer feeling a greater distance from the displaying individual. This disaffiliative effect is the logical complement of the affiliative consequence discussed above at length, and has in fact been treated in the discussion -- almost inevitably-- alongside the latter. Thus, it should require no further elaboration.

Nevertheless, it may be interesting to examine display behaviours specifically intended to produce disaffiliation. The possible effect of humour and/or laughter may be used strategically in two ways: by avoiding the use of humour and/or laughter completely, or by exhibiting humour and/or laughter which will not be shared by an audience.

Strategic Disaffiliative Avoidance of Humour and Laughter

In the first case, participants of interaction sometimes refrain from laughing or joking in order to maintain a distance from others. Someone in a position of power, for instance, --a teacher, a military superior, a boss-- may choose to abstain from sharing humour with his subordinates to avoid 'excessive closeness' that could degenerate into a loss of respect towards status differences. Judges, moderators, arbiters, and other supposedly ‘impartial’ observers may also adopt such a strategy to avoid excessive commitment to one disputing group over another. The deliberateness of such a display strategy is evident from the following discussion of schoolteachers’ theories about how best to interact with students:

> So far as humour is concerned, teachers themselves were once divided over the question of whether or not to smile or permit their pupils to do so. Even among those who felt that humour has a place in the schoolroom, some held that one should start off in a serious mood, just to establish firmly who is boss, and only gradually drift toward a more jocular disposition as the term wears on. Others operated by the rule of thumb that one should ‘never smile before Christmas.’

(Stebbins, 1993: 111)

During specific interactions, it can be observed how the invitation to laugh produced by another's humour may be declined by an audience, or followed by a minimal reaction, to avoid affiliative implications. A good illustration is Jim Schenkein's (1978) analysis of the initial exchanges between an insurance salesman and his target client. While the former --Alan-- deploys a number of procedures to establish a more personal relationship, the latter --Pete-- resists these attempts with more or less explicit definings of the situation as a salesman-client interaction. During this "negotiation of participant identities" Schenkein notes the particular "kind of humour tendered" by the salesman as one resource employed for reducing the social distance and creating affiliation (p. 61-62):

Alan: ...And, I give a memobook
out. And also let me put my magic card
innit.
Pete: Your magic card?
Alan: My magic card, this makes the whole
thing a s- sort of a kaleida-scopic
experience-not really it's just,
y'know, uh two dimensional a(hh)c-
tually hehh hehh hehh hehh heh ih- it
all depends on y'know, what you've
been doing right before you, look at
the card I guess if it's two dimen-
sional.
Pete: Righ(h)t.
Alan: Uhh,
Pete: I gather you also wanna try t'sell me
some insurance. (p. 65)

In this passage, Alan makes a humorous allusion to drug use ("it all depends on y'know, what you've been doing right before you, look at the card I guess"), a risky move by which the salesman claims some knowledge and sympathy --if not experience-- with the world of an essentially secret in-group to which he is gambling this young and 'bohemian' student might belong. Pete, however, reacts with barely polite disaffiliation (p. 68):

> The turn at talking...is ripe for demonstrations of affiliation with the identity categories enlivened by [Alan's reference to drug users], but while Pete's "Righ(h)t" does not distance itself thoroughly from the unofficial identities alluded to ..., neither does it jump to affiliate with those identities. In fact, if Alan's "...a(hh)ctually hehh hehh hehh hehh heh ..." displays animated enthusiasm over the identity negotiations conducted through the action sequence, then Pete's subsequent "Righ(h)t" is considerably more reserved and steps down the animation markedly.

Such uses of non-reaction have been observed in a number of studies. Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff (1987) analyzed the introduction of 'improper talk' (i.e., frankness, rudeness, obscenity) into a conversation as an attempt to increase intimacy with a co-participant during conversation, non-laughter signalling a non-acceptance of this closeness. Walle's (1976) article on joke use in an all-night diner has already been mentioned above. In the unique setting of the diner during the last hours of a shift, where the negotiation of social distance had a particular significance (the setting up of a sexual rendezvous), non-appreciation could signify rejection of a 'pick up' attempt (p. 214):

> All the waitresses in the diner enjoyed sexual humor and often employed it among themselves and with customers. But on certain occasions, these same waitresses would feign embarrassment or shock when a customer would tell such a joke. The negative response varied from the humorous 'Oh, my virgin ears' to threats to call the manager or the police. In such cases the waitress pretended the joke was objectionable because giving the appropriate response (laughing) would have transformed the customer/waitress relationship.... This type of response usually occurred if the waitress believed a male was attempting to pick her up when she wasn't interested in him.

Strategic Use of Disaffiliative Laughter and Humour

Not only can disaffiliation be produced by limiting the use of laughter and humour before a particular audience: *specifically disaffiliative* displays can also be employed. Treating events as funny which another actor considers serious, for instance, can lead to disafilliation. This fact allows humour and laughter to be used as a sign of distance by participants. One variant involves the use of laughter or humour at some event openly considered unfunny by the actor. A more direct alternative is for the audience to laugh or joke at the seriously intended behaviour of the actor himself.

Openly divisive humour and laughter is rare in ordinary interaction, where participants generally strive for some kind of consensus. Good hunting grounds include such inherently combative arenas as battle zones, playing fields, and political meetings. Clayman (1992) has studied audience responses to the 1988 US presidential debates as expressions of affiliation or disaffiliation with the speakers. The debate setting was characterized by a clear bi-polar division of participants: Not only was the object of debates a confrontation between the major representatives of the Democratic and Republican parties, but over two thirds of audience tickets "were distributed by the campaigns themselves to their staunchest supporters", who were furthermore segregated by the seating arrangements (p. 36). In this context, Clayman found that disaffiliative laughter from opposing camps tended to follow remarks which “1) showed the speakers to be talking about themselves, 2) were noncritical and often supportive in character, 3) were not marked as laughable, and 4) appeared unconvincing, evasive, or otherwise inadequate, particularly in the context of prior talk” (p.54). Such moments of claim-making, "clearly meant to be taken seriously" (p. 46) offer opposing groups who share a common skepticism of the claims and hostility towards the speaker an opportunity to demonstrate their distance from him (as well as their own unity)[4].

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[4] An example from Clayman’s transcripts was provided above in Section 4.1.4 of this chapter, in which the audience laughed loudly at Senator Dan Quayle’s self-claims of environmental concern.

Laughter and humour displays, by means of the knowledge, identity, and involvement connotations which they imply, represent self-claims regarding the possession of specific mental contents.

From a neutral and objective standpoint, one effect of such claim-making is to classify the displaying individual as belonging to particular social categories. What he laughs or jokes at reveal who he is. In the aggregate, moreover, this social classification effect contributes to the creation and reinforcement of the very boundaries separating one social category from another.

From the perspective of a display's observer, however, one of two complementary effects is possible. If the observer can share in the amusement referred to by the display, thus sharing the mental possessions revealed by the displaying individual, affiliation between the two may result; if the observer does not share these mental possessions, the result is more likely to be disaffiliation. These effects can be used strategically by individuals who wish to increase or decrease the level of intimacy between themselves and others.

4.3. Effects Derived From the 'Identity' Connotation

Laughter and humour displays communicate to observers that the displaying individual does not identify himself as the discredited claimant alluded to by his display --i.e., the ‘identity’ connotation (see Chapter Seven, 2.4.3, 3.3). Often, the fact is so obvious as to merit no attention --there is no question about the teller of an ethnic joke being associated with the slandered ethnic group, or about the performer of a clown act being tainted by his acted improprieties and silliness. In other cases however, there may exist a more or less strong association between a discredited claimant (pointed to by a communicative display or by mere circumstances) and a participant actually present. The participant may be undergoing criticism or teasing; he may have committed an act which is improper or out of character; he may be found in a compromising situation, or be associated by a social tie to a discredited third party. Here, laughter and/or humour displays by the suspect may have the effect of reducing or erasing his discredit in others' eyes.

I have divided this ‘protective’ consequence of displays into three separate effects depending on the source of discredit. One possibility is the **protection from discredit which is completely accidental and unintended** by the threatened individual. Another concerns cases where this individual obtains **protection from a potentially discrediting action which he has willingly undertaken** or wishes to undertake. In a third possibility, he achieves **protection from discredit imposed on the person by an outside agent**. The use of self-disparaging laughter and humour is a method which exploits these various effects according to circumstance.

I have also listed a fourth effect related to the ‘involvement’ connotation, actually a ‘second-order’ effect resulting from an excessive reliance on the intentional use of self-directed laughter and humour to protect the self from discredit. In these cases**, the individual may be seen as suspiciously or unfairly defensive**, giving off impressions of cowardliness, insecurity, falseness, etc.

4.3.1. Protection from Unintentional Self-Discredit

If a person trips awkwardly over a piece of pavement he may follow the event with a number of shows designed to reassure others that he is normally not such a clumsy person (Goffman, 1981: 88): the "oops!" expression, a close scrutiny of the offending surface, and very often a small laugh or even a display of humour (i.e., an ironic "well, that was very elegant, wasn't it"). The stumbler may or may not feel actual amusement at his oafish moment --perhaps less than his embarrassment--, but the display communicates to bystanders that the event was no more than an accident, and wholly unrelated to his real character. Laughing at the self evokes a new self untouched by discredit, distanced from the derided claimant. It transforms a person's own acts into the improvised performance of a clown, which he claims to enjoy as part of the audience:

> A self-deprecator is, in a measure, just that, and in just that measure is not the self that is deprecated. He secretes a new self in the process of attesting to the appraisal he is coming to have of himself.
>
> (Goffman, 1974: 521)[1]

This defensive use of laughter and/or humour is extremely common, allowing individuals to excuse themselves from some of the many accidental (or not-so-accidental) lapses, violations, and failures which occasionally occur or are revealed during interaction. Anthony Chapman noted that “sometimes laughter can constitute part of a stoic effort to safeguard against loss of face or to disguise embarrassment” (1983: 152). A study by Rowland Miller (1996: 173) found "making a joke or laughing at oneself" to be one of the most frequent responses to embarrassing situations, second only to 'evasion.'

Self-directed humour and laughter are commonly used by individuals training in some skill or trapped in a role for which they are not fully prepared. For example, Coser (1960) found that over 36% of jokes made by the average junior (i.e., a trainee) at psychiatric staff conferences were directed at himself, as compared to less than 8% for the average senior member of staff. Well aware of their insufficient competence, such

neophytes wish to make others well aware of their awareness, in preparation for countless unintentional errors. They wish to excuse themselves by declaring “I am not (yet) a doctor/driver/adult/etc...”. Humour and laughter are basic technique used in such exhibitions of 'role distance'. In an essay on this topic (1961), Goffman shrewdly noted that (in 1950's America) "tasks that might be embraced by a housewife or maid may be tackled by the man of the house with carefully expressed clumsiness and with self-mockery" (p. 99). He also described in some detail the behaviour of a group of teenage girls on a horseback riding trip (p. 98-99):

> One girl, having been allotted the tallest horse, made a mock scene of declining to get on because of the height, demanding to be allowed to go home. When she did get on, she called her horse 'Daddy-O', diverting her conversation from her friends to her horse. During the ride, one girl pretended to post while the horse walked, partly in mockery of a person not in their party who was posting. Another girl leaned over the neck of her horse and shouted racing cries, again while the horse was locked in a walking file of other horses. She also slipped her right foot out of the stirrup and brought it over the saddle, making a joke of her affectation of riding sidesaddle and expressing that both positions were much alike to her --both equally unfamiliar and uncongenial; at the same time she tested the limits of the wrangler's permissiveness. Passing under low branches, the girls made a point of making a point of this by pulling off branches, waving them like flags, then feeding them to their horses. Evidences of the excretory capacities of the steeds were greeted with merriment and loud respect.

Such behaviour effectively protects the actors involved from discredit as role-holders, to which they might well be subject by taking up the relevant activity in a serious manner. Effectively, they are saying, 'We are not making any of the self-claims associated with this role', and thus, in Goffman's words, "We are not to be judged by this incompetence" (1961: 99).

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[1] See also Goffman 1981: 307; and Smith 1996: 286.

4.3.2. Protection from Intentional Self-Discredit

Self-directed laughter or humor can also be used when an actor is about to knowingly engage in behavioural anomalies which could discredit him, or during the course of such behaviour. In the following conversation (Coser, 1960: 89), the role demand of a psychiatrist to accurately report patient facts pressures him to transgress conflicting role requirements concerning acceptable terminology. The exchange takes place when, during a hospital staff meeting, a visiting psychiatrist reports on a patient before other members of staff.

Visiting psychiatrist: She called her house-mother names, like "bitch," and so on.

Senior staff member [smiling]: Other names, like "other side of tracks"?

Visiting psychiatrist [smiling]: No, worse than that. [Senior staff member smiles encouragingly] Well, to tell you exactly, she called her a God-damned fucking bitch. [The two men laugh very hard, and are joined by more subdued laughter from the audience.]

This exchange is particularly interesting in that the visiting psychiatrist at first sheepishly avoids transgressing propriety, as if fearing that a full report would tarnish his and his interlocutor's dignity. The ironic question and 'encouraging' smile of his superior in rank, however, reassures the psychiatrist that the foreseen violation will be interpreted in a playful key. When the series of expletives is finally delivered, it is the two speakers who laugh hardest, in order to effect the ritual shedding of the selves spoilt by the offending words. The laughter of the audience, by comparison, is ‘subdued.’

This and similar incidents suggest that as long as an audience can be counted on to accept a self-claim of non-association with discredit, every manner of transgression

may be attempted under the cover of humour and laughter[2]. Indeed, many authors have commented on the 'license' which humour offers to breach taboo topics and carry out norm violations. For Sigmund Freud (1905), it was this license which allowed the individual to release suppressed desires, especially of a sexual or aggressive nature, through wit. The profanities of carnival, marked out by a widely-accepted 'play-frame' applying once every year; playful insults, 'silly' or 'childish' behaviour, teasing, and mock violence between trusted friends; the bizarre antics and appearance of specialized figures such as clowns and comics; and joking on themes such as sexual perversion, death, and other normally unacceptable subjects of polite conversation --all of these constitute examples of norm-violations excused by their definition as 'non-serious.'

This defensive quality of humour is commonly used by individuals to attenuate the illocutionary force of linguistic acts (Mizzau, 1984: 82-84). Often, a person is or feels constrained to deliver communications which could be perceived as improper or demeaning: e.g., making an insult, applying a sanction, giving an order, or uttering a ritualistic formula ("thank you," "I love you") to a person known on friendly or intimate terms. A joking, ironic, or 'mock' rendering of such an expression, however, while achieving the task intended, announces to the audience that 'this is not really me':

> Through humor, men can sometimes communicate what would be difficult to say in any other way.
>
> (Miller, 1967: 271)

> For teasers, as for people raising awkward topics and those in pursuit of intimacy, the humorous mode can provide a protective shield against some of the dangers lurking in the realm of serious discourse.
>
> (Mulkay, 1988: 91)

Persons in positions of authority may adopt such tactics to avoid aggravating their subordinates and obtain their willing cooperation while meting out orders and criticism.

[2] As has already been argued (this chapter, 4.1.4, above), though such a transgression may afford a momentary individual pleasure or release from tension, social norms themselves are unharmed, indeed

Surgeons during an operation, for example, have been observed to engage in frequent expressions of role-distance of this type (Goffman, 1961: 106-117).

Relatedly, ironic renderings can also serve to disguise or ambiguate true intentions or attitudes (Mizzau, 1984: 83; 92-94), which in contexts of interactional risk can be greatly advantageous:

> Joking provides a useful channel for covert communication on taboo topics.... For the very reason that humor officially does not 'count,' persons are induced to risk messages that might be unacceptable if stated seriously.
>
> (Emerson, 1969: 269)

A classic case is the 'flirting' behaviour of individuals romantically attracted to each other. Before any direct and unambiguous declaration of interest is made, an exchange of ironically exaggerated signs may take place and become habitualized: mock kisses, passionate declarations of love, suggestive nicknames, and endless sexual innuendo[3]. The deniability of serious intent protects each partner from a hasty commitment or from discredit should the others' intentions prove different. Nevertheless, the situation prevents both from attaining full certainty regarding the 'real situation.' They assert "this ridiculous 'me' who professes such an intense attraction is not my real self." What they do not reveal, however, is who the real self actually is. Of course, at any stage, one partner may challenge the other as to the 'serious import' of the humour --Emerson (1969) has studied how such transitions are negotiated. Otherwise, to the frustration of one or both partners, such behaviour may be prolonged for very long periods.

One good reason for masking true meaning is to protect the self when criticizing others, an aggressive act which may bring on unwanted hostilities. Teasing, wind-ups, satire, caricature, and parody are some forms of humour which attempt to discredit some target in a 'nonserious' way. This nonseriousness depends on the exaggerated or transformed nature of the unmasking or criticism, which in fact constitutes a secondary humorous element, a double-meaning 'trick.' Such genres are inherently ambiguous: they

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strengthened, by such ‘play’ transgressions, which as ‘laughable’ are marked as ‘improper.’

[3] Walle (1976) is a brilliant case study of the use of sexual humour in this 'exploratory' fashion.

retell the discredit of some self-claim (Senator X is stupid/corrupt/big-nosed) and yet accepting the criticism literally is funny in itself. Indeed, the latter constitutes an important part of the humour. This secondary element tells the audience 'I do not *really* think Senator X is as stupid/corrupt/big-nosed as I am playfully claiming, and anyone who *would* think so would be ridiculous himself.' This ambiguity protects the humourist from responsibility for the criticism, as the crucial link between joke and reality can always be denied. Emerson (1969) recounts how 1960's folk singer Joan Baez threatened to sue cartoonist Al Capp if he continued his "Joanie Phoanie" comic strip character, which she believed was a caricature of herself. Capp's reply was in fact to deny that Joanie Phonie, "a campus idol who sings protest songs for $10,000 a concert" was related to Baez: "I see no resemblance to Joan Baez whatsoever, but if Miss Baez wants to try to prove it, let her" (p. 274-75).

4.3.3. Protection From Discrediting Attacks

Laughter and/or humour can also be used by an actor to deflect an interactional move (i.e., a 'challenge' --See this chapter, 4.1.1) aimed at discrediting him. Conversation analysts have provided examples of humour use which is successful in transforming 'laughter at' a person (who has committed some gaffe or is accused of some fault) to 'laughter with' him (Clayman, 1992: 31-32; Glenn, 1995: 51-55; Smith 1996: 283-289).

Greg Smith (1996) has studied radio broadcast 'wind-ups,' involving the nonserious discredit of some target by a radio disc jockey, for the entertainment of the listening audience. The DJ phones up the victim, who is lured into involvement within a false and increasingly absurd frame. During the joke, it is the audience (and presumably the DJ), who experience amusement at the target of humour for accepting the incredible claims of the joker, for overreacting emotionally, for allowing his dignity to be trampled on by the DJ's offensive words, for resorting to offense and expletive himself, among other possibilities. When the deception is discovered by the victim, however, his most common response is also laughter (p. 281, 285):

[from Extract 1]

SP: Anyway they've written to me and this isn't really
((pause)) Ian Cooper from the travel shop, this is Steve
Penk from [Key one-oh-three]
JC: [Oh::hhha] hahahahahahaha you're joking,
you are joking...

[from Extract 3]

SP: This is Steve Penk from Key one-oh-three Ronnie.
RB: Hey! Herpurgh! Heeheehee (...)

With these laughter displays[4], joke victims instantly become part of the joke audience, on one hand accepting the behaviour has been improper, but on the other demonstrating their distance from the part of themselves which has appeared in such a bad light: “Who RB

laughs at is his former self; what he laughs at is his now revealed foolishness in allowing that self to be sustained; but in so laughing he shows himself to be no fool" (ibid.: 286).

Nonserious discredits, such as friendly practical jokes, by definition allow the target of amusement the option of shedding a self which has been abused by evidently unfair procedures. In the following example, on the other hand, defensive humour is employed by an individual challenged and discredited in a somewhat more serious manner, albeit over a minor self-claim of linguistic knowledge.

(UTCL A30. Phone)

Stanley: But deeming that a young lady's on the phone wu'we woh' discuss nune u'thet.
Jeffrey: Deeming. Now wha'does deeming me[an ma::n).
Stanley: [eh Deeming I don't [know ma:n is jus'as jus]uh c:atchy wo:rd ma:n.
Jeffrey: [hih-huh hu AH! huh-hah!]
Rhonda: hih [heh.
Stanley: [It don't fit shit.
Rhonda: ihh [huh huh h:::]h
Jeffrey: [Wu'I tell you what ma][::::n.
Stanley: [My English teachuh be exin my ass on that. Ev'ry time.=
Rhonda: =Who [deeming?
Stanley: [Deemin',
(0.2)
Stanley: Ooph! It don't fit.
(0.7)
Stanley: [Off with it.
Jeffrey: [(t'sh) mh! hmhuhhmhuh. (Glenn, 1995: 51-53)

In this passage, Stanley's independent self-claim to know the meaning of the word 'deeming' (made by his use of it in talk) is discredited and subsequently laughed at by the other participants. By joining in the disparagement, however, Stanley transforms himself "from an accidental producer of a teaseable error into an intentional producer of comic accounts and narration,...recover[ing] artfully...and bring[ing] those laughing back into alignment with him" (ibid: 52-53). In other words, he takes a step back from the

[4] Smith also includes the successful use of *humour* by a victim, mid-joke, to demonstrate she has 'caught on' to the nonseriousness of proceedings (pp. 283-284).

pretentious self who had used 'deeming' in talk, and thus demonstrates his 'real' self to be the down-to-earth Stanley of old, who is able to join in the mockery of such pretense. He thus attempts to protect himself from any real embarrassment.

Moves to discredit an individual, however, can be substantially more serious and consequential than practical jokes, challenges over word knowledge, and similarly trivial attacks. In fiercely competitive fields --political elections, employment and the corporate 'ladder', religious hierarchies, economic markets, artistic and academic circles-- players may suffer important setbacks or even expulsion over damaging allegations. Perret's (1989) manual of humour use in business recommends joking as a defense measure against discredit attempts by adversaries. He cites the practice of septuagenarian Ronald Reagan during the 1984 presidential campaign, who was attacked by critics as 'too old' for office (p. 31-32):

> He did age jokes on himself as often as he could. When his opponents tried to bring up the issue, it was dead --deflated. Reagan had done it --himself....
> Some people reminded Reagan that if he were reelected, he would be 76 years old when he left office. Reagan replied, "Well, Andrew Jackson left the White House at the age of 75 and he was still quite vigorous. I know because he told me."

Whatever other evidence voters may have had for assessing Reagan's capabilities, such self-ridicule evoked the sparkle and wit of a 'young Ron' within the exterior 'ancient Ron' being mocked.

4.3.4. Consequences of Excessive Defensiveness

It is worth considering the long-term cumulative effects of humour and/or laughter displays directed at a distanced self. Occasional claims of identity distance from a discredited claimant apparently associated with the self may be deemed credible. However, abuse of this technique is likely to nurture distrust or disrespect in others. Social actors are required to make claims about themselves and attach to at least some actions by which the claims may be measured. Otherwise, they face grim interactional consequences. A person who continually adopts ironic overtones, winks, grimaces, and exaggerations, which distance him from practically every word and deed, will be seen as evasive and unreachable. His behaviour forces observers to guess his true intentions by a process of elimination which often yields confusion or contradiction. These others may simply become frustrated by the protective barriers, or even come to loathe the perpetual ironist's contemptuous and indiscriminate dismissiveness. Mizzau (1984) cites a literary characterization of such an individual:

> As he spoke I noticed, what had often struck me before in his conversations with my grandmother's sisters, that whenever he spoke of serious matters, whenever he used an expression which seemed to imply a definite opinion upon some important subject, he would take care to isolate, to sterilize it by using a special intonation, mechanical and ironic, as though he had put the phrase or word between inverted commas, and was anxious to disclaim any personal responsibility for it; as who should say 'the "hierarchy", don't you know, as silly people call it.' But then, if it was so absurd, why did he say the 'hierarchy'? A moment later he went on: 'Her acting will give you as noble an inspiration as any masterpiece of art in the world, as --oh, I don't know--' and he began to laugh, 'shall we say the Queens of Chartres?' (....) For what other kind of existence did he reserve the duties of saying in all seriousness what he thought about things, of formulating judgements which he would not put between inverted commas; and when would he cease to give himself up to occupations of which at the same time he made out that they were absurd?

(Proust, 1922: 115-116)

Similar is the behaviour of individuals who mock themselves at every opportunity with self-disparaging humour, or exhibit an almost continuous stream of self-directed 'nervous laughter' which annuls the serious intent of every other expression uttered. By refusing to claim any competence, responsibility, or worth at all, these individuals are perceived as insecure and cowardly, or else suspected of 'false modesty.'

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The ‘identity’ connotation of humour and laughter may protect a displaying individual from the true discredit of his self-presentation --assuming a display is accepted as honest. This effect is relevant to cases of unintentional discredit, cases where the displaying individual has knowingly caused the discrediting events, and also those where an outside agent has engaged in a discrediting attack on the individual.

Though self-directed laughter and humour is commonly put to such uses, affording participants behavioural flexibility and some measure of interactional self-defense, excessive reliance on this manoeuvre can lead to the giving off of negative impressions.

4.4. Effects/Uses Derived From the 'Involvement' Connotation

Laughter and humour communicate to others that the displaying individual can become sufficiently involved in the funny stimuli pointed at to experience amusement. In most cases, such a meaning is unremarkable. When perceived obstacles to such involvement exist, however, the display in question may reflect on the individual's character or provide noteworthy information about his current mental activity.

When relevant competitors to attention include tragedy or misfortune, the displaying individual will give off an **impression of 'callousness' or 'toughness,'** depending on the value attached to such empathic distance. The presence of events demanding a reaction of moral disapproval or outrage will result in the displayer **appearing immoral or amoral**. When the object of amusement referred to by the display is itself an emotional reaction perceived as improper, the effect will be **to deny the reality or relevance of the underlying interpretation**. Finally, in the case of laughter only, the display will (supposedly) **reveal the current focus of attention** of the displaying individual.

4.4.1. Revealing Inhumanity/Callousness/'Toughness'

In Chapter Six, 3.2.2, it was suggested that self-claim discredit events often involve claimants (or other individuals) who suffer or may suffer tragic or painful consequences, such events often eliciting anxiety, sadness, or empathic pity rather than amusement. It may now be added that observing laughter or humour directed at such questionably funny events may lead observers to form a particular type of impression about the displaying individual: that he is a person who has the ability or disposition to distance himself emotionally from events 'normally' elicitory of such emotions as pity, grief, sadness, fear, and anxiety, either directed towards his own plight or those of others (through 'empathy').

Depending on the attitudes of the observer and the context of the situation, this impression will be coloured by varying shades of value. The distance may be perceived as morally questionable or even evil, describable with such terms as 'inhumanity,'

'callousness,' or 'coldness.' On the other hand, it may be seen as a positive characteristic: 'toughness,' 'hardness,' 'cool detachment,' or courageous 'coping.'

Black and 'sick' jokes, as well as violent and cruel practical jokes, seem to be more common in environments where physical violence and/or its threat are ordinary facts of everyday life. In our own society, good examples include the worlds of organized crime, law-enforcement, and war. A royal marine officer, for instance, is quoted by Mayo (1993: 43) as saying that "the humour of the [Armed] Forces in general can be rather cruel and harsh sometimes." A relatively developed emotional distance from pain, injury, mutilation, and death in such contexts becomes a useful psychological tool for coping with tragic events when they occur to the self or others (Obrdlik, 1942) --and thus often also a valued characteristic and role self-claim. Humour and laughter at events associated with cruelty and misfortune becomes one way of expressing and developing this valued distance. Being 'hard as nails' is considered a good thing, and the appreciation of heavy-handed humour can be taken as evidence of this quality.

Outside of such circles, however, distance from suffering may be perceived otherwise. Though generally concealed from outsiders, the attitude is subject to moral disapprobation, outrage, or scandal when observed. The following genre of news story (the article is taken from *El Mundo* 9/7/1997: 26, my translation) seeks to elicit this type of response:

German military leaders laughed at the video of the executions

> BONN -- A soldier has accused his superiors of having seen but not denounced the video which has created scandal in Germany, in which military personnel simulate the executions and crucifixions of Bosnians. The soldier claimed that they even found it "very funny."/AFP

News stories of 'horrifying' pranks played on natives of warring countries, prisoners of war, and even on soldiers of the same side occasionally emerge. The reports of 'laughter' at such torture inspire moral revulsion in readers --it is for this reason they count as newsworthy enough to merit a headline. Relatedly, the Hollywood 'bad guy' often achieves his 'badness' for audiences by virtue of some similar, though fictional, scene.

Emotional distance regarding misfortune relating to the self, on the other hand, is more generally perceived in a positive light, as evidence of 'courage' and 'resilience.' If a

person can laugh at his own problems and looming dangers, it would seem that he is 'coping' well with them: his mind is calm enough to enjoy amusement despite adverse circumstances. Thus, while laughing at the misfortune of others is frowned upon, laughing at one's own is encouraged. Gail Jefferson, through a close study of conversations in which people talk about their troubles, has provided evidence for this asymmetric pattern: “In the course of [this study], a recurrent phenomenon was found: a troubles-teller produces an utterance and then laughs, and the troubles-recipient does not laugh, but produces a recognizably serious response” (Jefferson, 1984: 346). The explanation arrived at for this pattern fits both Jefferson's data and our intuitions about laughter and humour displays (ibid.: 351):

> He is exhibiting that, although there is trouble, it is not getting the better of him; he is managing, he is in good spirits and in a position to take the trouble lightly. He is exhibiting what we might call 'troubles-resistance.' But this does not mean that... a recipient is invited to join in the merriment, to also find the thing laughable... it appears to be a recipient's job to be taking the trouble seriously; to exhibit what might be called 'troubles-receptiveness.'

The extent to which we attend and react to our own and others’ troubles is everywhere considered an important variable of personality. Laughter and humour displays constitute one important set of behaviours used by observers to form impressions regarding this variable in others, by actors to regulate others’ impressions of themselves.

4.4.2. Revealing Moral Character/Causing Moral Offense

Laughter or joking at objects considered sacred, as well as jokes which include scatological, sexual, aggressive or other elements considered offensive by an audience, lead observers to view the displaying individual as morally lax, if not depraved[1]. Unless accompanied by an explicit disclaimer, these displays commit the individual to the line that the offensive elements in question give him few if any moral qualms, as he is able to enjoy the amusing elements despite (if not because of) them. The display itself may be judged a moral offense, and may be subject to the same social and legal penalties.

Monty Python's 1979 parody of the Christian Gospels, *Life of Brian*, caused a moral uproar in both Christian and Jewish communities. Though successful in terms of both box office and critical reviews, *Brian* was picketed by protesters, removed from several cinemas, and rated as "condemned" on a scale of 'moral acceptability' by the film and broadcasting office of the United Catholic Conference[2]. The contrast in moral sensibilities and subsequent audience reactions is evident from the following comment by New York Times film critic Vincent Canby (NYT 17/8/79: 15).

> Some people who wander into this film will stalk out in as high a dudgeon as is possible in the dread darkness of a movie theatre --as did one fellow sitting behind me at a sneak preview. Others will want to see it a second time to catch the dialogue overwhelmed by laughter during the first viewing.

Numerous statements of moral indignation were voiced in the press by representatives of political parties and religious organizations[3]:

> a crime against religion...This film is so grievously insulting that we are genuinely concerned that its continued showing could result in serious violence

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[1] In the previous section, I have already dealt with moral outrage at signs of amusement towards aggression and misfortune. Therefore, I will limit my examples here to other areas of morality.

[2] See New York Times, 1979 --28/8: 8; 30/8: 13; 4/9: 7; 4/10: 30; 31/10: 18.

[3] Rabbi Abraham B Hecht, speaking on behalf of three Jewish organizations (New York Times, 28/8/79: 8); Msgr. Eugene V. Clark, spokesperson for the Catholic Archdiocese of New York (New York Times, 30/8/79: 13); Rev. Kenneth Jadoff, spokesperson for the Catholic Archdiocese of New York (ibid.).

> The picture holds the person of Christ up to comic ridicule and is, for Christians, an act of blasphemy.
>
> This is the most blasphemous film I have ever seen and it pretends to be nothing else....We are just drawing the attention of our people to the fact that it is their responsibility to avoid seeing immoral entertainment.

Such reactions reveal, among other things, that in some social environments it is considered a moral obligation to respect and leave unquestioned certain self-claims made by revered deities, holy men, and religious leaders and church members.

Punitive sanctions for 'immoral entertainment' can be even more extreme. Lenny Bruce, a daring comic transgressor of social taboos in 1960's America was thrice arrested for obscenity in the US and in 1963 was refused entrance to Britain by the Home Secretary on similar grounds (Staveacre, 1987: 174; see also Van de Gejuchte, 1996).

4.4.3. Denying a Particular Interpretation

When humour or laughter is directed at a specific and emotionally-arousing interpretation of reality (i.e., at a frame management error), the display signals a rejection of this interpretation. By communicating “I am (can be) involved in the funny elements of the situation,” it points out the existence of these elements, and moreover their attendable quality, despite the competing interpretation which one or more participants engage or could engage in.

The further consequences of this frame denial vary according to the specific character of the interpretation and its context. One everyday example is the sudden and startling meeting of two acquaintances at a dimly lit street corner or doorway. Initial reactions of fear may quickly be reacted to by amusement and laughter at the improper fright. By labelling the fear as improper, each of the two participants reassures the other that no harm was meant and accepts the other's reassurance. This kind of humorous assurance can be more calculated in the mouth of the familiar Hollywood spy or snoop caught with his hands in the politician's desk drawer.

Ambiguous situations of varied types may serve as the setting for this effect of display. Emerson (1975: 338-339) has noted its frequent use during the course of gynecological examinations, a situation liable to much officially misplaced anxiety and arousal:

> For example, in one encounter a patient vehemently protests, "Oh, Dr. Raleigh, what are you doing?" Dr. Raleigh, exaggerating his southern accent, answers, "Nothin'." (...)
>
> In another incident Doctor Ryan is attempting to remove some gauze which has been placed in the vagina to stop the bleeding. He flippantly announces that the remaining piece of gauze has disappeared inside the patient. After a thorough search Doctor Ryan holds up a piece of gauze on the instrument triumphantly: "Well, here it is. Do you want to take it home and put it in your scrapbook?"
>
> (p. 339)

Such displays deny the relevance of manifest or potential patient interpretations portraying the doctor's activities as threatening, invasive, or meaningful in any way outside of the strictly medical definition. In each of these incidents, the gynecologist acknowledges the existence of ambiguity by alluding to the improper interpretations. In the first, he takes up the role of a seducer claiming innocence; in the second, he jokingly describes the experience as so momentous and trying as to merit its remembrance by memento-keeping. These interpretations are mentioned, however, only as targets for ridicule.

Where conflicting definitions of events exist, humour and laughter displays may also communicate participant positions relative to debate. Illustrations of such definitional struggles have already been provided in this chapter (4.1.4) --skepticism of a speaker's portrayal of himself (Dan Quayle) as an environmentalist, of a malady as serious, of a male love-interest as trustworthy, of police work stories as exciting, and of pseudoscientific theories as plausible. In the previous context I was concerned with the possible social control effects of display moves. Preliminary to any social pressure to modify interpretations, however, is the simple denial by the displaying individual of the relevant interpretation, and the resulting situation of definitional conflict.

Laughter and humour displays may, on the other hand, threaten the stability of what has been established as an official framework of interpretation. A board meeting, a lecture, a face-to-face reprimand, a sports match, a religious celebration --each of these activities achieves its sense of reality by the cooperative efforts of participants to treat events as officially defined. Goffman's account of the fragility of serious enterprise in his essay "Fun in Games" incidentally considers the relevant destructive repercussions of laughter and humour displays in detail (1961: 17-81). A subsection of participants who refuses or loses the capacity to treat events seriously may well succeed in temporarily halting or entirely spoiling the proceedings. Denials of reality may also be communicated across secret channels, or after the termination of the encounter, between the participants who share or may be counted on to share a similar interpretation of events (ibid: 61-62).

In some situations, the official situation has been intentionally constructed in bad faith, with some participants being misled as to the real state of affairs. When such deceptions are engineered as jokes (i.e., in wind-ups or practical jokes), laughter and/or

humour displays may cause the implosion of the fabricated frame to all participants. Greg Smith has analysed this meaning of display and its consequences with reference to broadcast radio wind-ups (1996; see this chapter, 4.3.3, above). When the 'wound-up' victim discovers the falsehood of the frame he had been engaged in, whether disclosed by the DJ-prankster or 'seen through' by the victim himself, the most common reaction is laughter. Moreover, in the latter case, a suspicious victim may also engage in humour displays by which he claims "participation status as a gamester" (p. 284). According to Smith, laughter "signals a shift in alignment" from the specific identity maintained throughout the deception episode (wronged customer, etc.) to that of a fooled wind-up victim: "As soon as the mark laughs, the frame is in question" (ibid.). In other words, laughter here (and in other cases humour --also treated by Smith, p. 283-84) denies the previous reality, and signals the transition to a new interpretation of events.

4.4.4. Revealing the Focus of Attention (Laughter only)

Laughter displays offer clues as to where a person's attention is directed. Laughter which arrives 'on cue' at a punchline announces not only that the audience finds the joke funny, has what it takes to 'get' it, etc., but also that they were actually paying attention. An unexpected and incomprehensible bout of hilarity, on the other hand, suggests to observers that a co-participant is attending to something which escapes them --perhaps leading to a reinterpretation of events or words, a survey of the surrounding scene, or a worried self-examination. This effect of communicating the focus of attention is habitually used in the course of ordinary talk.

During conversation, speakers are in continuous need of 'back-channel cues' (Goffman, 1981: 12), signs from listeners that what is being communicated has been understood. Head nods, smiles, and sounds such as "yeah," "uh-huh," "ok," and "mmm," may accomplish this task for neutral topics, while other signals (frowns, upraised eyebrows, "tsk," "oh no," "no way"...) provide commentary to more specific themes. Laughter displays can reassure a speaker that a listener is paying attention to relevant details of his speech when he is engaged in a display of humour. This back-channel effect becomes especially relevant in cases when the humorous intent of a phrase is ambiguous, as is often the case with irony:

Al: [You stolen // a car (I bet)
Roger: [Daddy doesn't wantchu to have one.
((silence, 1 second))
Jim: No he wants me to have one, my ol' lady doesn't. hh
Roger: Oh! Main conflict with mother.
(...)
Roger: Bring your mother in we'll work on her hehh
Al: [hehh//hehh
Jim: [Okay, hh (Schenkein, 1972: 376)

In this excerpt from a group conversation, Roger tags a small laugh at the end of a statement ("Bring your mother in we'll work on her hehh") in order to distance himself from its literal sense (See this chapter, 4.3.2, above), which implies an invasive and possibly aggressive act. The similarly reduced laughter displays which Al ("hehh//hehh")

and Jim ("hh") offer in response provide reassurance that the statement was (1) received by hearers and (2) understood as offered --i.e., ironically. As Schenkein notes, "a second-speaker's *heheh* may accomplish, among other things, demonstration of hearership" (p. 366).

Another possibility, of course, is for such a laughter display to reveal that a listener has *misunderstood* the sense of a phrase. The speaker then has the choice of correcting the error, ignoring it, or adapting to the listener's interpretation.

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The ‘involvement’ connotation of laughter and humour is associated with at least four separate effects. Three of them relate specifically to situations where competing foci of attention exist which according to observers could (or *should*) prevent full involvement in amusement. Elements of misfortune or tragedy which the display appears to ignore may cause the displaying individual to appear ‘callous’ if they apply to others, ‘tough’ or ‘courageous’ if they apply to himself. Similarly, ignored blasphemy or depravity may cause him to appear immoral or amoral. Individuals who wish to give off such impressions may use laughter and/or humour displays strategically to obtain these consequences. A different possibility concerns cases where competing emotional reactions are the very targets of amusement referred to by the display. Here the effect is to deny the definition of reality entertained (potentially or actually) by the audience of laughter and/or humour. This effect may be sought intentionally in particularly ambiguous situations, or in situations where there is the suspicion or certainty that the displaying individual has been contained by a deceptive fabrication.

A final and very general interactional consequence, relevant only to laughter displays, is the mere provision of information about the laughing individual’s current focus of attention. Laughter is commonly used during conversation to let the speaker know his humour display is being appreciated as offered.

4.5. Effects Derived From the 'Entertainment' Connotation

As seen in Chapter Seven (3.3), a humour display gives off a meaning not connoted by a laughter display: "I am delivering a communication which can produce amusement at cause Y in my target sharing audience, not including myself." This claim about events is simultaneously a self-claim about the humourist's own skill and judgement, which is subject to confirmation or discredit. Such claim-making, with its subsequent interactional risks and outcomes, represents an additional effect attributable to laughter displays.

4.5.1. Self-claim of Ability To Amuse

With a humour display, a comedian claims to know his audience well, and also claims a certain amount of communicational dexterity of varying type, according to the genre of humour. Skills might include story-telling, bodily and facial mimicry or mime, graphic design, attention-directing abilities, vocal control, a talent for deception, creative frame-mixing, etc.

Successful humour is not only enjoyed and appreciated by audiences, but builds up the humourist's reputation as a clever and confident social participant and communicator. Unsuccessful humour, commonly described in the grimmest of terms (a joke 'falling flat' or 'bombing' leading to the comedian 'dying' on stage), leads to discredit and embarrassment. The British actress Emma Thomson has confessed from experience that few things can be more embarrassing than "not being laughed at when you're attempting to be funny...in front of 60.000 CND supporters at Trafalgar Square" (Complete, 1989: 73). Comedian Michael Kilgarriff (1973) has also commented on the perils of stage humour: "there is always a strong whiff of embarrassment in all patter acts, but it is just this element of danger which makes the solo turn so exciting" (p. 15).

Success in the production and performance of humour also elicits the same admiration (and envy) associated with the fulfillment and surpassing of any self-claim made previously. Clayman (1992) has noted that in political debates, audience laughter which follows a humorous statement "is often followed by applause" (p. 45), and from

my own informal observations of live comedy performances, I would suggest this pattern is common in other types of humour display before large audiences. Exceptionally strong laughter reactions tend to be accompanied by clapping responses. During everyday encounters, co-participants may also verbally exhibit appreciation of the skills involved in humorous production --"very clever," "nice timing," which are delivered separately or in conjunction with laughter itself.

Obviously, the self-claims of humorous skill made by a self-proclaimed 'comedian' are stronger than those implied in a single witty remark during conversation. Nevertheless, fellow co-participants often feel strong pressures to support each others' little humorous quips and innuendoes in order to protect each others' social standing. Persistent failures in this regard may have substantial negative effects on a person's social worth and self confidence.

It should be noted that this claim-making effect does not apply to all cases of humour, but only to those where the target sharing audience extends beyond the humourist himself. Though this is commonly the case, it is not always so. I have already suggested one example in this chapter (4.4.1), those conversations where one speaker tells another about current or recent 'troubles.' Here, humorous remarks by the former are not intended to be appreciated by the latter, and are generally followed by a recognizably serious response (Jefferson, 1984: 346).

[Frankel:TC:1:4:SO]

G: You don't want to go through all the ha:ssle?
S: hhhh I don't know Geri,
(.)
S: I've I've stopped crying uhheh-heh-heh-heh-heh,
G: Wuh were you cry::ing?

[NB:II:4:3:SO]

E: It's bleeding just a tiny tiny bit hastuh be
dre:ssed, bu[t uh
N: [Oh:::::[:::.
E: [Go:d it was he:ll. uh hahh!
hhh[hhh
N: [What a sha:me.

Normally, however, humour displays are intended for one or more additional members of the audience, and thus the claim-making effect applies.

5. 'Functions' of Amusement, Laughter, and Humour

The literature concerning effects and uses of amusement, laughter, and humour has often approached these topics in a functionalist language. It has been said, for instance, that a joking relationship has a cohesive 'function,' that self-mockery has a defensive 'function,' or simply that amusement as a whole has a therapeutic 'function.' Very often, such terminology has been applied in a careless and unreflective manner, obscuring complex and fundamental questions of both biological and social causality and diluting the potential benefits of a more honest functionalism in a jumble of imprecision.

5.1. Functions in Sociology

Functionalist analysis, a once-dominant paradigm in sociology, seeks to explain phenomena by their functional consequences. The 'function' construct is a mechanical metaphor, implying that the functional phenomenon provides a beneficial service to the system of which it is a part, and indeed exists for this very reason (i.e., like a single cog or wheel in a clock's machinery). The metaphor is well suited to biological science: an organism of a certain species represents a well-defined 'whole' or system; individual organs, reflexes, and instincts represent well-defined 'parts'; and natural selection provides a mechanism by which the positive consequences of a mutation in an organism may determine its continuation and dissemination throughout a species: if it betters the individual's chances of living and reproducing itself, the genes in question will be more likely to survive.

In the social sciences, the metaphor is less clearly applicable. The 'organism' has sometimes been taken to be represented by 'society' itself, mainly by anthropologists (i.e., Radcliffe-Brown, 1935). The small island communities on which these ideas were based, however, displayed a degree of cultural and structural integration and boundedness that is relatively rare for human populations and certainly foreign to the amorphous chaos of so-called 'Western society,' where boundaries tend to shift and cross-cut each other, and where conflict and difference are widespread. Other sociologists have distinguished between functions applying to society as a whole and those relating to various subgroups

or even to categories of individuals (Merton, 1968: 106). Though this is a step forward, the parallels with biological species (let alone constructed machines) remain rather strained. For example, individual societies, groups, and categories are in a process of continual flux and transformation, unlike the members of a single species (at the level of their transmittable DNA). Functionalists have tended to portray their 'systems,' unrealistically, as moving from one static state of equilibrium to the next.

A second major problem is the lack of a clear mechanism by which the functional consequences of a social pattern or institution may lead to its establishment and/or continuation (Elster, 1983). Societies and subgroups are not members of a large 'species' with greater chances of survival in the case of better adaptation to the environment. It is not clear in what sense they have 'needs' which require fulfillment. They are not born and do not die, but merely split from, develop, and merge with each other. In functional analysis, the relationship from effects to causes is often merely assumed.

The only general and obvious links between a consequence of a social phenomenon and its cause are human consciousness, cognition, and will. The members (or some members) of a society may recognize the benefits of a certain social form and acquiesce with, copy, develop, promote, and/or build on it. This is what Robert Merton called 'manifest functions' (1968), in contrast to 'latent functions' --the unintended and unrecognized effects of a phenomenon. Manifest functions, of course, are not as theoretically interesting or novel as latent functions, since they do not identify the unconscious evolution of a 'part' of a system, but rather the consequence of intentional collective action. The distinction between these two concepts is not as simple as may appear, however. Elster (1990) has identified some of the difficulties (131-32):

> The classification of consequences in intended versus unintended and recognized versus unrecognized suggests four categories rather than two. Also, we have to ask, as Merton rarely does: intended by whom? recognized by whom? These questions, in turn are related to another: functional for whom?
>
> In any given item of functional analysis, there are two groups of individuals involved; those who engage in practices we want to explain and those who benefit from these practices, i.e., those for whom they are in some sense

> functional. The question of intention arises only for the first group, the question of recognition may arise for both. The two groups may coincide, overlap, or be totally disjoint. In the last case, the possibility arises that the effects are unintended by those who produce them but recognized by those who benefit from them. If, moreover, the latter have the power to sustain the activities from which they benefit, we have the ingredients of a filter explanation.

Even greater complexity is added if the meanings of the convenient terms 'intention' and 'recognition' are probed. Do intentions, for instance, need be conscious or explicit intentions? Do persons who buy designer clothes admit to others or even to themselves their intention to demonstrate their superior status? Perhaps so, perhaps not, perhaps vaguely, perhaps clearly, perhaps sometimes, perhaps for some persons. Again, do they, and in what senses might they recognize that status is demonstrated in this way? And how might they experience this as beneficial?

Functionalists have asserted that the task of sociology is to reveal the latent functions of phenomena, in order to provide a real or ‘deep’ explanation of their character and existence which goes beyond the actual intentions of actors (Merton, 1968). The abovementioned difficulties in extricating intentions from the causal chain pose the question of how to identify latent functions and whether and which latent functions will turn out to have explanatory power. This is an empirical question to be settled for specific cases, rather than a presupposition to be applied indiscriminately to all social phenomena, or any which appear to have beneficial consequences.

In practice, many sociologists have continued to use functional concepts and terminology in a loose metaphorical manner. The manifest/latent distinction has not been often followed (even by Merton in his own article; see Elster, 1990: 132), with the word 'function' being used merely as a convenient cover-all label for beneficial consequences to which is attributed some unspecified kind of explanatory significance, or merely for consequences as a whole. Sociological humour research represents a typical case.

5.2. Functions in Humour Research

In sociological humour research, as elsewhere, imprecise and unsupported claims for functional significance have been common. Some authors seem to have assumed that all consequences of laughter and/or humour have functional significance:

> Although dozens, if not hundreds, of specific functions of humor might be proposed, three seem of particular and general significance: humor promotes group cohesion, it provokes intergroup (or intragroup) conflict; and it provides social control. One might note that provoking conflict is contrary to traditional functional theory, but more recent analyses (Coser, 1956) have indicated that conflict can have functional consequences for a social system, and so we shall include it here.
>
> (Fine, 1983: 173)

Does Fine distinguish at all between consequences in general and the 'hundreds' of functional consequences he hints at? Between beneficial and harmful consequences? Between manifest and latent functions? Between phenomena explained by functions and those merely 'functional' in a vague, metaphorical sense? No such distinctions are made, nor is his a unique case.

In these studies, though the explanatory value of functional consequences is ever the justification and backdrop for analysis --suggesting that it is latent functions that are being proposed--, there is often plenty of implicit recognition that functions might actually be manifest:

> In a spirit of harmony, the group *realizes* that the fact that they are able to laugh at each other's foibles indicates that they have a trusting, communal relationship.
>
> (Fine, 1983: 173; my italics)

> Humor is *intended* to initiate social interaction and to keep the machinery of interaction operating freely and smoothly. Indeed, sometimes it may not be sufficient. But perhaps most often *this is its intention and objective function*.
>
> (Martineau, 1972: 103; my italics)

> Sometimes a joke is *used* to point out the shortcomings of members in the council
>
> (Miller, 1967: 266; my italics)

I would suggest that the general categories of 'functions' proposed by these authors are better described as categories of 'effects' or 'consequences' (as I have done throughout this chapter). In specific cases, effects which are desirable or useful in some context for some person or group may be strategically sought; undesirable ones may be avoided. It may be observed that certain humorous or laughter institutions emerge in particular situations. Most of these are easily accountable as recognized and relatively intentional 'uses' (the term I have preferred), however habitualized. Admittedly, in these cases, the use of the word 'function' can indeed 'function' as a useful "shorthand notation" (Boudon, 1990: 136). Nevertheless, if not explicitly defined, avoided, or limited to occasional informal use, this word should --at the very least-- not be employed as the main term referring to 'consequences' or even 'beneficial consequences', as many authors have done.

Some phenomena may perhaps be candidates for true functional analysis. These, however, will need to be well defined, as will the larger unit for which they are functional. The absence of intentionality and recognition on the part of actors should be demonstrated. And a clear mechanism explaining the link between beneficial effects and arising of the phenomenon should be at least suggested, if not documented.

5.3. Biological Functions

The function metaphor, as I have mentioned, is well suited to evolutionary explanations of biologically inherited traits. Amusement, as a psycho-physiological mechanism, is therefore subject to functional analysis of the evolutionary sort. Nevertheless, I will argue that such explanations are too speculative to merit serious effort or attention.

It is certainly possible and even likely that some effect of amusement improved the survival or reproductive potential of an individual organism, allowing laughing hominids to pass on their genes to future generations with more frequency than non-laughing hominids. If it is accepted that amusement is a universal inherited emotional trait, the consequence follows. The accounts of evolutionary laughter and humour theorists, however, have failed to concoct any single plausible 'story' explaining how a particular effect could have been adaptive to a single individual. In practice, unfortunately, all such accounts lack credibility due to the incompleteness of our knowledge regarding crucial variables:

1. The stage in the brain's evolution at which amusement.
2. The ecological and social conditions of our pre-human ancestors at this point.
3. The precise biological nature and functioning of amusement and its relation to laughter (The topic of Part Two of this thesis).
4. The various psycho-physiological, communicative and social effects that joking, amusement, and laughter produce under various conditions (The topic of the present chapter).
5. The interaction between emergent social organization on the one hand and structures and evolutionary change in early hominids on the other.

While each of these informational voids in itself makes nonsense of evolutionary reconstructions, many of them threaten to remain permanently opaque. The discovery of 'missing link' skulls, for instance, will never clarify the mystery of the human brain's gradual growth in size and complexity.

An attempt to order the following partial list of contributions to the 'debate' according to probability of truth should convince the reader of its futility:

Laughter was originally a vocal signal to other members of the group that they might relax with safety.

(Hayworth, 1928: 384)

Humor evolved to induce the subject to seek out informative social stimulation and to reward others for providing such stimulation.

(Weisfeld, 1993: 162)

Laughter probably evolved by ritualization of a redirected threatening movement.

(Lorenz, 1967: 253)

The rehearsal of alternate categories and classifications of the world in which we find ourselves...may have survival value.

(Miller, 1988: 11)

What is the survival value of the involuntary, simultaneous contraction of fifteen facial muscles associated with certain noises which are often irrepressible?...The sole function of this luxury reflex seems to be the disposal of excitations which have become redundant, which cannot be consummated in any purposeful manner.

(Koestler, 1964: 31)

All things that were good, that made for pleasurable feelings were greeted with the full-throated, deep-chested laughter that springs forth naturally. [These outbursts were] invitations to others to share the delightful mood, [and anyone who didn't was] a pariah [and was] exterminated.

(McComas, 1923: 55)

> Laughter has a curious ambiguity, combining elements of affection and conciliation with elements of rejection and aggression. Perhaps all these ancestral means of social communication became fused to compose a single, absolutely irresistible way to make another person cease an activity regarded as objectionable or ridiculous.
>
> (Minsky, 1985: 280)

Evolutionary theories are uncertain enough in cases of gross bodily parts and physical mechanisms of small, relatively uncomplicated organisms. When considering laughter, all hope can safely be given up. The considerable speculation that exists on the subject, usually presented as probable fact, displays a heterogeneity proper to our profound ignorance regarding the fundamental variables.

6. Conclusions

An overview of the various effects (and related phenomena) associated with amusement, laughter, and humour has been presented, with reference to the large humour research literature concerned with effects, uses, institutions, and ‘functions’ of the three components of the laughter triad.

An instance of amusement may produce in its subject a number of ‘mechanical’ effects:

1. The sounds and movements of 'laughter'
2. The pleasurable subjective sensation of funniness.
3. Numerous less observable bodily manifestations of amusement.
4. A subsequent state of physical and psychological relaxation.
5. In the long term, improved health.
6. The facilitation of further amusement.

An interpreted humour piece may produce amusement in its audience. As the effects of amusement cannot be stimulated directly, humour provides a method for obtaining any of the six effects of amusement listed above.

Laughter and humour displays produce their effects through the communication of meanings, including the five connotations of display set out in Chapter Seven (2.4, 3.3). Effects, classified according to the signification(s) from which they derive, include:

(Derived from the 'discredit' connotation)

1. The immediate broadcasting of the fact that a claimant has been discredited to any observers, provoking or increasing discredit if the claimant be present, and possibly eliciting facework on his part.
2. The subsequent provocation of amusement and/or laughter in observers whose attention is guided towards the funny events.
3. In the long term, and with reference to new members of a group, the transmission and reproduction of social norms alluded to by the display.

4. Also in the long term, the maintenance and reinforcement of these same social norms within full members.

(Derived from the 'knowledge', 'identity', and 'involvement' connotations)

1. In objective terms, the placement of the displaying individual within a scheme or schemes of social classification, as betrayed by his mental contents, identities, and attitudes.
2. With reference to an observer who shares some/all of these mental contents, identities, and attitudes, an increased closeness or affiliation.
3. With reference to an observer who fails to share some/all of these mental contents, identities, and attitudes, an increased distance or disaffiliation.

(Derived from the 'identity' connotation)

1. Protection from discredit for a displayer unintentionally associated with a discrediting event.
2. Protection from discredit for a displayer who has intentionally produced a discrediting event.
3. Protection from discredit for a displayer who suffers a discrediting attack by another individual.
4. With reference to a person who depends 'too often' on protective displays, the giving off of an impression of evasiveness or excessive defensiveness.

(Derived from the 'involvement' connotation)

1. When discrediting events are associated with tragedy or misfortune, the giving off of an impression of 'callousness' or 'toughness' (judged favourably or unfavourably depending on the observer's attitude towards empathy)

2. When discrediting events are associated with any fact which 'should' elicit an emotional reaction of moral condemnation, the giving off of an impression of moral looseness or depravity.

3. When the source of amusement referred to by the display is an erroneous focus of involvement itself, the denial of this supposed misinterpretation.

4. In the case of laughter displays only, the revelation of the displayer's focus of attention.

(Derived from the 'entertainment' connotation)

1. In the case of humour displays before an audience, the making of the self-claim that the displayer is able to provoke the amusement of other members of the target sharing audience.

The relevance of an effect depends on the relevance and specific content of its parent meaning in context. Effects derived from the displaying individual's assertion of 'involvement in the amusing elements' of a scene, for instance, do not apply in the absence of apparent obstacles to involvement. Several, of course, may apply at once.

Throughout the discussion, I have also included references to many common strategic uses of laughter and humour by actors to achieve specific effects. The fact that humour pieces result in amusement, for instance, allow actors to obtain desirable effects of hilarity such as pleasure, relaxation, or improved health. Laughter/humour-induced conformity to social norms of demeanour, derived from the ‘discredit’ connotation of these displays, can be used by actors to control the behaviour of others through gossip, ridicule, and mockery. Such uses, moreover, may become institutionalized, as in the once-common practice of the ‘dunce’ cap at schools, which exploited the conformity effect of ridicule to correct children’s behaviour and study habits.

I have, however, avoided reference to the ‘functions’ of amusement, laughter, and humour, which I have argued should be posited only with reference to specific empirical phenomena, and with more theoretical and methodological care than has often been applied by authors within the functionalist tradition.

The effects of amusement, laughter, and humour which have been presented in this chapter, and the related strategic uses and social institutions, have been the topic of a considerable amount of the work undertaken in the field of humour research. Indeed, the discussion has made continual reference to such studies, and has drawn from many for its empirical illustrations. The treatment offered in this chapter, however, has gone further than most mere summaries of effects or 'functions' by integrating them within a systematic ordering derived from a solid theoretical base. I have been careful in distinguishing effects relating to each of the three components of the laughter triad, and between those of humour pieces and of humour displays. Moreover, the effects of laughter and humour displays have been traced to the various meanings which these displays imply by virtue of their reference to amusement. The intuitive knowledge which all human actors possess of this emotional experience, and which I have attempted to make explicit in Part Two of the thesis, can account for the presence of carnivals, salesmen's joshing, village idiots, and joking relationships in far-flung corners of the globe. Each of the various connotations of laughter and humour displays, it has been argued, naturally leads to a set of interactional and/or social consequences which attain relevance within specific contexts, many of which can further be exploited by actors intentionally. This chapter can thus be considered a further test of the 'claim-discredit' hypothesis of amusement. The amenability of many and diverse research findings to the theoretical structure proposed represents additional support for its validity.

Chapter Nine: Situating the Laughter Triad

1. Introduction page 217

2. Summary of Proposals page 219

3. Cross-Cultural Validity page 221

3.1. The Emotion Debate page 221

3.1.1. The Question of Distinctiveness page 222
3.1.2. The Question of Universality page 226

3.2. Amusement as a Basic Emotion page 231
3.3. Cross-Cultural Variation page 239

4. Situating the Laughter Triad page 243

4.1. The Return to Situation page 243
4.2. Amusement and Situated Interaction page 245
4.3. The Field and Its Placement page 247

5. Conclusions page 255

1. Introduction

Throughout the past eight chapters, I have drawn up a suggested chart of the area bounding the three basic phenomena pursued from the start: amusement, laughter, and humour. Distinctions have been drawn, concepts delimited and defined, factors of variability identified, similarities noted, and, whenever possible or useful, empirical illustrations and links to relevant theory and research provided. It will be the charge of all those interested in these subjects to assess the accuracy of this preliminary guide, and perhaps to develop and improve upon its rough outlines.

In these final pages, I will provide a brief summary of the proposals, and some reflections on their cross-cultural validity. Within the context of the current debate on the relative influence of nature and culture on emotional phenomena, I will argue that amusement can be considered one of the 'basic' universal emotions common to all human beings. I will also suggest how and on what bases the manifestations of amusement, laughter, and humour may vary cross-culturally.

Finally, the 'situation' of the laughter triad, in the three senses mentioned at the start of the thesis, will be addressed. I will draw attention to the continuous focus on ‘the everyday situation,’ on which analysis has been firmly grounded. I will emphasize once again the essential links between the fundamental features of situated interaction and the workings of amusement. And, to conclude, I will draw up the outline of a suggested structure for the field of humour research, integrating the main theories of amusement as well as the full and varied body of interdisciplinary research.

2. Summary of Proposals

Three concepts have been the focus of this dissertation: amusement (a universal emotion responsive to ‘funny’ objects), laughter (the observable and more-or-less faithful signs of amusement), and humour (the attempt to stimulate amusement).

No general theory of amusement (and by extension, of laughter and humour) has yet been widely accepted, though such a theory would be of immense benefit to the field of humour research. The four types of theory most commonly discussed --superiority, incongruity, tension-release, and play-- are widely regarded as partial and unsatisfying, even by many of their proponents. These approaches have been rejected on the basis of their failure to explain all cases (or even a well-defined subsection) of amusing stimuli, or to account for the wide range of effects, uses, and additional features of the phenomena.

A successful theory could be identified on the same grounds, by its usefulness in drawing together and classifying the widest range of relevant data. Only individual judgments of validity are relevant to the assessment of such a theory, however, due to the relative difficulties posed by objective observation of basic phenomena. Some evidence for its general validity could be garnered from the balance of aggregate individual assessments, taking special notice of the variety of interests and backgrounds of validators, and each assessor's specific knowledge of the field.

A 'claim-discredit' amusement theory, closely akin to earlier views by Aristotle, Plato, E.F. Carritt, J.B. Baillie, Henri Bergson, and others, has been proposed. According to this proposal, amusement reacts to the observation, by a perceiver, that a self-claim attaching to some claimant has been discredited. It further requires the perceiver's identity distance from the claimant --otherwise resulting in his embarrassment-- and his sufficient attention to the discrediting events --as opposed to other cognitive or emotionally-engaging percepts. The actual characteristics of a self-claim’s discredit, and the subjective quality of its perception, may vary widely due to differences in the self-claim's origin and content, the identity of the claimant discredited, the cause of discredit, the location of the discredit event within the structure of interpreted reality, and also the synchronicity of the perception and its result with other amusement reactions and/or other cognitive and emotional processes. This variety can account for the full range of amusing

stimuli: unintentional gaffes, unorthodox ideas, practical jokes, political cartoons, slapstick movies, bouts of tickling, ironic quips, parodic imitations, comedic one-liners, blunt obscenity, and so on.

The proposal has been integrated within (and strongly influenced by) the larger structure of Erving Goffman's study of situated interaction, which portrayed individuals in public as fragile performers of the selves they craft for specific audiences. His analysis of the embarrassment which results in a subject when his self-claims are discredited in public has been extended by the parallel notion that amusement follows the same types of events (whether or not a present or real embarrassable person exists) in identity-distant and appropriately engrossed observers.

Flustering and apologetic displays, the expressions of embarrassment, are similarly complemented by laughter and humour displays, two nearly synonymous communicative signs. Through their common reference to amusement, laughter and humour displays imply a series of universal meanings derivable from the preceding analysis of the basal emotion, a set of connotations which in turn may provoke specific effects depending on context. Many of these effects, and the uses of laughter and humour which they inspire, have been widely observed and analyzed in the humour research field, including the broadcasting of discredit, the transmission and maintenance of social norms, interpersonal affiliation and disaffiliation, and protection from discredit. The definition of the social situation, modulated by the aims and relative power of an actor, will influence the display he desires to express. His achievement of this display, moreover, will depend on his skills, and in the case of laughter, on the complicating influence of the psycho-physiological process of amusement.

These proposals have been offered as tentative suggestions to be tested and improved upon by humour researchers, both professional and lay.

3. Cross-Cultural Validity

3.1. The Emotion Debate

The theory presented describes amusement as a discrete pan-human emotion. This claim requires some further elaboration and support, as the distinctiveness and universality of emotions has been strongly contested in some camps. The study of the emotions crosses a badly defined and much fought-over border between psychology and more sociological disciplines, where nature and culture interact closely. In this section, I will make clear and defend my own version of boundaries. Before the question of universality is addressed, however, it will first be necessary to defend the very existence of emotions as discrete and independent bodily processes, a proposition which has not always been taken for granted even within psychology.

An emotion is defined as a bodily mechanism which produces a specific, brief, immediate, and automatic psycho-physiological reaction in response to the outcome of a cognitive judgement of a specific type. A manifestation of emotion is perceivable by its subject as an 'emotional experience' and by an observer (when observable) as an 'emotional display'. I assume that there is a set of such emotions (specific cognitive judgments corresponding to specific bodily reactions) which are distinct from each other and universal throughout our species. Evidence for such a set is overwhelming. The most compelling derives from our own subjective experiences of emotion, and from the fact that similar emotional events appear to be present in all other human beings with which we interact. Despite the immense variability in language and culture across the range of known societies, travellers and ethnographers have found (at least some) emotional displays recognizable and similar to their own in all known societies. People everywhere display what looks like our 'anger,' 'sadness,' or 'happiness' for the same types of reasons. Indeed, these similarities provide a good part of the basis for communication between members of linguistically and culturally distant societies.

Nevertheless, these intuitive understandings of emotion have been unpopular within the social sciences. Cognitive psychology has questioned the distinctiveness of what are commonly regarded as separate emotions, while anthropology has questioned

the cross-cultural validity of our emotional understandings. Each of these related issues will be addressed in turn, with reference to the recent shift in attitudes towards these aspects of emotion within the social sciences.

3.1.1. The Question of Distinctiveness

In psychology, many have argued that the apparent distinctiveness of independent emotions is an illusion of subjectivity. Until recently, psychologists have granted little if any motivational importance to affects, conceiving them primarily as the result of cognitive processing (Tomkins, 1981):

> Contemporary psychology regards feelings as last. Affect is postcognitive. It is elicited only after considerable processing of information has been accomplished. An affective reaction, such as liking, disliking, preference, evaluation, or the experience of pleasure or displeasure, is based on a prior cognitive process in which a variety of content discriminations are made and features are identified, examined for their value, and weighted for their contributions. Once this analytic task has been completed, a computation of the components can generate an overall affective judgement.
>
> (Zajonc, 1980: 151)

In contrast to Charles Darwin's (1902) and William James' (1884) view that specific eliciting circumstances correspond to specific emotional responses, psychology has favoured the version of W.B. Cannon (1927). Cannon argued that varied eliciting circumstances are associated with an identical set of physiological responses, subsequently interpreted by the subject as one or other emotion. According to this view, though fear and anger both provoke the activation of the sympathetic nervous system through the release of the adrenalin hormone, it is the actor's appraisal of circumstances which allows him to decide which emotion he is experiencing.

Schachter and Singer (1962) conducted an experiment which was widely held to support Cannon's claims, becoming an immediate classic in the discipline and a

justification for psychology's disinterest with emotions as motivating forces. The experimenters injected subjects with adrenaline and placed them in situations elicitory of either happiness or anger. According to predictions, subjects acted and felt happy in the former context, angry in the latter (and happier/angrier than control subjects). The fact that different emotions may share some physiological similarities does not, however, demonstrate that no extracognitive differences exist between them. Schachter and Singer's subjects may have truly experienced separable manifestations of happiness and anger, each group simply misattributing the general adrenaline-stimulated arousal as part of either one, or having either of the emotions amplified by the arousal. In the absence of external arousal, less intense versions of either emotion could have been experienced. Moreover, the results of the experiment were weak and in some cases actually contradicted the main hypothesis; its methods have been strongly criticized; and attempts at replication have generally failed (Scherer, 1996: 294). Nevertheless, the conclusions of Schachter and Singer were hardly questioned for a full two decades by the practitioners of a psychological science dominated by the cognitive paradigm (Tomkins, 1981: 310-312).

More recently, considerable evidence for the physiological separability of emotions has accumulated. At least some physiological measures have been shown to discriminate between some emotions. Ekman, Levenson, and Friesen (1983; 1990) found that when posing emotional expressions, subjects' heart rates were higher for sadness, anger, and fear than for happiness, disgust, and surprise; skin temperature higher for anger than for fear and sadness. A study seeking to produce real emotions of happiness, anger, and fear in subjects (Stemmler, 1989) found these reactions could be discriminated on the basis of skin conductance and head temperature.

Paul Ekman and others have provided evidence that many observable expressions of emotion are at least partly inherited and thus recognizable universally. Ekman and Friesen (1971) conducted a study which documented the ability of members of the South Fore, an isolated New Guinean society, and American college students to mutually comprehend each others' emotional facial displays. A group of Fore subjects accurately selected from six photographs of faces the one which best fit each 'emotion story' retold by the experimenters. Other Fore were photographed posing faces in reaction to these

same 'emotion stories', and these photos accurately recognized by Western subjects. Six 'basic' facial emotional expressions were identified: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust. Very similar results were obtained by an initially skeptical Karl and Eleanor Heider (1970; in Ekman, 1980), when they replicated the experiment with the Grand Valley Dan, a much more isolated New Guinean culture. Additional evidence has been obtained by observing children born deaf and blind, who are unable to learn emotional expression from others, and yet exhibit easily recognizable emotional behaviour (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1973).

More subtle correlations have been measured in the brain. Numerous tests have determined that 'positive' emotions --those leading to approach or positive action such as happiness and anger-- are associated with greater activity in the left cerebral hemisphere, while 'negative' emotions --characterized by withdrawal: fear, disgust, sadness-- are associated with right-brain processing (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996: 147-150). Electrical stimulation to specific regions of the brain is known to produce specific emotional feelings (Heath, 1954; Duchowny, 1983). It has also been found that the action of particular neurochemicals is related to particular emotions. The peptide cholecystokinin (CCK) can apparently induce panic attacks in the absence of any recognizable cause (Oatley and Jenkins, 1993: 154).

Subjective experience should not be discounted as evidence for emotional diversity. Though the way in which such experience is codified, interpreted, remembered, and communicated varies from person to person and from culture to culture, leading to insurmountable difficulties in the sharing of observations, certain fundamental features of subjective emotional life can be established through the sharing of introspective insights. Wundt (1874) suggested three basic dimensions of feeling along which emotions could be distinguished: pleasantness/unpleasantness, excitation/depression, and tension/relaxation. The first two of these have been strongly supported by empirical research (Scherer, 1996: 306-07).

The unique flavour and distinctiveness of at least some emotions cannot be denied by any human being. Whatever the physiological similarities found between intense joy and intense fear, it seems nonsensical to theorize that purely cognitive interpretation distinguishes one from the other:

> It is as reasonable a possibility as a theory of pain and pleasure which argued that the difference between the pain of a toothache and the pleasure of an orgasm is not in the stimulation of different sensory receptors, but in the fact that since one experience occurs in a bedroom, the other in a dentist's office, one interprets the undifferentiated arousal state differently.
>
> (Tomkins, 1981: 311)

The conscious mind is a far more precise measuring tool for the distinctiveness of emotions than crude thermometers and EEG machines.

In recent years, the motivational role of emotions, and with it the distinctiveness of different affects, has increasingly come to be recognized. Current views propose that the different outcomes of certain cognitive 'appraisals' or evaluations directly produce specific types of emotion (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 1993). Research in the field of emotions has experienced a dramatic upsurge (Oatley and Jenkins, xxiii; 26-31), and a revised edition of a social psychology text includes a new chapter on emotions (Hewstone, Stroebe, and Stephenson, 1996). This thesis can be positioned partly within this new movement.

3.1.2. The Question of Universality

Many social scientists have questioned the universality of emotions. Klineberg (1938) noted that in many societies, expressions are used in ways that to us seem bizarre. He cited the Melanesian Orokawa's use of fierce expressions to greet guests at a feast, or the joy displayed by Samurai women upon hearing of the death of their husbands or sons in battle. Weston La Barre (1947) offered laughter itself as an example of cultural diversity:

> Smiling, indeed, I have found may almost be mapped after the fashion of any other culture trait; and laughter is in some senses a geographic variable. On a map of the Southwest Pacific one could perhaps even draw lines between areas of 'Papuan hilarity' and others where a Cobuan, Melanesian dourness reigned. In Africa, Gorer noted that laughter is used by the negro to express surprise, wonder, embarrassment, and even discomfiture; it is not necessarily, or even often a sign of amusement; the significance given to 'black laughter' is due to a mistake of supposing that similar symbols have identical meanings. Thus it is that even if the physiological behaviour be present, its cultural and emotional functions may differ. Indeed, even within the same culture, the laughter of adolescent girls and the laughter of corporation presidents can be functionally different things.

More recently, a number of anthropologists have argued that even apparently similar emotions actually differ significantly from one society to the next, in their causes, boundaries, and even their subjective quality, that "the passions are as cultural as the devices" (Geertz, 1980: 124; see also Rosaldo, 1984; and Solomon, 1984). Lutz (1988) and other ethnographers have conducted studies of the emotional lives of particular peoples which differ significantly from our own.

Some replies to these arguments have been already implied in the body of this thesis, with regard to the emotion of amusement. A distinction between the psycho-physiological response itself and its observable display must first be drawn. There are then three ways in which culture may influence an emotion and/or its expression.

Firstly, though the type of cognitive judgement which triggers an emotion is claimed to be universal, the specific information used in assessments varies from moment to moment and from person to person, let alone from culture to culture (See Chapters Four and Six). The same mask which inspires terror in a young child may be found mildly amusing by an adult. The discovery of an unusual tumorous growth on a bodily organ could elicit fear in the patient, grief in his family, and scientific interest in the surgeon. An outside temperature that would make an Eskimo smile would make a Berber frown (and vice-versa). Public torture and beheadings that made medieval crowds cheer would inspire revulsion, grief, and moral outrage in modern Westerners. These different reactions reflect divergent attitudes, beliefs, and interpretations, rather than divergent emotional mechanisms. A particular group may also develop a general 'threshold' of a particular emotion which is higher or lower than those of others, by learning certain recurrent patterns of interpretation in relevant circumstances. Where individuals learn their exclusive entitlement to large sets of rights and property, anger (due to inevitable violations) is likely to be common. Larger patterns of emotional difference may reflect relevant culturally variable features of personality such as the extent to which the individuality and independence of the single social actor is emphasized and valued (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996: 42-43). Sociologists and anthropologists may well draw out the connections between the sources of natives' emotional reactions and the outlines of their culture and social structure.

A second factor regards cultural rules and individual aims affecting the expression of emotion. Emotional display is partly subject to pressure from the relevant official definition of the situation (is the display acceptable/required here and now?) and also to the goals of the actor in question (is it in my interests to display here and now?). In a celebrated experimental study (Ekman, 1972; Friesen, 1972) it was found that while both Japanese and American college students displayed expressions of disgust in reaction to unpleasant filmed images, the former showed fewer such expressions when aware that they were being observed. The general level of acceptable display of a single emotion or a group of emotions may also vary from one society to the next. As Douglas (1971) has noted, "the thresholds of tolerance of bodily relaxation and control...are set socially," and

these will affect the level and type of emotional display appropriate both generally and in specific contexts.

Certain uses of emotional displays and of the stimuli that produce the emotion may also become institutionalized or more common in a single society, group, or environment either by mere historical accident or to achieve particularly desirable effects. In an imperialistic, military society, institutions of socialization and control may be directed towards reducing fear while encouraging and channeling anger (See David, 1988). On the other hand, in societies where the violent and unsociable consequences of anger could threaten survival or basic values, this emotion may be socialized to virtual nonexistence (Briggs, 1970; Levy 1973; Marshall).

Finally, there is the question of cultural interpretations of emotion. Like any other feature of the environment, emotional reactions are the subject of varied classifications by different societies. In the same way that Eskimos are known to distinguish between countless varieties of snow, Tahitians reportedly have forty-seven terms referring to anger (Levy, 1984). Moreover, the content and boundaries separating emotional concepts may vary widely. The Ifaluk people's emotion 'metagu' integrates our ideas of 'fear,' 'anxiety,' and 'embarrassment,'(Lutz, 1982) whereas our 'fear' includes what to Tahitians is an important and separable emotion of the 'uncanny', involving perceptions of certain incongruous events which cause the flesh to crawl and the hair stand on end (Levy, 1984). Nevertheless, it can be argued that these diverse theories of emotions or 'emotionologies' (Stearns and Stearns, 1988) apply to some foundational reality of emotional predispositions common to all humans, on which specific concepts are based:

> whatever the cultural peculiarities in the relations and associated meanings of Tahitian emotional terms, I had little trouble in recognizing, say, ri'ari'a as "fear," riri as "anger," hina'aro as "desire," 'oa'oa as "happiness," ha'ama as "shame." That is, if an emotion was recognized and named at all, its "central tendency" seemed to be universally human.
>
> (Levy, 1984)

It seems probable that at least a number of separable 'basic emotions' exist, with universally definable causes and physiological/expressive features. Indeed, it can be observed that even ethnographers who attempt to demonstrate the uniqueness of other-cultural emotions fall back on intuitive understandings of such universals in their work. Oatley and Jenkins (1996: 49) make this point with reference to some of Lutz's anecdotes among the Ifaluk:

> One night she was frightened by a man entering the doorless, individual hut that she had negotiated for herself. Her scream awakened her adopted family who came to see what was wrong.... The man had fled, and the family laughed hilariously when they heard Lutz had been alarmed by such an event. She said that she had been on the island long enough to know that men sometimes called on women at night for a sexual rendezvous. But she had imported the American idea that an uninvited visit from a man inevitably meant harm. On Ifaluk, Lutz says, although men may very occasionally seem frightening in public if drunk, so that others may fear that a disagreement might break out between them, interpersonal violence is virtually nonexistent, and rape unknown. Hence a night visitor means the very antithesis of fear.
>
> (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996: 48)

In this story, as in many others related by Lutz, both native understandings of the ethnographer's emotional expressions (i.e., fear) and the latter's comprehension of the former's displays (i.e., laughter) are easily achieved despite the considerable dissimilarities between the emotional lives of Ifaluks and Westerners which Lutz describes in her book *Unnatural Emotions*. A few lines also suffice to allow Western readers to understand why a particular emotion is felt by the Ifaluk.

It has also been found that descriptions of subjective emotional experience are also often cross-culturally very similar. For example, the 'hydraulic metaphor,' which portrays an emotion as an interior force which grows until it boils or spills over has been widely recorded in societies of very different temperaments, including of course our own

(Levy, 1984). Russell's (1991) comparison of numerous emotionologies from the most diverse cultures has also revealed certain basic common features.

Any psychological theory of emotions, however pretendedly 'scientific,' constitutes an 'emotionology' in competition with others. Our own English folk terms -- anger, fear-- may well turn out to be inadequate, and it is likely that attention to the distinctions made in other human cultures will continue to provide us with revelatory insights. It is uncertain how close to the foundational reality of human emotions such a theory will be able to arrive. Nevertheless, I assume that some emotionologies will be more accurate than others.

3.2. Amusement as a Basic Emotion

Is amusement a basic emotion? It is curious that while a positive answer to this question is common both within the humour field (Morreall, 1983: 297) and in earlier theoretical accounts of emotion (Hobbes, 1640; 1651; James, 1890; Darwin, 1902), contemporary emotion theorists and researchers rarely address amusement. Neither Tomkins (1981), Izard (1977), Plutchik (1980), nor Ekman (1980) have included amusement within their lists of fundamental emotions. A recent textbook on the emotions (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996) fails to list either amusement or laughter in its wide-ranging index.

The historical difficulties in reaching (or even approaching) consensus regarding a single cause of amusement probably accounts in great part for this neglect. Ekman's (1992) list of seven criteria for identifying a 'basic' emotion unproblematically fits with the features of amusement in all but this respect. In accordance with Ekman's defining criteria, a manifestation of amusement occurs quickly and spontaneously; lasts a brief period of time; follows a relatively automatic and unconscious appraisal; and is associated with distinctive physiological responses as well as universal bodily signals (i.e., laughter). What has been unclear is whether amusement is also associated with 'universal antecedent events', a single and coherent range of stimuli observable cross-culturally.

In this thesis, I have argued for the existence of such a set of universal antecedent events for amusement. Specifically, I have suggested that amusement follows the judgement that another's self-claim has been discredited, provided the subject attends to the discrediting event and does not feel identified as the discredited claimant. Whether this definition will be found accurate in relation to even Western society remains to be seen. For the purposes of discussion, I will for now take its local validity for granted and address the question of cross-cultural validity.

Travelers, missionaries, and ethnographers who have interacted with the widest range of human societies seem to have recognized laughter as laughter (i.e., as a sign of recognizable amusement), wherever they have gone. Reports of laughter and its sources are scattered sparsely throughout the ethnographic literature, and tend to confirm the

universality of amusement causes. Marshall's reports of the !Kung Bushmen, a nomadic hunter-gatherer society as removed from our own society as can be imagined, sound familiar in relation to humour behaviour and amusement reactions. She describes talking as a continuous activity between groups of !Kung, "the most loquacious people I know," and remarks that it is frequently punctuated by "shrieks of laughter" (p. 232):

> They laugh at mishaps that happen to other people, like the lions eating up someone else's meat, and shriek over particularly telling and insulting sexual sallies in the joking relationship... Men and women who have the joking relationship insult each other in a facetious way and also point out actual faults or remark on actual episodes which embarrass a person. Everyone joins in uproarious, derisive laughter.
>
> (233-35)

Marshall's examples here include the simple identification and retelling of self-claim discredits ("[they] point out actual faults or remark on actual episodes which embarrass a person"), the accident-caused occurrence of events which discredit a person's universal territorial self-claims ("mishaps...the lions eating up someone else's meat"), and also agent-caused discredits ("telling and insulting sexual sallies...insult[s]"). The interpersonal nature of amusement is also evident from this passage, as in the emphasis on the 'other' or 'someone else' as the source of amusement.

Even when dealing with some of the most isolated peoples, and in the absence of a common language, ethnographers can immediately share laughter with individuals of radically different cultural backgrounds:

> On one occasion, I trekked up into the mountains to the outermost confines of Dowayoland. Many of the children had never seen a white man before and began to scream with terror until comforted by their elders who explained that this was the white chief from Kongle. We all laughed good-naturedly at their fright and smoked together.
>
> (Barley, 1983: 54)

Ethnographic studies of humour reveal self-claim discredit as the basis of humour pieces. Pierre Clastres (1974) analyzed two myths of the Chulupi Indians of the Paraguayan Chaco which provoke loud laughter during the retelling. Each of these involved important cultural figures --the shaman and the jaguar-- failing to fulfill their most basic role self-claims. In one myth, a shaman is called upon to cure a girl of a fever, and his every action is a display of incompetence: he calls upon the help of other shamans (a measure reserved for desperate cases, here applied to a trifling malady); he dances with women (when he should dance alone); he tries to seduce women (revealing his lack of concentration, essential to the spiritual work); he discovers to have forgotten his tobacco (the most essential item of the shaman, the cure-all substance); his spirit assistant is a she-ass (considered a ridiculous, stupid, and stubborn animal) rather than the usual bird or serpent; he falls into a thorn bush.

A wide range of humour genres has been found to be widespread throughout humankind, including sexual and scatological taboo-breaking, verbal and physical abuse, teasing, gossip, clowning, and satirical mimic (Apte, 1983). The content of the 'joking' in joking relationships, varieties of which have been reported from every corner of the globe, have been described as

> teasing, sexual innuendoes, mock insults, obscene remarks concerning an individual's sexual organs and prowess, playfulness, banter and so forth.... Cultural notions of incongruent, outrageous, or deviant manifestations of personalities, behaviour, and so forth, are also important.
>
> (bid: 186)

Barley's account of ritual clowns among the Cameroonian Dowayo suggests again that differences in 'sense of humour' are a matter of taste, fashion, and emphasis rather than of substance:

> The clowns were extravagant, their faces painted half white, half black. They wore rubbish or old rags and spoke in a high-pitched scream partly in Fulani,

> partly in Dowayo, shouting out obscenities and nonsense. 'The cunt of the beer!' they screamed. The crowd roared with pleasure. They exposed themselves, produced ear-shattering farts by what mechanism I know not. They attempted to copulate with each other. They were delighted with me. They 'took photographs' through a broken bowl, 'wrote notes' on banana leaves. I managed to give as good as I got; when they asked for money, I solemnly handed them a bottletop.
>
> (p. 83-84)

Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court was struck by the lack of novelty in modern humour as compared with the gags of a medieval court jester:

> I think I never heard so many old played-out jokes strung together in my life.... It seemed peculiarly sad to sit there, 1300 years before I was born and listen again to poor, flat, worm-eaten jokes that had given me the dry gripes when I was a boy 1300 years afterwards. It about convinced me that there isn't any such thing as a new joke possible.
>
> (cited in Mintz, 1983: 133)

To support this literary observation, often reflected also in folk ideas of jokes being 'old as the hills,' Larry Mintz has identified the links between such distant comedians as the Marx Brothers and the troupes of the 16th century Commedia del Arte, or between the frame-confusing wordplay found in both Greek comedy and Abbott and Costello's most famous routine:

> [from Cyclops, Euripides, 400 BC]
>
> CYCLOPS: I was battered by Nobody.
> CHORUS: Then nobody touched you.
> CYCLOPS: Nobody blinded me.
> CHORUS: Then you can see....What? Blinded by nobody?
> CYCLOPS: Where's Nobody?
> CHORUS: Nowhere, of course.

[from Abbott and Costello's absurd dialogue about the players --first, second, and third basemen-- of Abott's new baseball team]

ABBOTT: I say Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know's on third...
COSTELLO: Yeah, do you know the fellow's name?
ABBOTT: Yes.
COSTELLO: Well, who's on first?
ABBOTT: Yes.
COSTELLO: I mean the guy playing first.
ABBOTT: Who.
COSTELLO: The fellow playing first.
ABBOTT: Who.
COSTELLO: The first baseman.
ABBOTT: Who!
COSTELLO: The guy playing first.
ABBOTT: Who is on first!
COSTELLO: Well, what are you asking *me* for?

(in Mintz, 1983: 133)

More spontaneous, everyday examples of amusement from around the world reinforce this impression of universality. Many relevant examples gathered by Western visitors to distant lands have been unintentionally provoked by these visitors themselves, who inevitably were seen to lack the native version of human 'fundamentals':

> The Sumatrans, writes one authority, have very slow dances which are thought to be ludicrous by Europeans. Yet, funnily enough, they think our customary dances "to the full as ludicrous."
>
> [In Borneo,] the girls, a visitor reports, made Europeans repeat sentences of their language after them, and burst out into loud laughter "either at our pronunciation or at the comical things they had made us utter."
>
> The Fuegians, though living much in the water, have no idea of washing themselves; accordingly, "when Europeans first came among them, the sight of a

> man washing his face seemed to them so irresistibly ludicrous that they burst into shrieks of laughter."
>
> A teacher of the native Australians had once tried to explain to [an aborigine] the doctrine of the immateriality and immortality of the soul. He afterwards learned that his pupil had gone away from the lesson to have a hearty fit of laughter at the absurdity of the idea "of a man living and going about without arms, legs, or mouth to eat."
>
> (Sully, 1902: 240; 238; 243)

These examples suggest that the antecedent events identified for amusement in this thesis, to the extent that they are found accurate for our own society, are also likely to be universal. Such a conclusion would strengthen the case for classifying amusement as an emotion.

To the criteria for recognizing an emotion enumerated by Ekman, a final one can be added. As mentioned above, emotions are currently distinguished from other feelings --pain, hunger-- by their being reactions to a cognitive appraisal or judgement, and classified according to the particular type of elicitory evaluation associated with each. As Frijda has stated, "appraisal is the central issue in emotion theory" (1993: 225). Morreall (1983) has challenged the view that amusement is an emotion precisely on the basis that it does not follow an appraisal in the same sense that other emotions do (p.298):

> Fear, anger, and other emotions involve different evaluations of their various objects, but a positive or a negative attitude of some kind is always taken up toward the object of the emotion.... But objects of amusement are different. If I am amused by something I need not have a positive or a negative attitude toward that thing. Suppose, for instance, that while driving through a tract of pastel, lookalike houses I suddenly come upon a gaily painted house with windows in the shapes of zoo animals. I may be amused by the house without thereby either liking or disliking the house itself. (...)

> Not only need I not have a positive or negative attitude toward an object of amusement, moreover, but I need not have beliefs about what properties it actually has.... As has often been pointed out, an emotion like love or fear for some object *X* involves beliefs about *X*. To be afraid of some dog, for example, is in part to believe that the dog is likely to hurt you. Now amusement, as we'll see in a moment, is based on incongruity, but we need not believe that the object amusing is in fact incongruous --it is enough to simply *look at* the object as incongruous.

Morreall's analysis, as evident from this excerpt, features 'incongruity' as the identified cause of amusement. Incongruities, Morreall argues, are not objects to which we take up a positive or negative attitude, nor objects about which we need believe anything.

However, the causal theory presented in the current thesis oversteps this objection. According to the claim-discredit view, a manifestation of amusement *does* require a preceding cognitive evaluation of an object, indeed one of the objects most crucial to the individual human being: the interactional other. Evaluated against his projected self, the other may appear as fulfilling or as failing to fulfill his presented self-claims. This can be regarded a negative valuation of an aesthetic variety, so negative in fact that people fear and/or may be offended by it, and which, as has been seen in Chapter Eight (4.1.4), may lead in the long run to the exclusion of an individual from the main of social life.

Morreall claims not to take a positive or negative view towards a hypothetical multicoloured house with animal-shaped windows. His amusement, however, judges the style as inappropriate for a house, and negatively evaluates anyone who would regard it as normal. Of course, the house may have been built just so precisely as an object of merriment (i.e., as a preschool or by an eccentric and playful owner), in which case those responsible themselves display their laughter at (and disapproval with) its design *as a normal house*. An architect, at least in most environments, would have difficulties in promoting his career with such unorthodox ideas.

A case can thus be made for treating amusement as a basic human emotion. It conforms to Ekman’s seven criteria, including --if the theory set forth in chapters Four to

Six is accepted-- that of a universal antecedent cause. The evidence from reports of travellers, ethnographers, and historians appears to confirm the similarity of amusement elicitors in remote and dissimilar cultures. The contents of humour pieces in such foreign environments, though they may not inspire our own amusement, also follow recognizable and familiar patterns. Laughter can be shared by individuals even across the widest of linguistic and cultural divides. Finally, in addition to Ekman's criteria, the additional requirement that emotions should follow a process of cognitive appraisal is fulfilled by the claim-discredit theory presented.

3.3. Cross-Cultural Variation

While suspicion of essential cross-cultural differences regarding amusement seem unwarranted, it is evident that the specific character of amusing stimuli varies as radically as culture itself, and indeed closely in parallel. The causes of amusement are directly related to the self-claims associated with specific roles and to ideas of simple 'normality' (i.e., to culturally specific norms of demeanour --see Chapter Four, 2.4). Washing the face, to hygiene-minded Westerners is an obvious daily ritual, to Fuegians a pointless absurdity. In ancient Sparta, a military society where self-claims of great courage and fearlessness formed the central core of 'maleness' as a role, "the most prominent category of buffoons...consisted of the 'tremblers' (*tresantes*)":

> Cowardice in battle was punished at Sparta by a series of legal penalties... In addition to the legal sanctions, the punishment of the 'tremblers' entailed certain opprobrious norms, the virtual effect of which was to transform the victims into miserable clowns: 'any passer-by may strike them if he wishes. Moreover, they are supposed to go about in a dirty and abject state, wearing cloaks with coloured patches, half of their beard shaven and half left to grow'
>
> (David, 1988: 14)

Culturally defined sensitivities to different types of misfortune or obscenity (see Chapter Six, 3.2) may also lead to divergent emotional reactions. Marshall reports of the !Kung that "they laugh when the lame man, Kham, falls down and do not help him up" (p. 231). This reaction seems foreign --'callous' and 'cruel'-- to Westerners, who nevertheless laugh at the fictional pratfalls of slapstick comedy. It must be understood in the context of a nomadic band society, where independent mobility and action are basic prerequisites for survival. In this barren desert landscape, excessive 'sympathy' with lameness or other handicaps would probably endanger the survival of the collectivity.

Particular genres of humour and rules about its display can also be culturally specific, though variability, again, is limited by the common intention to provoke a universal emotional reaction. The carnivals and buffoons of the middle ages can be

analyzed in conjunction with the social structure and culture of feudal Europe, as can the televised sitcoms and postmodern comedy performances of today with reference to the wider features of our own society. The development of artistic forms and communications media also influences the range of humorous display. The development of the press, radio, and television have transformed the substance and widened the scope of comedy in the past two centuries. The history and ethnography of literature and the performance arts embraces also the full catalogue of known humorous genres. An extreme and surprising example of how far variability can go is again taken from the lives of the !Kung Bushmen:

> They do not invent stories. They said they had no interest in hearing things that are not true and wonder why anybody has.
>
> (Marshall: 233)

The possible humorous repertory in a society wholly devoid of explicitly fictional retellings seems to us astoundingly restricted. Nevertheless, as documented previously (3.2), the objects of the humour and laughter which the !Kung do display are not unlike categories of our own amusing stimuli.

As with any emotion, laughter is regulated by culturally specific rules regarding appropriate expression, and affected by the motives of actors in relation to cultural meanings and values. In 1902, Sully had already identified the mismatch between display and genuine emotion as a possible obstacle to the cross-cultural study of amusement. He cited the account of an African missionary who reported that while natives may often express seriousness in the face of a European's awkward mistakes or accidents, they will often "amuse themselves at his expense after he is gone, and, indeed, while he is present, if they know that he cannot understand their speech" (p. 221). More recently, Chapman (1983) has observed similar concealment relating to laughter in the experimental lab. The general style and level of acceptable laughter may also vary from one society to the next:

> We know that some tribes are said to be dour and unlaughing. Others laugh easily. Pygmies lie on the ground and kick their legs in the air, panting and shaking in paroxysms of laughter
>
> (Douglas, 1971: 387)

Certain uses of humour and/or laughter may also become institutionalized or more common in a single society, group, or environment either by mere historical accident or to achieve particularly desirable effects. In small-scale nomadic communities, for instance, where cooperation of every member may be crucial to common survival, the use of humour and laughter to resolve disputes is widespread (Roberts, 1979: 88). In other societies where conflict is not as threatening, the affiliative potential of humour may remain less exploited. In the same way that present-day laughter therapists teach their patients to develop their 'senses of humour', a culture recognizing the health benefits of amusement could similarly promote its development within members.

Regarding cultural interpretations of amusement and its relation to other aspects of emotion and behaviour, I am aware of few specific studies --David's (1988) study of laughter in ancient Sparta is one example. Undoubtedly however, classifications and descriptions of the causes, features, physiology, and effects of amusement vary greatly from one society to another[1]. The great variety of theories that have accumulated over the history of humour research itself provide a sampling of possibilities. Focusing merely on the place of amusement among other emotions, we find that it has been presented as akin to delight or pleasure (Sully, 1902, McComas, 1923; Morreall, 1982), to displeasure (McDougall, 1903), to (pleasurable or playful) pain (Plato, 1961; Eastman, 1921), to "strong feeling of almost any kind" (Spencer, 1860), and to aggression (Feinberg, 1978). Koestler (1964) identifies it as one element of a trio completed by scientific discovery and aesthetic pleasure, Baillie (1921) and Hobbes (1651) as complementary to weeping, and Bergler (1956) as opposed to fear "of one's own internal masochism."

[1] As I have argued in Chapter Seven, 2.3, however, interpretations of laughter are limited by the universal features of amusement. In David's (1988) study, for instance, it is seen how the 'corrective' and 'punitive' effects of laughter and humour were emphasized in ancient Sparta. Such effects have been treated in Chapter Eight, 4.1.3 - 4.1.4, as resulting from the 'discredit' connotation of laughter displays. It is not to be supposed, moreover, that other meanings and effects of laughter were not recognized by Spartans.

The present theory of amusement is also part of a particular 'emotionology.' It opposes amusement to embarrassment on the basis of their common sensitivity to the vicissitudes of the social selves people present to each other in everyday situations. Its basic outline coincides with ideas proposed by other 'claim-theorists' identified in Chapter Three and many of its individual distinctions can be mapped on to elements of numerous other theories (see Section 4.3. below). Most probably, many of the concepts will also be found to relate to ideas on amusement held by specific cultures and individuals. Though inevitably partial and ultimately inaccurate, it is hoped that the present account will be found recognizably closer to the shape of this elusive emotion than at least its better-known competitors.

4. Situating the Laughter Triad

The aim of this thesis has been to 'situate' the laughter triad, in three senses:

1. To observe and describe the triad in the 'social situation,' the specific interactional context where its members most commonly or exclusively manifest themselves.

2. To identify the roots of amusement in fundamental features of situated interaction --selves and their constitutive self-claims.

3. To map out the confines and relative positions of the three basic concepts and associated phenomena, in all their empirical variety, bounding the field of humour research and locating it within the varied set of disciplines which have shared an interest in the field.

In this section I will provide a final summary of results by addressing each of these three objectives in turn.

4.1. The Return to Situation

Throughout the thesis, I have presented the laughter triad as it naturally manifests itself in the context of everyday social situations. This return to the situation, in all its complexity, contrasts with the inevitable artificiality of laboratory experiments and decontextualized analyses of commercial humour.

My own everyday experiences have served as the foundational source of data for analysis, even if such examples have not often been included explicitly in the text. These personal events --often recalled by reference to abstract concepts or empirical facts under consideration-- provided my primary guidance in delineating boundaries, widening the scope of inquiry, and selecting examples for illustration. The aim of these illustrations, in

turn, has been to stir up the memory of such experiences in readers, as part of an attempt to solicit recognition that would bolster the theory's validity (see Chapter Two, 3.2 - 3.5).

This attention to everyday events permitted a broad approach to the subject unbiased by an exclusive or excessive reliance on easily available written sources of humour. Considerable effort, in fact, was made to obtain textual materials themselves descriptive of everyday events, including first-hand accounts of experienced reality. I have also drawn heavily from previous naturalistic studies relevant to the subject, including anthropological and sociological fieldwork, studies involving the use of personal laughter 'diaries,' and analyses of conversation. In comparison with traditional humour theory, the conceptual structure is clothed in a considerably richer texture of empirical detail, which covers the full range of causes, types, effects and uses of the main phenomena. This structure, in turn, has been located within the larger framework of Goffman's theory of the interaction order, itself developed from a close (and by all accounts acute) observation of everyday events.

The situated aspects of amusement, humour, and laughter have been emphasized at every step, including such features as the number and identity of participants present, the shared definition of events, and the distribution of power. Special attention has been paid to the single perspective of each individual participant --the perceiver of amusement, the audience of the laughing individual or humourist, the discredited individual--, and thereby to the importance of features such as attention, culturally acquired frames of interpretation, meanings, levels of interpreted reality, identity, and inter-personal relations. Laughter and humour have been portrayed as communicative signs, meaningful elements interpretable by other copresent participants, and in fact commonly deployed and/or modified with an audience in mind. The immediate effects upon the current situation which these displays may provoke have also been detailed, together with many related strategic uses to which they may be put.

4.2. Amusement and Situated Interaction

Social situations are defined by the co-presence of a set of participants. This co-presence transforms individual behaviours into dramatic presentations where selves are constructed out of single self-claims and maintained by fulfillment and cooperative safeguarding of these claims. Amusement (and by extension laughter and humour) have been understood, in these pages, as rooted in and complementary to such fundamental features of the social situation.

Both embarrassment and amusement emerge from the proposed analysis as psychological mechanisms attuned to social features of the most primitive type: self-claims and their fulfillment or discredit. Analyses of the interaction order, of embarrassment, of rules of demeanour, of the nature of insanity and social strangeness -- whether by academic Goffmans or by more literary Pirandellos, cannot help but to deal, more or less explicitly, with the emotion of amusement. The psychological link is one Goffman always cautiously refrained from making, but which others have done for him:

> Goffman frequently stakes a claim for the very general nature of the practices he analyses. If such should indeed be the case, it would definitely tend to suggest that generic mechanisms of a psychological sort are at work.
>
> (Giddens, 1988: 275)

The psychological study of embarrassment has been strongly influenced if not dominated by the view proposed by Goffman in "Embarrassment and Social Organization" (1967). A recent book on the subject attributes to Goffman both of the main theoretical contenders purporting to describe the causes of this emotion (Miller, 1996: 121). I have argued that amusement can be understood in a similar perspective.

It is tempting to speculate on whether such psychological mechanisms might have evolved in humans precisely to maintain their social situations, and thus the wider social world, ordered and safe for interaction with other members of our unpredictable, uninstinctive species. Considering the dangers of such evolutionary analysis (See Chapter

Eight, IV) and the speculative nature of the present thesis in its entirety, however, I will go no further than admit the temptation.

What I do suggest is that (1) a worthy contender to a causal theory of amusement --present already in the work of Plato and Aristotle-- can be derived quite naturally from Goffman's hugely influential description of situated interaction; (2) grounding the concept of amusement in the defining features of situated interaction can serve to clarify and integrate large bodies of data from all areas of humour research. The apparent belongingness of this emotion to Goffman's realm of the interaction order is noted, and this note submitted for appraisal.

4.3. The Field and Its Placement

An attempt has been made to unify and organize the scattered ideas and data of a growing interdisciplinary field of 'humour research'. Many of these have been successfully integrated into the theoretical structure developed: the incongruity accounts of verbal humour, the interpersonal dimension emphasized by superiority theorists, the humour cues of play theorists, and the anxiety-reduction and 'tendentious elements' of tension-release theorists; the control, conflict, and cohesion effects and uses of humour and laughter; the role of humour and laughter in early learning during childhood; the protective use of irony and similar displays; the conversational uses of laughter and humour; social influence on amusement and laughter displays; the moral and self-presentation consequences of laughter and humour.

The first step has been the establishment of a single, coherent way of describing amusement itself, as a reaction to the perception of a self-claim's discredit in appropriate circumstances. This approach can be located within the bounds of social psychology, specifically on the more psychological side of Erving Goffman's more sociological social psychology. Of the three central topics along this boundary --amusement, embarrassment, and the cognitive interpretation of and involvement in social reality-- only the latter two were directly treated by Goffman himself[1]. From a more general perspective, the account fits within the psychological study of universal human emotions.

In comparison to the unitary analysis proposed, the traditional causal theories of amusement appear not 'wrong' but partial, focusing on limited sets of amusing stimuli and shedding light on restricted areas of research. Aggression and superiority theorists concentrate on the discredit of individuals other than the perceiver himself, giving particular weight to territorial aggressions; incongruity theorists on agent-caused frame mismanagement errors of the self; tension-release theorists on frame management errors of the self as well as certain provoked territorial invasions; play theorists on varieties of intentional humour. How does the substance and findings of each of these theories relate to the proposals of the current thesis?

[1] In "Embarrassment and Social Organization" (1967) and *Frame Analysis* (1974).

Amusement does not result from a feeling of superiority but it does involve an interpersonal assessment: a judgement that another person has failed to maintain some presented self-claim. 'Feeling superior', whatever this may mean in a precise cognitive and emotional sense, is certainly not the *cause* of hilarity. It may, however, be the *result* of an independent subsequent assessment relevant to certain cases of amusement. An opera singer's missed note could be the cause for amusement of both another opera singer and a non-singer. Only the former would have cause for feeling 'superior' however. The interpersonal dimension of amusement, identified by superiority theorists, requires attention to basic features of the relationship between observer and object --such as the extent to which the former identifies as the latter, or the amount of sympathy the former may be willing to extend to the latter's plight. This interpersonal dimension, in turn, is related to the influence of 'affective disposition' on amusement, as measured by numerous psychologists of the 'superiority' school; and also to many of the social effects and uses often associated with laughter and humour, including affiliation, disaffiliation, and self-defense.

Amusement, as incongruity theorists propose, may indeed be triggered off by the mental conjunction of the opposing scripts or frames thrown together by a joke (or rather, by awareness of the inappropriateness of this conjunction). Detailed analyses of joke-work techniques have undoubtedly provided important contributions to the field, and these tie into issues of affiliation and disaffiliation effects based on shared knowledge pools. However, it is not only one's own mental errors, stimulated by linguistic tricks, which we find funny. The accidental frame mismanagements of others (from temporary erroneous misinterpretations to the 'wild' beliefs of pseudoscientists and 'cranks') can also inspire hilarity. Furthermore, appropriate frame management is only a single, if central, case of a wider range of competencies and characteristics which all individuals must claim for themselves to be considered full members of any human society. Only when the nonfulfilment of these 'universal self-claims' is added to that of more specific 'role' and 'independent' self-claims can the full range of amusing stimuli be accounted for.

Amusement does not result from a release of tension, but it may be coincident with a release of tension in specific cases. If new information or a new perspective on the current situation causes an individual to view his behaviour and interpretation of events

as mistaken, amusement at his improper stress, worry, anger, sadness, sexual arousal, interest, actions, words, etc, may be elicited. Whether and to what extent any 'tension' (whatever this may be taken to mean) which is reduced as a result of this new awareness results from the awareness itself or from the amusement and laughter that follows it could be debated. In either case, this set of amusing stimuli represents a subtype of a much wider range --similar to that of incongruity theories. It is the set with reference to which individuals may intentionally use humour as a 'coping' device, to decrease unwanted and unnecessary negative feelings (i.e., of fear, depression, etc.). A further relationship between amusement and tension-release regards 'tendentious' humour --i.e., sexual, aggressive, scatological, or otherwise taboo-breaking. In appropriate contexts, social norms may be transgressed under the cover or excuse of non-seriousness. It is the fact of transgression itself (rather than the 'released tension') which is funny, and its explicit labelling as funny (i.e., 'a transgression I would not *really* commit') which provides the necessary license[2]. But the performance of an illicit act may provide additional pleasure to the actor if such behaviour has been psychologically repressed, which could be subjectively experienced as a 'release.'

The application of a playful frame -- a transformation explicitly labelled as improper-- may 'cause' amusement (by first provoking an anticipated frame mismanagement), but it does not account for all cases. Serious and untransformed events --unintentional improprieties or self-presentation failures-- may also lead to amusement. Play theory has, nevertheless, contributed interesting reflections on the 'humour cues' which humourists use to warn audiences of their intention to amuse, guide their interpretation, reassure them that any improprieties are not meant seriously and that no accusation of impropriety partaken in will follow, grant them permission to laugh, and ensure that the humourists' self-claims of taste and skill are fulfilled. Through the fruitful concept of 'unseriousness,' it also relates closely to the defensive effects and uses of humour and laughter. Moreover, it highlights the fact that much intentional humour, in addition to other amusing elements, includes a frame-mismanagement 'trick' designed to

[2] The irony that Freudian 'humour as license' ideas most closely relate to social control effects of laughter and humour has already been noted in Chapter Eight (4.1.4, 4.3.2).

fool the audience, which in relevant cases protects the humourist from charges of impropriety of one type or another.

The establishment of a unitary conception of amusement, integrating elements of these four traditional theories (and similar to a lesser-known ‘claim-discredit’ school), has permitted the development of an account of the effects and uses of the laughter triad integrating and classifying research from varied corners of the field. Some of these apply exclusively to the emotion of amusement itself: clinical studies of its stress-relief and 'health' aspects, practical theories of 'method acting' and comedy 'timing' and technique, or research on certain educational, economic, and advertising uses of humour. One category has been classified as concerned mainly with humour pieces, the content of humour displays. This area, primarily represented by aesthetic and media-related disciplines such as literary criticism or film studies, also includes historical and anthropological approaches to culture as well as studies of personality and psychopathology, ideology, and attitudes (including gender beliefs).

The most sizeable and complex set of studies, however, relates to the effects and uses of laughter and humour displays on the immediate situation and beyond, and is thus to be located more squarely within the fields of face-to-face strategic interaction, communication studies, and conversation analysis, with their links to wider sociological concerns. This large and varied body of research has been organized on the basis of the common reference to amusement implied in either display. Each of the five major connotations of the displays is associated with a group of effects and uses, many of which have been the object of study by investigators in the field of humour.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize some suggestions regarding the relationship between different topics in the field of humour research. Amusement serves as a central hub connecting the three main divisions of the laughter triad: the emotion itself, the productions intended to elicit its manifestation, and the display of communicative signs referring to it. Each of these has been subdivided according to rough disciplinary boundaries and again according to specific topics. In the case of laughter and humour displays, table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of relevant areas of study according to the derived connotations of amusement which displays may imply.

Needless to say, this classification of research is a rough and incomplete guide. Nevertheless, it represents a possible starting point for orientation within an increasingly large and complex field lacking much internal organization or coherence. In a sense, it can also be considered a concluding statement of the proposals advanced throughout the thesis.

Table 1: Classification of some areas of humour research.

A M U S E M E N T	Amusement (the emotion itself)	Psychology	neurobiological structures and cognitive processes involved; influence of attitudes, identities, and personality; effects on body, mood, cognitive processing; relationship to other basic emotions
		Medicine	effects on stress and health
		Sociology/ Anthropology/ History	cultural codes informing the assessment process leading to manifestation; influence of social pressure on appraisal; cultural interpretations of the emotion within schemes of knowledge
		Evolutionary Science	the evolution of the emotion
	Humour Pieces (productions designed to provoke amusement)	Aesthetic and Literary criticism	humorous technique and skill; genres and their development; topics of humour
		Linguistics	techniques and structure of verbal humour
		Sociology/ Anthropology/ History	cultural beliefs, values, interests, and ideas (i.e., gender or ethnic biases) as reflected in humour
		Personality and Psycho-pathology	individual beliefs, values, interests, and ideas, as reflected in humour
	Laughter and Humour Displays (signs referring to amusement)	Sociology/ Anthropology/ History/ Communication Sciences	effects and uses of laughter and humour displays (See table 2)
		Sociology/ Anthropology/ History	cultural interpretations of laughter and humour displays, their effects, and their uses

Table 2. Classification of humour research relating to effects and uses of laughter/humour.

Connotation	Effects/Uses	Topics of study
Discredit	Broadcasting discredit	Situated interaction
	Provocation of amusement/laughter	Social facilitation; humour cues and techniques; 'invitations' to laugh
	Transmission of social norms	Developmental studies; education
	Maintenance of social norms	Social control, deviance, and power; mental health; defining reality; gossip, teasing, mockery, and 'informal sanctions'
Knowledge, Identity, and Involvement	Social classification	Social classification
	Affiliation and Disaffiliation	'cohesion/consensus' and 'conflict'; group formation and identity; ethnic humour; advertising, sales, public speaking, and conflict mediation; the negotiation of intimacy; joking relationships
Identity	Protection from unintentional self-discredit	Self-deprecation, role-distance, embarrassment management
	Protection from intentional self-discredit	Irony and ambiguity; tendentious humour and licensed improprieties (i.e., carnivals); critical or aggressive humour
	Protection from discrediting attacks	Face-work
	Consequences of excessive defensiveness	Personality studies

Table 2. (Continued)

Connotation	Effects/Uses	Topics of study
Involvement	Revealing callousness/ toughness	Morality; 'coping' behaviour
	Revealing moral character	Morality
	Denying a particular interpretation	Symbolic interaction; face-to-face conversation
	Revealing the focus of attention	Face-to-face conversation
Entertainment	Claim of ability to amuse	Situated interaction; comedy performance

5. Conclusions

In this final chapter, I have provided a summary of the basic proposals: the need for an adequate causal theory of amusement, the inadequacy of existing theories, and how such a theory might be developed and validated; the possibility of accounting for amusement with reference to the perception of self-claim discredits; the wide range of amusing stimuli amenable to such an explanation; the historical precedent for such a view and its links to Goffman's work on the interaction order; the link between amusement and laughter/humour displays; the ordered classification of effects and uses of amusement, laughter, and humour.

I have addressed the issue of the potential cross-cultural validity of the central amusement theory. Though the distinctiveness and universality of emotions have been questioned both in psychology and in the sociological sciences, a case can be made for both. Evidence for the discreteness of emotions derives from numerous physiological and neurobiological studies, research on cross-cultural facial expression, and subjective experience --as well as the weakness of contrary argument and empirical support. In recent times, psychologists have increasingly begun to recognize the discreteness of separate emotions and their autonomy as motivational forces.

Anthropology has revealed the varied character of emotional life when viewed from a global perspective. Nevertheless, the existence of basic universal emotions has not been disproven. On the contrary, ethnographers themselves continue to rely on emotional expressions for their most basic observations and interactions with natives. The influence of culture on emotion is undoubtedly manifold and varied: on the frames of interpretation informing the elicitory evaluations, on the rules for appropriate emotional display, on the specific channelled uses of particular emotions, and on the interpretation of emotional life itself. As observation of emotional expressions and ideas can only access phenomena combining natural and cultural elements, only together will the psychological and sociological disciplines obtain a clearer view of cross-cultural emotion.

The case has been made for amusement as a basic human emotion. Though, laughter and humour have been observed in all societies, hilarity has not often been classified as one of the universal emotions. Its long-standing deficiency in this regard has

been its lack of a clear set of universal antecedent events. This thesis has provided a possible definition of such a set, which appears to be valid even for the societies most distant from our own. Styles and content of humour, the intentional attempts to provoke amusement, also seem remarkably similar cross-culturally. Variations concern, in the case of amusement stimuli, culturally-specific ideas of normality for individuals and role-holders, as well as sensitivity to other potentially conflicting emotions; in the case of humour pieces, genres of art and performance; in the case of laughter and humour displays, norms of expression both specific to these displays and to emotion in general, as well as cultural values and consequent needs affecting the uses to which displays may be oriented; in the case of cultural interpretations of amusement, any of the features of humour theory as observable in the varied interpretations of Western humour theorists and in ethnographic accounts.

Bringing the thesis to a close, I have addressed its principal aim as described in Chapter One: the situation of the laughter triad. I have drawn attention to the continuous emphasis, throughout these pages, on the interactional situation where amusement, laughter, and humour most often manifest themselves and achieve their full relevance. Only such a wide-ranging and empirically grounded analysis, it has been claimed, can be successful in delivering a comprehensive account of the triad. I have once again argued for an essential relationship between the basal emotion of amusement and the fundamental features of situated interaction. Finally, on the basis of this conception, I have provided a rough guide to the field of humour theory and research, tracing out connections and distinctions between its numerous and scattered areas to compose a well-ordered if tentative classification.

Table 2. Classification of discrediting situations on the basis of the five self-claim and claim-discredit variables identified (See Table 1)

	Claim Discredit Situations																							
Location of Discredit	Untransformed Reality												Transformed Reality											
Claimant Discredited	Other						Perceiver						Other						Perceiver					
Cause of Discredit	Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent		
Origin of Self-Claim[1]	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U
Content of Self-Claim: skill						*																		
mind																								
territories																				●				
appearance and condition																								
biography																								

[1] I = self-claims of Independent origin, R = self-claims of Role origin, U = self-claims of Universal origin.

Table 1. Classification of funny events on the basis of the five self-claim and claim-discredit variables identified (see Chapter Four 2.2, 3.2)

	Funny Events																	
Location of Discredit	Untransformed Reality												Transform					
Claimant Discredited	Other						Perceiver						Other					
Cause of Discredit	Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent		
Origin of Self-Claim*	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U
Content of Self-Claim: skill																		
mind																		
territories																		
appearance and condition																		
biography																		
Classification Type	**I**			**II**			**III**			**IV**			**V**			**VI**		

Type I: The accidental discrediting of an other's self-claim, in untransformed reality.
Type II: The agent-caused discrediting of an other's self-claim, in untransformed reality.
Type III: The accidental discrediting of the perceiver's own self-claim, in untransformed reality.
Type IV: The agent-caused discrediting of the perceiver's own self-claim, in untransformed reality.
Type V: The retold, play-acted, or imagined accidental discrediting of an other's self-claim.
Type VI: The retold, play-acted, or imagined agent-caused discrediting of an other's self-claim.
Type VII: The retold, play-acted, or imagined accidental discrediting of the perceiver's own self-claim.
Type VIII: The retold, play-acted, or imagined agent-caused discrediting of the perceiver's own self-claim.

* I = Independent Self-Claim; R = Role Self-Claim; U = Universal Self-Claim.

Bibliography

Part I: Academic Sources[1] page 261

Part II: Data Sources page 284

[1] The bibliography has been divided into 'academic sources' and 'data sources'. The former category includes all articles, books, and other works primarily dealing with questions of theory or research in areas covered by the thesis. The latter includes mainly works listing or including humour pieces: joke anthologies, humorous novels, collections of anecdotes, and the like. In some cases of overlap, I have listed a particular reference twice.

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