EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE

Department of Political and Social Sciences

Situating Laughter:
Amusement, Laughter, and Humour
in Everyday Life

by

Eduardo S. Jauregui

Thesis submitted for assessment with
a view to obtaining the Degree of Doctor of the
European University Institute

Florence, March 1998

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Note on the use of gender-biased pronouns

My treatment of everyday social interaction has required frequent references to unspecified or hypothetical social actors. I have employed the masculine terms 'he' and 'his' throughout to refer to such individuals, despite the gender bias inherent in the convention, because I find the alternatives ("the person", "he/she", "s/he"...) awkward and cumbersome when used frequently. Wherever 'he' or 'his' are used in this way, therefore, the reader is asked to understand 'he or she'.

Dedication

To the memory of Barbara Allaway,
Who had a funny little sausage dog.

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Situating Laughter:

Amusement, Laughter, and Humour in Everyday Life

PART ONE

In this introductory part of the thesis,

I introduce the subject and the field of study,

consider a number of traditional theoretical approaches,

propose an appropriate methodology,

and introduce a lesser-known contender to explanation.

Chapter One

Preliminaries

Chapter Two

Causal Theories of Amusement

Chapter Three

The Discrediting of Actors' Self-Claims

Chapter One: Preliminaries

1. Introduction

Certain phenomena seem obstinately hidden from the lenses of scientific tools and microscopes. Least visible of all, perhaps, lurks the man behind the lens; and within him, behind his eye, his seeing, thinking, and feeling 'I.' In recent times, the scientific (and social scientific) endeavour has been shaken by glimpses of self-awareness, the deforming retina raised as gross evidence of the uncertain nature of all its prized research results. This will not be my purpose.

I turn the mirror on the scientist to have him observe certain features shared with other apes of his species, those features furthest removed from what he considers the 'serious work' before the test tubes. (And I assume that such things can, after all, be profitably studied). In this regard, it could be argued that the true 'furthest reaches' of science are not to be found in outer space but bordering the chit-chat between these men and women in the lab coats (or in the pin-striped suits, uniforms, aprons, and overalls); in the bars, cars, and homes to which they retire after work; among the gossip, temper tantrums, joking, and lust which colour their daily experience.

Laughter is something the reader will need little introduction to, as a human being. Nevertheless, to the scientist it represents a baffling and objectionable intruder; an embarrassing glimpse of himself. The emotions, less rational and less susceptible to objective inspection than other aspects of human behaviour, have long been shunned by Western science. Modern medicine ignores the person to hunt the microbe; economics and other social sciences model humans as rational decision-makers; psychology builds computerized 'minds' that can play chess but cannot judge art.

Humorous amusement, however, holds a particularly accursed place among the emotions. Unlike anger, happiness, or fear, it appears to lack a simple, commonsense cause or purpose. An infinite miscellany of trivialities may trigger off this often explosive and strongly pleasurable bodily reaction, confounding attempts to understand its seeming unity at the subjective and physiological levels. Its evolutionary significance for our laughing species appears equally mysterious. Its association with all things unserious, moreover, relegates laughter to a uniquely ignominious corner. The phenomenon has

remained largely unstudied throughout the development of the human and social sciences.

To be sure, laughter has been the subject of consideration by a long and honourable list of thinkers, from the Greek philosophers to modern psychologists, literary critics, and sociologists. In recent years, empirical research in the nascent field of 'humour research' has been growing at a considerable rate. Nevertheless, many of the most basic questions remain unanswered, including the most basic question of all:

What does it take for something to be 'funny'?

This thesis will propose a tentative answer, deriving from it a general scheme within which to classify the varied research findings of a currently scattered field. It is hoped that the proposal will find resonance both among investigators in the humour research field, and in all those who hold its mirror up to themselves with curiosity.

2. The Thesis

This section will introduce the subject of the dissertation, the aims it seeks to pursue in relation to this subject, the scope of the study, the methodology that has been employed, the rationale for undertaking such an endeavour, and a preview of the work to be presented over nine chapters.

2.1. Subject

Most human beings **laugh** --smile, smirk, snicker, giggle, chuckle, cackle, guffaw-- almost every single day of their lives. Sometimes this laughter corresponds to some measure of real **amusement** --an automatic bodily response to a 'funny' perception, including a pleasant subjective sensation of 'funniness' or 'hilarity'--, while other times the laughter may be relatively 'hollow' --feigned or exaggerated at something not truly considered amusing. On the other hand, humorous amusement which arises may remain unexpressed, with laughter being actively suppressed where it might have been more easily released. As for the things which may be considered 'funny,' these include spontaneous, unintentional laughables such as harmless blunders or deflated pretensions, but also words or actions openly intended to provoke amusement, displays of **humour**.

Amusement, laughter, and humour together conform what I will refer to as the **laughter triad**.[1] The phenomena corresponding to this set of closely interrelated terms can be briefly summarized as:

(1) the pan-human emotion responsive to 'funny' or 'comical' objects (amusement);

(2) its visible and more-or-less faithful expression (laughter); and

(3) the attempt to stimulate amusement (humour).

---

[1] Identifying the entire triad with the label of 'laughter' is not entirely unjustified. In common speech, the word 'laughter' is often used to denote the expression of genuine amusement, or even a manifestation of amusement itself which is not expressed or observable (ie, 'laughing up one's sleeve'). It is also occasionally employed in reference to at least some types of humour --'laughing at' as a synonym for satirizing or ridiculing-- when no actual laughter has been displayed.

These three phenomena will be the subject matter of the present thesis.

2.2. Aims

As hinted in the title, the aim of these pages will be to 'situate' the laughter triad, in a number of senses. Firstly and most generally, I will attempt to provide a collection of theoretical mappings of an area which has been long traveled but remains largely uncharted. The history of what has come to be known as 'humour research' can be traced back at least to classical antiquity, when Plato and Aristotle left their musings on comedy and the nature of 'the ridiculous.' The role-call of subsequent distinguished pioneers includes Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Herbert Spencer, Henri Bergson, Luigi Pirandello, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Koestler, and Umberto Eco. In the present century, many areas have been explored in a more empirically-minded fashion, culminating in the last two or three decades with an unprecedented volume of research and a number of moves toward the institutionalization of an interdisciplinary field.

Nevertheless, a generally accepted understanding of contours, features, and relative position of specific points within the field has not yet arisen. Theoretical disorientation has persisted throughout the centuries:

Neque hoc ab ullo satis explicari puto, licet multi tentaverint.[2]

(Quintillian, 1st Century AD)

There is remarkably little acknowledged agreement about the nature of humour.

(Michael Mulkay, 1988)

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[2] "None have yet satisfactorily expressed what it [laughter] is, though many have tried." *De Institutione Oratoria*, vi, 3. Cited in Grieg, 1923, p. 227.

With this thesis, I seek to ameliorate the situation. On the basis of certain rare or misunderstood sketches by early theorists, the elaborate ground plan drawn up for the study of the 'interaction order' by Erving Goffman, the reports of numerous professional and lay observers, and my own surveys of the area, I have developed a preliminary guide which may serve to orient current and future humour theory and research. Through the use of this conceptual topology, it is hoped that investigators originating in different disciplines or at work in distant areas will obtain a more accurate grasp of their shared interests and relative positions, and perhaps thereby develop new channels of communication and the mutual interchange of tools and ideas.

From the outset, I admit the tentative and incomplete nature of this theoretical map, which is offered only in the hope that subsequent work will fill out gaps, elaborate rough approximations, and correct distortions. Assuming only such relatively minor adjustments will be necessary, its validity will be supported, and the major aim of the thesis fulfilled.

A more literal take on the 'situating' metaphor is also intended. Too often, the relevant phenomena in this field have been studied as abstractions, or in sterile laboratory environments. There is no doubt that interesting research can be (and has been) conducted by analyzing the structure of joke-book gags and by testing the reactions of subjects exposed to humour under varying conditions. The ideas and results of many such studies will be cited in later chapters. Nevertheless, it seems likely that many of the most essential features of amusement, laughter, and humour will be missing from this sort of work. Characteristics of the experimental laboratory, such as the need for systematic procedure or the subject's awareness of being under surveillance, represent the antithesis of the informal, spontaneous, closed-off environments where the phenomena in question tend to flourish. Anthony Chapman (1983) provides one telling detail (p. 137):

> An index as to the artificiality and sterility of much of the humor research to date
> is that the majority of researchers do not incorporate any measure of *laughter* in

their work. One suspects that this is because they know from experience that many of the persons they are observing will not actually laugh.

Laughter (and its kin) must be observed where they occur, in everyday situations: on bus queues, in bars, across the sales counter, in comedy clubs, over the telephone lines, and under the bedcovers. These phenomena should be, quite literally, situated --placed back into the interactional space which provides their natural home: the face-to-face encounter[3].

Studies of a more naturalistic slant do exist, of course, including relatively unobtrusive experimental observation, participant observation in varied settings, diaries recording self-observation, and analyses of accurately transcribed conversation. Many will be cited in the coming pages. Nevertheless, the emphasis --especially in the more theoretical approaches to the laughter triad-- has generally been on data far removed from real-life situations. The wide body of relevant empirical facts has rarely been harnessed to support a general theory of amusement, laughter, and humour. In this thesis, I have made every effort to maintain theorizing at ground level.

Finally, 'situating laughter' will mean suggesting an essential, and not merely contingent, relationship between the laughter triad and the characteristics of the social situation. Here I refer to the features of 'situated interaction' as analyzed by the sociologist of everyday relations in public, Erving Goffman. It is not merely that displays of laughter and humour fall under the category of situated behaviours, and may be affected by situational factors even when performed in utter privacy. More fundamentally, it will be suggested that amusement itself reacts to interactional failures, to the mismatch between someone's self-presentation and the attributes he actually exhibits. Goffman's analysis of embarrassment will emerge as complementary to the suggested analysis of amusement, and many of his key references --the self as a ritual object, social life as drama, the insane asylum, frames of interpretation-- will be drawn on as resources throughout the thesis.

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[3] Greg Smith (1997, personal communication) deserves credit for this phrasing.

2.3. Scope and Method

The scope of the thesis has been dictated by the basic phenomena themselves. I have attempted to refrain, as far as possible, from limiting my data by preconditioned ideas and boundaries, seeking to track amusement, laughter, and humour wherever they might have taken me. The study has been guided by a set of basic questions, pursued more-or-less systematically, in whichever domains they seemed to apply. Some questions found ready answers or tentative solutions, some were rephrased or led to further questions, and others proved unanswerable. Those which remained consistently prominent throughout included:

1. What are amusement, laughter, and humour?
2. What causes or influences their manifestation?
3. What meanings are attributed to their observed manifestation?
4. What effects do they provoke in different circumstances?
5. To what uses can they be put?
6. What are the links between these varied features and the concerns of the social sciences?
7. What methods can be used in their study?
8. What are the limits of our knowledge regarding these phenomena?

The enterprise will be limited quite closely in scope to the laughter triad itself, perhaps a minor concern of science, but one sufficiently demanding to merit exclusive treatment on occasion. Admittedly, amusement should really be considered within a more general context of psychological reactions. Though relevant to and oriented towards the literature on the emotions --especially that other social emotion, embarrassment--, this thesis will focus on the single case at hand. Similarly, laughter and humour belong to wider fields of communication studies which will be only alluded to in passing, not to mention the further connections to countless sociological concerns. The sheer number and magnitude of potential ramifications forbid a general treatment which devotes more

than a minimal reference to each. The risk of trivializing topics as enormous and controversial as 'social control' or 'emotional expression' has been taken in the interest of thesis size and complexity, leaving remaining work of detail to more capable others.

Though most of the observations to which I have had access concern 'Western' society, and particularly the United States and Britain, they range across numerous cross-cutting planes of variation, each an immense and unique expanse: class, age, occupation, ethnic background, geographical location, immediate context, type of funny stimulus, goals of actors, distribution of power, and, of course, academic background and research aims of the observer. Moreover, relevant ethnographic fieldwork and historical fact from farther-flung corners of anthropological and chronological inquiry have also been consulted and integrated into the analysis, from classical Greece to present day African hunter-gatherers. The ideas proposed are in principle intended to apply to the human race as a whole, however well or badly they may fare in this ambitious intention.

The method employed could be described as an ongoing theoretical experiment. The questions detailed above, together with certain initial hypotheses and intuitions, were used to guide observation. Observations were compared against the early hypotheses, with refinements and alterations being made to the developing theory. This testing process was repeated, once and again, with new and ever more varied sets of data. 'Observations' included my own direct observation of both myself, others, and products labeled 'humorous' or 'non-humorous,' second-hand reports found in scholarly, journalistic, and other printed works, and in some cases 'plausible' fictional or hypothetical accounts. This admittedly unstructured and intuitive procedure, which I have followed since an initial project in 1993 (Jauregui, 1993), has resulted in the growth of a theoretical classification by no means complete or secure. The distinctions and relations suggested in these pages will be validated or not according to their usefulness in the context of further research in the field. I have made every effort to present them as clearly as possible, with the aid of numerous empirical illustrations, in order to facilitate this work.

As will be argued in a further chapter, this unorthodox but wide-spread methodology --most notoriously and brilliantly exploited by Erving Goffman-- is

particularly suited to the study of emotional expression and other aspects of situated interaction. Its main justification resides in the status of most adult human beings as 'experts' in such matters. For example, though we may not be able to describe verbally what funniness is, we intuitively 'know' and recognize such stimuli every day --how else could we experience amusement at all? An accurate theoretical description of the laughter triad, therefore, should be able to trigger off many moments of 'recognition' in the widest variety of readers. In this genre of theory, every reader is involved in the 'scientific' process, becoming a sort of individual experimenter testing the validity of the theory for himself. As no judgment is final, and results of each 'test' are not fully shareable, the theory will not be 'falsifiable' in the general, objective, Popperian sense. Nevertheless, this method delivers the best type of account which can be hoped for in these areas of science: individually falsifiable theories.

2.4. Rationale

Before launching into the main body of the thesis, there is a final question to be addressed: why laughter? The enterprise requires justification on a number of levels. Most generally, it might be asked why should anyone devote substantial effort to humour research in the first place. What purpose does it fulfill? What good might it do? What is the point?

There exists a veritable sub-genre, in the field, of embarrassed prefatory excuses provided to demonstrate the seriousness of a topic stigmatized by its association with the unserious. This suggests that studying the laughter triad is generally considered somewhat improper, somewhat ridiculous, a fact supported by the teasing and laughter which humour researchers tend to suffer when divulging their academic interests at dinner parties. Nevertheless, the amusement having subsided, these same dinner guests tend to display a genuine interest in the subject, an interest grounded in the surprising awareness that the most familiar of events can seem the most foreign, even the most mysterious; an interest, moreover, shared by thinkers of the stature of Aristotle, Plato,

Hobbes, Kant, Bergson, and Freud. For this reason alone, the enterprise seems worthwhile.

It is not merely, however, that the widespread curiosity about these curious behaviours deserves feeding. The ubiquitousness of the laughter triad in the widest range of human environments makes it relevant to an unusual variety of disciplines. Some of those which, at one time or another, have dabbled in and contributed to its study include aesthetics, anthropology, computing science, ethology, history, linguistics, medicine, philosophy, politics, psychology, and sociology. A better understanding of amusement, laughter, and humour, therefore, may contribute indirectly to research and theory in many of these areas.

In the present study, my pursuit of the laughter triad has also forced me to cross interdisciplinary borders. Nevertheless, the rooting of these phenomena in the social situation seeks to demonstrate their special significance for the social sciences. A second level of justification, tied to our specific academic surroundings, can thus be addressed: Why laughter in a department of social and political sciences? It will be argued that amusement, though itself a psychological mechanism, relates closely to the self-claims which make up the social personas of individual actors. The communication of alleged amusement by means of laughter and humour, in turn, connects all three terms to central sociological concepts and to the realities behind them: socialization and social control, group culture, identity, status, and power. An underlying theme of the thesis will thus be to clarify in what precise sense laughter might be considered 'social in nature', as Henri Bergson and others have suggested.

A third question, concerning the reasons for choosing to develop a general theory of the field rather than taking up a more manageable subtopic, has been addressed briefly in the discussion of aims. Such a theory appears necessary both for the undertaking of any single subtopic, and in general within a field characterized by fragmentation and disorder. Humour research is presently conducted in the midst of an evident theoretical maelstrom, within which specific ideas, findings, and pieces of research float in isolated clusters, sometimes vainly grasping at each other in the hope of coherence. Neither the four major 'global theories' of amusement --superiority, incongruity, tension-release, and

play--, nor any of the 'multicausal' theories proposed have succeeded in reconciling views over what causes this psychological reaction, or how it relates to humour and laughter. Nevertheless, one or other of these is often relied upon by investigators, who generally select the perspective most convenient for their specific object of study.

Until the early part of this century, theoretical approaches to the field were common. Grieg in 1923 was able to list over 90 different views. On the other hand, empirical research was rare, and theoretical works could not often be characterized as empirically-grounded, systematic, thorough, and coherent: "The problem of humor has always been a special field of play for the irresponsible essay writer, and the literature that adorns it is notoriously inconsequential" (Eastman, 1921). In the past thirty years, a contrary pattern has developed. Serious empirical humour research has increased at a considerable pace, particularly in the United States. The creation of The International Society for Humour Studies (ISHS), a journal of Humour Studies (*Humor*), and a humour research list on the internet (at the *mailbase.uk* server), all attest to the growing interest and work in this field. Attempts to classify and interrelate this rapidly expanding body of work have not followed suit, however. Indeed, it has become a standard tenet of humour research that no general theory is attainable or even necessary.

I will not contest the notion that specific research into joking relationships, children's play, or the deployment of humour cues can illuminate important aspects of the laughter triad. I am skeptical, however, that the mere accumulation of facts will result in a better understanding of the field as a whole or even in a full understanding of any single observation. Finding the connections between isolated areas of research, on the other hand, will allow such areas to benefit from the exchange of methods, results, and ideas, and from an improved understanding of their location in various theoretical spaces. It seems to me that narrowly-focused analyses conducted free from any conceptual foundation will always remain superficial in some regard, blind to the elements shared with closely-related cousins. The search for a general perspective should not be wholly abandoned.

A final justification is required: how can the present writer presume to offer a theory which has escaped the minds of weighty thinkers for centuries? Here I offer my

true reason for selecting the laughter triad as my object of analysis. In early 1993 I began to test the idea, borrowed from Jose Antonio Jauregui's *The Emotional Computer* (1990)[4], that amusement was a response to the 'violation of social norms' (See Jauregui, 1993). Though the notion of 'social norm' had to be specified and modified substantially, I discovered that the idea had a surprisingly wide applicability, and that it seemed to clarify ever more numerous relevant phenomena. In subsequent years, this impression has only grown, and I have found additional support from thinkers who have proposed similar notions (Plato, Aristotle, Bergson, E.F. Carritt, J.B. Baillie, Luigi Pirandello). Moreover, the rough ideas with which I began flourished in the fertile ground prepared by Erving Goffman, which I found not only uniquely suited to the task, but essential to its successful accomplishment. In short, the theory proposed is neither essentially new, nor unrelated to existing social theory. I have merely developed, as thoroughly as I have been able, an ancient but often neglected conception of the laughter triad which has come of age with the advent of Goffmanian sociology. It will be the charge of humour researchers, both professional and lay, to judge its validity.

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[4] Jauregui treats amusement within the context of a general theory of human decision-making (with its effects on both individual and social behaviour) which emphasizes the role of affect over cognition.

2.5. Preview

The thesis is broadly divided into three main parts. **PART ONE** (Chapters One to Three) presents essential introductory material.

Chapter One, the chapter in progress, introduces the thesis as a whole, as well as the three basic terms of the laughter triad, which have not always been carefully distinguished:

1. Amusement (the emotion reacting to funny stimuli).
2. Laughter (its visible and more-or-less faithful expression).
3. Humour (the attempt to stimulate amusement).

Chapter Two will provide a critical introduction to the most influential theories of amusement, including the four main monocausal accounts --superiority, incongruity, tension-release, and play--, multicausal accounts, and agnostic stances. It will argue that none of these approaches is satisfactory. It will then discuss the possibility and character of a general amusement theory in the abstract, how such a theory might be developed and validated, and what historical precedents could support such an approach. Specifically, due to the nature and empirical location of the laughter triad, a methodology similar to that employed by Erving Goffman in his analysis of the interaction order will be suggested as the single viable alternative. In this procedure, a continuous mutual comparison and adjustment of theory and data results in an ordered and richly illustrated description, a structured classification of concepts closely grounded in empirical detail, which if successful trigger off recognition and identification in prospective readers.

Chapter Three will introduce the reader to the type of amusement theory to be proposed, with a historical review of what will be called 'claim-discredit' interpretations of amusement. Plato, Aristotle, William Moore, Luigi Pirandello, E.F. Carritt, J.B. Baillie, Henri Bergson, Orrin Klapp, J.A. Jauregui, and others will be credited with variations on the view that amusement reacts to the discredit of an individual's claims about himself. A close kinship will then be noted between these ideas and the themes

elaborately developed by Erving Goffman regarding the 'interaction order', the order which regulates human relations in public surroundings. A brief introduction to Goffman's thought will be offered.

PART TWO (Chapters Four to Six) develops the central account of amusement, expanding upon the ideas of the claim-discredit theorists.

Chapter Four presents the main idea, the necessary condition for amusement (the *sufficient* conditions being reserved for Chapter Six):

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

The Goffmanian notion of a self-claim --the attribution of some predicate by a claim-maker to a claimant he represents, typically himself-- will be specified in detail, and classified according to two variables: origin (method of claim-making) and content. An analysis of the requirements for perceiving the discredit of such a self-claim will be undertaken. This analysis will engender a number of further variables related to the circumstances of discredit, including its cause, the identity of the discredited participant, and the location of the event among various levels of interpreted reality.

Chapter Five will apply this interpretation of amusement to hundreds of 'funny stimuli'. The immense variety of amusing events can be derived from the single definition of the necessary conditions proposed in the previous chapter. This single 'claim-discredit' cause results in apparent differences on the basis of variables relevant to the type of self-claim discredited and the circumstances of the discredit and its observation. The distinctions already noted --origin and content of self-claim, cause of discredit, identity of discredited participant, and location of event-- will be employed to illustrate some of the possible dimensions of variability. Absent-minded errors, irony, tickling, satire, practical jokes, and many other diverse examples of funny stimuli will be related to each other along these axes.

In **Chapter Six**, the explanation of amusement will be elaborated with a number of additions to the basic proposal. Firstly, two amendments are considered to complete the set of necessary and sufficient conditions for amusement:

2. The perceiver of discredit does not identify himself with the claimant at the moment of perception.

3. The perceiver is sufficiently involved in a definition of events which places the discrediting in the foreground.

If condition '2' does not hold, and the perceiver identifies himself with the claimant, the former will experience embarrassment, unless condition '3' additionally fails to hold. If condition '3' does not hold, the perceiver will experience the cognitive and/or emotional processes stimulated by his dominant foci of attention.

Two further complications will be discussed: the possibility that several emotional reactions may be stimulated simultaneously, and the possibility that a single episode of observed activity, or even a single event, may include multiple potentially amusing stimuli.

PART THREE (Chapters Seven to Nine) will broaden the focus to include the whole of the laughter triad.

Chapter Seven will treat laughter and humour displays as communicative expressions with closely synonymous meanings:

Laughter = "I am experiencing amusement at cause X"

Humour = "I can experience amusement at cause X (and so can you)"

The direct allusion to amusement in both of these basic meanings permits the derivation of a number of additional submeanings associated with laughter and humour displays.

These connotations, arising from the features of amusement-perception described in Part Two, include:

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/humour"

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

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

Humour displays express an additional submeaning:

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

These meanings provide the crucial link between laughter/humour displays on the one hand, and amusement on the other, suggesting the futility of treating the former two without some conception of the latter.

The process by which an actor displays laughter or humour to an audience of observers will also be analyzed, with regard to the influence of physio-psychological and situational pressures, individual aims and skills, and the distribution of power.

Chapter Eight will provide a lengthy though certainly not exhaustive list of the effects which amusement, laughter, and humour may have on individual experience and behaviour, the immediate situation, social relationships, and society at large. In relevant cases, intentional uses of these phenomena to provoke particular effects will be discussed.

Particularly attention will be paid to the effects and uses of laughter and humour displays. As communications, their consequences depend on meanings expressed, including those detailed in the previous chapter. This will permit the organization of large bodies of research according to a single theoretical scheme, simultaneously grounding such research in a unitary conception of amusement. Effects of laughter and humour include the broadcasting of an actor's discredit to others; the provocation of further amusement and/or laughter; the transmission and reproduction of social norms shared by a group or society; the creation of boundaries between and around social groups; the creation or reinforcement of affiliation/disaffiliation between two parties; the protection of an actor from discredit; the giving off of certain impressions to others; etc. These effects, and their related uses, will be classified according to the signification(s) from which they derive.

'Functionalist' approaches to these topics, which have been dominant until recent times, will be criticized as methodologically careless and conceptually vague.

Chapter Nine will bring the thesis to its close by summarizing proposals, considering their cross-cultural validity, and suggesting how they may be used to situate the laughter triad and its field of study. Amusement will be presented as one of the 'basic' and universal emotions of humankind, and an explanation will be given of cross-cultural variability in the experience of this emotion, and in the display of laughter and humour. Finally, I will offer a tentative classification of the humour research field, based on the proposed account of the laughter triad.

3. The Laughter Triad

Our everyday familiarity with the phenomena and vocabulary of laughter and humour requires special care and attention in the definition of basic terms, often overused, vague and/or ambiguous. In this section I will set out and delimit the three fundamental concepts to be treated, justifying and making explicit any assumptions made along the way. Some basic well-confirmed facts will be presented, along with the major unanswered questions.

3.1. Amusement

The spontaneous, unconscious behaviours of the human body --sensations, reflexes, feelings, and emotions-- have a single nature but a double appearance. Each event of this type is associated with two aspects which, though often separated conceptually, linguistically, and methodologically, can be treated as referring to an identical occurrence.

On the one hand, there exist the objectively observable signs of the event: the knee spontaneously jerks up the lower leg when the hammer hits the right spot; the eyes water and the corners of the mouth sag when a tragic situation is perceived. Sophisticated instruments may permit the detection and monitoring of less obvious physiological changes, such as alterations in brain and nervous system activity, skin conductance, heart beat rate, and chemical composition of the blood.

On the other hand, the subject of consciousness encased in this altered physical body can observe the phenomenon 'from the inside.' Having one's knee jerk 'feels' particular, while experiencing the dozens of physiological changes associated with sadness is a qualitatively unique subjective experience.

I will assume that both of these perspectives --objective and subjective-- refer to the same event. When a person 'feels sad,' his subjective feelings are no more, and no

less, than the first-person perception of certain bodily processes brought about by the tragic stimulus[1].

The Cartesian mind-body dualism widespread in Western society resists such conclusions. Intuitively, it seems that we cry because we are sad, or that we draw back because we feel pain. One reason is that there inevitably exist two languages corresponding to the subjective and objective identification of bodily events. Happenings and features in objective reality are describable by reference to other exterior happenings and features. The subjective characteristics of guilt, however, (i.e., what it *feels* like to be guilty) can only be described in terms of other feelings. There is an empathic or 'internal' understanding of such terms as pain or guilt which is irreducible to and irreconcilable with observable 'external' physiological or behavioural events. Moreover, many of the possible bodily correlates of affect --i.e., the release of endorphins into the blood, specific alterations in neurological activity-- are invisible to the naked eye, and others will continue to escape any conceivable advances in medical technology. Finally, we are often aware of a dissociation between feeling and its most evident bodily signs: we may 'counterfeit' smiles or frowns. The subjective aspects of emotion and feeling, therefore, appear much more salient or even exhaust the attention of most actors when considering such events. Thus, it seems only natural to believe that subjective feeling causes any observable bodily changes, or that in any case the two are separate.

I will maintain, however, that crying is a constitutive part of the sadness process, and that drawing back is a constitutive part of a defensive mechanism which includes bodily occurrences perceived as pain. William James (1890) first proposed this conception of affect (743-44):

Our natural way of thinking about these coarser emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My theory, on the contrary, is that *the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur* IS *the emotion*. (...) *If*

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[1] I make a distinction here between the raw experience of emotion and subsequent cognitive interpretations,

we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no 'mind stuff' out of which the emotion can be constituted and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains.

Within the set of spontaneous bodily reactions, emotions are distinguished by the cognitive character of their stimuli. Sneezing, yawning, pain, or the taste bud messages resulting in 'sweetness' all react to physical, directly perceived stimuli of one type or another. Fear, happiness, nostalgia, and regret, on the other hand, follow the perception of events which normally require some interpretation. The concept that "my house is burning" has to be cognitively processed and understood, its implications assessed and valued, in order for emotions such as fear or sadness to arise. The 'appraisal' process leading to various emotional reactions has become a central issue in recent theorizing about emotions (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996: 99-102). As will be argued more fully in Chapter Nine, **amusement**[2] can be considered within the set of basic human emotions.

Amusement is defined firstly as a unique bodily emotion, associated (in its stronger manifestations) with the following characteristic bodily movements and sounds:

...the mouth is opened more or less widely, with the corners drawn much backwards, as well as a little upwards....the cheeks and upper lip are much raised.... The sound of laughter is produced by a deep inspiration followed by short, interrupted, spasmodic contractions of the chest, and especially of the diaphragm. From the shaking of the body, the head nods to and fro. The lower jaw often quivers up and down...

(Darwin, 1902: 211-215)

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which I take to be secondary.

[2] There is no word in English which precisely and unambiguously covers the concept identified here. It continues to be, as Hobbes pointed out, "a passion that hath no name," (1640: 45). 'Laughter' has been the most common label, but this term refers primarily to the observable signs of the emotion, which do not always reflect the actual bodily state.

My usage of 'amusement' will refer exclusively to humorous amusement, and in no case will be intended in the sense of 'enjoyment.' Moreover, it is intended to cover the phenomenon as a whole, in its observable bodily manifestations and interiorly felt dimensions.

These observable signs, which I will refer to as **laughter** (See Section 3.2), are merely the grossest physical manifestations of a much wider range of bodily events constitutive of amusement, including epinephrine secretions and changes in heart rate, skin conductance, muscle tension, respiration, and patterns of brain activity (McGhee, 1983: 16-19).

The observable bodily process of amusement corresponds to a unique subjective emotional experience, which I will refer to as the amusement feeling/experience, or simply as **funniness**.

Funniness can be further described as pleasurable. Seemingly spontaneous laughter which is experienced without pleasure is considered 'pathological' by medical science and "results in management problems for friends, family, or caretakers [of the patient] who are unable to comprehend the absence of inner well-being" (Duchowny, 1983: 91). It has been argued that other subjective feelings accompany amusement, either always or in some cases: aggression, sexual arousal, general excitation, wonder, a 'sense' of the incongruous, relief, joy. None of these seems intuitively basic to funniness itself, however (though 'joy' might be considered a close relative).

Amusement, as other emotions, varies in intensity. Graded scales for measuring 'felt funniness' in psychological experiments have been devised (La France, 1983: 2). Positive relationships have been found between variations in such funniness ratings and variations in heart beat rate, galvanic skin response, and muscle tension (McGhee 1983: 16-19). Fluctuations in perceived funniness also often correspond to the directly observable expressions of laughter: "a graduated series can be followed from violent to moderate laughter, to a broad smile, to a gentle smile" (Darwin, 1902: 216). This correlation is complicated by the ability of subjects to consciously control the display of laughter (See Section 3.2). In many experimental studies of humour, for instance, the two measures do not coincide, as the laboratory situation itself appears to inhibit laughter (Chapman, 1983: 137). In 'naturalistic' research, where observation is less intrusive, a closer fit has been found between felt funniness and observed laughter (ibid.).

Considerable evidence suggests that amusement is an involuntary, unlearned, and innate behaviour. For example, stimulation of the hypothalamus and diencephalic region of the brain has been repeatedly demonstrated to provoke "well-developed laughter" (Duchowny, 1983: 97). Patients with Bell's Palsy, an affliction in which half of the face becomes slack, can only smile voluntarily with one side of the face, but "once amused, then there is bilateral symmetry in their performance" (Miller, 1988: 8).

The possibility that infants learn to laugh through imitation seems unlikely: "Laughing as well as joyful shouts appear at a time when the laughing of adults does not facilitate the same behaviour in the baby but startles it more than anything else, or can even cause the baby to cry when it has been laughing" (D.W. Ploog, in Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1975). It has been documented that deaf and dumb children, who could not have learned the behaviour, exhibit laughter in what seem to be typically amusing situations:

> Goodenough observed that on one occasion, a doll was dropped inside the neck of a 10-year old child's dress: "When she got it out, she threw herself back into her chair...There were peals of hearty laughter."
>
> (Black, 1984: 2995)

Amusement is commonly attributed universality throughout the human species, and the facts seem to support this claim. Not only laughter but joking, clowns, mimicry, and ridicule have been described in a wide range of societies (Apte, 1983). In a review of the admittedly sparse anthropological literature on the subject, Mahadev Apte concludes that "humour and its appreciation appear to be panhuman traits" (p. 194). Another question is whether all peoples are amused in the same situations, and how such sameness or difference should be described. The answer to this remains open, though the aforementioned evidence of recognizable humour in divergent cultures suggests at least some similarities.

A related and equally common assertion holds that amusement is unique to humanity. This claim, however, is less certain, in view of some of the literature on

primate behaviour. The "relaxed open-mouth display" or "play face" of a number of species closely related to Homo Sapiens is used during

> the boisterous mock-fighting and chasing involved in social play.... It is often accompanied by quick and shallow rather staccato breathing. In some species, the breathing may be vocalized (e.g. the chimpanzee). The vocalizations then sound like 'ahh ahh ahh.'

> > (Van Hooff, 1972)

In the case of chimpanzees, this expression

> can easily be elicited by tickling.... Many authors (e.g. Darwin, 1872; Foley 1935; Kohts, 1937; Grimek, 1941; Yerkes, 1943) were struck by its resemblance both in form and context with our laughter.

> > (Van Hooff, 1972)

The precise relations, evolutionary or conceptual, between human amusement and these animal behaviours remains unknown, and will probably continue to do so. It is impossible to determine, for instance, if chimpanzees subjectively experience funniness. Undoubtedly, Aristotle's 'laughing animal' (*de partibus animalium*, 673a8) reacts to a much wider range of stimuli. Nevertheless, the expressive and contextual similarities of his laughter to that of apes suggests that the behaviour may not be unique to humans.

Primate data does, however, support the common supposition that laughter and smiling constitute distinct expressions. Ethologists have distinguished between the "relaxed open-mouth display" and the "silent bared-teeth display" or "grin face." As in the case of humans, the latter is used primarily in social situations of "affinity." (Van Hooff, 1972). Separate phylogenetic origins for the two are suggested by this evidence. Subjective experience also confirms the notion that these behaviours differ, particularly in their extreme forms: "Surely we can distinguish between a pure, intense smile from

pure, intense laughter, and the two expressions are then very different indeed" (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1975).

As for the cause or causes of amusement, there is little agreement, as will be seen in Chapter Two. The question "what provokes amusement?" has accounted for much of the debate in the field.

One utterly basic point can advanced with some confidence: amusement reacts to a definite stimulus. However heterogeneous the array of events that may provoke it generally, each specific case seems to have been triggered by some specifiable event. Indeed, social actors must be able to account for outbursts of this type, as unmotivated laughter is considered a symptom of mental illness (Duchowny, 1983: 92-93).

It has been occasionally argued that even this may not always be the case; for example, that one may laugh with real amusement but 'for no reason' or out of 'pure joy' or 'nervousness.' However, actual examples of these phenomena are rare. Most of the evidence is to be found in the literature on children:

A brief observation of three-year-olds at play suggests that laughter is a highly contagious reaction that may suddenly erupt in the midst of rough and tumble play, running, jumping, chasing and so forth. In these situations there is nothing that is actually funny to the child.

(McGhee, 1979: 126-27)

Such interpretations are questionable, however, on grounds of both vagueness of the description offered and a more essential methodological problem. How could it possibly be determined whether nothing, or on the other hand something, may be "actually funny to the child" in this case? Child's play constitutes a complex interpersonal activity presenting the individual participant with any number of physiological, cognitive, and emotional contingencies. Without a detailed analysis of 'rough and tumble play' behaviour, we have no way of judging, independently of McGhee's conclusion, how random or mirthless these instances of laughter might be. Furthermore, the rudimentary communication and self-awareness skills of children present obvious methodological

difficulties to the researcher interested in unraveling such psychological processes, as McGhee himself concedes[3]. Merely assuming away the cause in this case seems a hasty procedure.

In one of the few naturalistic studies of actual amusement reactions as reported by adult subjects (Kambouropoulou, 1930), the instances which appeared to lack a definite cause made up only 1.3% of the total (p.24). An examination of these uncommon cases, furthermore, reveals that they either did not constitute amusement ("Laughed numerous times to be polite, but not because I was amused", p.15) or, more commonly, were vague or partial explanations of complex events remembered long after the facts ("At a tea everybody talking and laughing," p.15). Another telling detail from the conclusions of this study is the finding that "a lower academic standing accompanies the greater proportion of laughing with no objective cause" (p. 79). Perhaps the subjects who provided more examples of 'unmotivated' laughter were wanting in the types of skills or attitudes conducive to an accurate and detailed record of events.

The stimuli which provoke amusement can further be specified, at least in most cases, as *cognitive* stimuli: perceptions or mental states of some type. Jokes, puns, stage comedy, everyday mishaps and mistakes --these must be perceived and mentally processed in some way by the subject of laughter to have been amused. On this point, at least, the different schools of humour theory will agree[4]. Debate has centered rather on whether it is a single cognitive elicitor or rather several which may result in amusement -- and what this/these elicitor(s) might be. A single appraisal process for amusement has not yet been agreed upon, casting some doubt on the very status of the phenomenon as an emotion.

The adjective 'funny' will be used to characterize stimuli of amusement, with the caveat that speaking in general of 'a funny story,' indicates only that it is *potentially* amusing, that it may provoke or may have provoked amusement in some individual. 'A

---

[3] "It is impossible to determine in any particular situation whether an event was perceived as humorous by a young child.... We can only make an educated guess" (pp. 95-96).

[4] Outside of neuropsychological disturbances (brain damage, electrical stimulation, laughing gas), 'tickling' is the only exception that occasionally appears, but not according to all interpretations (see Koestler, 1964: 79-80; and this thesis, Chapter Five, 2.3.1).

funny story' additionally indicates that the story in question is *actually* amusing only when an actual or supposed instance of amusement has been explicitly indicated (i.e., "It was sooo funny; we laughed all afternoon."). Thus, **'funny X'** refers to the object or event in the world (X) to which an instance of actual, supposed, or potential amusement is attributed by some actor.

3.2. Laughter (Display)

Amusement cannot be directly observed, or at least not by anyone other than the subject of amusement who perceives the sensations of funniness. Only its outward manifestation as the movements and sounds of laughter can be seen and heard by other actors. These observable signs of apparent amusement I will refer to as a **laughter display** or simply as **laughter**.

As I have already pointed out, laughter displays are not always or even commonly equivalent to the spontaneous expression of actual amusement:

> Although people laugh when they find something funny, they also laugh when a 'joke' is seen to be anything but funny. Moreover, people can be very straight-faced in a truly humorous situation, giving little sign of felt mirth.... The person laughing the loudest may be the least amused, while the person smiling the least may be suppressing full-flow fun until a more appropriate context can be found.
>
> (La France, 1983: 2)

Laughter is, to some extent, subject to conscious control. This point, in its most general form, is obvious from the performances of professional actors and from our own subjective experience. The conclusions of researchers in the field of facial displays of emotion will surprise nobody:

> The facial nerve is connected to the very old and to the newer parts of the brain. Facial expressions of emotion are at times an involuntary automatic response, and at other times, a voluntary, well-managed response system.... Facial expressions are language-like in that they often are voluntary, and the involuntary facial expressions are vulnerable to interference or modification by custom, habit, or choice of the moment. People can and often do put on false expressions to play with or seriously mislead another.

(Ekman, 1978: 141)

Laughter can be consciously overstated or counterfeited on the one hand, understated or suppressed on the other. And not only its intensity, but its form and timing can be modified. Researchers in the field of conversation analysis have convincingly demonstrated that speakers modify their productions of laughter in line with the structural requirements of orderly talk (see, for example, Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff, 1987). A display of laughter may therefore be more or less **spontaneous** --i.e., corresponding more or less closely to the level of amusement actually experienced.

A further complication has been suggested by Hochschild (1979), who convincingly argues that not only do actors consciously modify the facial and bodily *expression* of emotions with 'surface acting,' but actually *manage the emotions themselves*, with learned and practiced 'deep acting.' Surprisingly familiar accounts are related by Hochschild's interviewees: "I psyched myself up....I squashed my anger down....I tried hard not to feel disappointed....I made myself have a good time....I tried to feel grateful....I killed the hope I had burning...I let myself finally feel sad" (Hochschild, 1979: 561). Thus, the relationship between a particular instance of laughter and its supposed amusement becomes even more problematic: not only laughter displays, but amusement itself may be more or less spontaneous. Even if, as some have suggested (Ekman, 1978; La France, 1983), there may be ways of discerning true from feigned emotional expressions through careful attention to facial details, these may not necessarily distinguish between truly spontaneous reactions and adulterated ones.

Two important consequences follow for observers of laughter. Firstly, social actors can never be certain of the relationship between 'real' and 'apparent' amusement in any observed other. Secondly, humour and laughter researchers can never be certain of the relationship between amusement and laughter displays in their experimental subjects or observed 'natives.' In both cases, specific circumstances or techniques may increase the probability of accurate judgment (i.e., secret or unobtrusive observation, a request for 'funniness ratings'), but doubts and conflicting opinions may always remain. Again in

both cases, some level of trust, based partly on subjective experience of honest emotional expressions, must be adopted in order to consider others' amusement at all.

The reality of conscious emotional display also has its consequences for the behaviour of social actors and for the societies they populate. The various possibilities of control over laughter permit, as with other emotions, both the influence of culture, social structure, and interactional requirements on this behaviour, and its strategic use by individuals. One striking example of the former is provided by crude cross-cultural comparisons:

> 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)

As Douglas argues, there exist great differences in the extent to which societies inhibit or stimulate bodily expression, perhaps related to the role played by individual bodies in communicating social messages. The more ceremonial or ritualized the situation, for instance, the heavier the expressive content of bodily movements, and the less tolerance will exist for spontaneous outbursts. Specific cultural meanings, ritual practices, social hierarchies and structures of power, the requirements of conversation and social interaction, all of these may affect the ways in which actors seek to manage amusement and display laughter.

3.3. Humour

'Humour' (Humor to Americans) has been often used to denote all funny things, all sources of amusement (for example, in the very label 'humour research'). What is in practice often meant by 'humour,' however, is rather *communicative presentations intended (by the communicator) to provoke amusement*. I will, accordingly, use the term to mean this and only this[5].

Instances of humour can thus be categorized as examples of artistic/communicative creation. A humorous piece can be regarded both as a piece of individual workmanship and as an instance of a cultural form of expression. Trends, styles, and genres of humour can be critiqued, analyzed, and compared across single performers, historical periods, and cultural settings. The same variety of analytical frames to which other cultural forms such as literary prose or table manners might be subjected -- aesthetic, historical, anthropological, moral, economic, political, psychological, semiotic-- has also been applied to humour. Identifying the specific 'techniques' of humourists and comedians has been another major concern of researchers: the question 'what provokes amusement' becomes 'how do they (try to) provoke amusement'.

Humour, in this narrow sense, has been the main focus of 'humour research.' Though often acknowledging and including unintentionally funny stimuli within the bounds of this field, researchers have concentrated overwhelmingly on productions intended to be amusing: i.e., jokes, puns, ironic remarks, comedy, wit, clowning, mimicry, ridicule, satire. These humorous communications are both perceptually salient and methodologically appealing: Salient because humour is consciously created and discussed, culturally valued, and in Western society commercially produced and advertised; methodologically appealing due to the ease which humour can be reproduced or displayed in the experimental lab and written texts, or sought and identified in naturalistic studies (i.e., of joking relationships, comedy shows, children's play, etc...).

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[5] The only exception will be the case of 'Humour research' itself, on the basis of the increasingly established nature of the field and its label.

Even in discussions of so-called 'unintentional' humour, the very need to specify a modifier implies that 'humour' by default refers to 'intentional humour.' The bias is so strong that in many analyses which include clear examples of unintentionally funny stimuli, the dominant wordings often continue to imply some sort of conscious volition behind the source of amusement. For example, Zillmann (1983: 87) mentions unwilled circumstances such as "misfortunes and setbacks...ugliness, stupidity, and ineptness" among possible causes. But his general description of this category is a festival of transitive verbs: "humor that disparages, belittles, debases, demeans, humiliates, or otherwise victimizes" (ibid.: 85). Though Zillman does not state that it a person (but rather the 'humour') which disparages or belittles, the terminology is misleading in a way congruent with the general bias towards humour. Can we say that a clumsy person is 'belittled by the humour' of his clumsiness in the same way a target of satire is belittled by a caricature? Perhaps, but a distinction between accidental and willed disparagements is thereby fudged, in favour of the latter. Zillman's description closely fits the majority of research in the area of disparagement humour, which has tested reactions to disparaging cartoons and jokes, but it seems less apt for unintentionally funny events, persons, and objects.

Moreover, several authors have explicitly relegated such potentially amusing stimuli to the status of 'non-humour,' as if placing them outside the bounds of study. Chapman (1983: 151) speaks of "nonhumorous laughter" in his mention of episodes when "people...laugh *at* others." Koestler (1964: 60) similarly dismissed as "entirely mirthless and humourless" laughter at mispronounced words, falls, poor dancing, and various other events from Kambouropoulou's (1930) study. Some have even classified such stimuli as provoking 'primitive' laughter within an evolutionary scale, more 'harmless' or 'sympathetic' wit and joking supposedly characterizing modern man:

> The 'primitive' person enjoys his aggression directly, the 'civilized' individual enjoys his aggression indirectly.
>
> (Feinberg, 1978)

> The amusement that laughter has finally released from its ungracious heritage of triumph, cruelty, and scorn marks a line of mental advance.

> (Gregory, 1923: 344)

The relegation of funny stimuli which do not classify as humour to an inferior theoretical status has hardly been noticed by scholars, let alone justified or supported by empirical evidence. The few facts collected regarding causes of amusement in everyday life, however, reverses the scale of values. The category of events from Kambouropoulou's study which Koestler dismisses as "entirely mirthless and humourless" included 53% of the total instances of self-reported amusement and laughter by 100 university students over a seven-day period, a category defined as "instances where the cause is the inferiority or predicament of a person, the diary author included; awkwardness, stupidity, mistakes, ignorance, absent-mindedness, blunders, social breaks, unfortunate dilemmas, and calamities" (Kambouropoulou, 1930: 14). The next largest category, accounting for 28% of the total, included unexpected and incongruous events or turns in the situation, whether "voluntary or not" (pg. 14). These results were confirmed forty years later with a replication of the procedure by two researchers (Graeven and Morris, 1972) who found "striking...the similarity in the distribution of humorous incidents for the two time periods" (p. 409). These studies indicate that the almost exclusive focus on intentional humour that has characterized the study of amusement may exclude from analysis the majority of real-life cases.

Such facts suggest that the 'humour' question is not merely terminological. The pervasive and rarely noticed bias against unintentionally funny stimuli has almost certainly misled and distorted theoretical analysis in the field. A broader outlook that encompasses not only the many varieties of humour but the wide range of naturally-occurring funny stimuli must be adopted if any serious progress is to be made. Not only empirically but also logically, the latter deserve an important role in the study of

amusement and laughter (if not pride of place): The intentional provocation of an emotion or reflex presupposes the workings of the bodily process itself[6].

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[6] It might be possible that amusement requires such interactional contingencies as perceived provocation, but this cannot be merely (even if implicitly) assumed. Considering the aforementioned empirical evidence, this possibility seems in any case highly unlikely.

4. Conclusions

In this preliminary chapter, I have introduced the aims, methods, scope, and rationale of the thesis, anticipated its major points, and provided detailed definitions for the three basic and interrelated objects of study.

The thesis seeks to situate the **laughter triad**, a set of three closely interrelated phenomena familiar to all of us through everyday experience: amusement, laughter, and humour.

Amusement is a mental and bodily process characterized by the feeling of 'funniness' and the production of certain movements and sounds. It is an involuntary, unlearned, innate response to a cognitive stimulus or stimuli, as of yet unspecified by humour theory. It seems universal to mankind, though perhaps not unique, as similar behaviours have been observed in the closest simian relatives of *Homo Sapiens*. The interactional situation appears to be an important effect on the likelihood and degree of amusement. It can be classified as an emotion.

Laughter, or **the laughter display**, refers to the observable signs of apparent amusement. These may or may not accurately reflect the true emotional state of the individual producing them. In other words, laughter may be either relatively spontaneous or otherwise overstated, counterfeited, understated, or suppressed. Its form and timing may also be manipulated. Finally, 'deep acting' may allow the individual to intentionally modify amusement itself.

These possibilities present problems of interpretation for social actors and humour researchers, and allow for the influence of culture, social structure, and interactional requirements on laughter, as well as its strategic use by individuals.

Humour refers to productions intended by an actor to cause amusement, which can be regarded as pieces of individual workmanship and instances of cultural forms of expression.

The aim of the thesis will be to 'situate laughter.' This will mean first of all to observe and analyze this triad in its natural home, the everyday interactional situation. It will be argued, moreover, that the manifestation of amusement is itself essentially

contingent on fundamental features of situated interaction: the self-claims which make up situated self-presentations, and related concepts. Finally, in its broadest sense, situating the laughter triad will involve developing a topology of the field within which each member of the triad, their many varieties, and related phenomena will be located in relation to each other, to the social sciences, and to existing humour theories and research.

The scope, though narrowly focused on the laughter triad itself, will thus be broad in the sense of encompassing all possible instances of amusement, laughter, and humour in any human society. It will also span the interests of numerous academic disciplines, with an emphasis on the social sciences resulting from the pursuit of the phenomena themselves.

The method used has been an unorthodox and intuitive sort which nevertheless represents the most viable alternative for the study of humour and other elements of everyday behaviour resistant to objective observation. It consists of successive comparisons of theoretical description with a growing body of empirical data gathered from the most heterogeneous set of situations possible. Validation depends on the recognition by other subjects of the features described from their own experience with them, and on the general utility of the theory for specific projects within humour research.

The topic of the thesis, which suffers from an evident whiff of impropriety, has been justified by its inherent interest to all individuals, and by its relevance to a wide range of areas within the social sciences and other disciplines. The thesis also answers a need for general theorizing in the field of humour research, characterized by fragmentation and diversity of approach. My confidence in proposing such an account is rooted in my own experience with its application, in its complementarity with the proposals of Erving Goffman's theory of the interaction order, and in its close kinship with the ideas of numerous both well-known and less prominent humour theorists.

A brief preview of the proposals has also been provided. Amusement will be portrayed as reacting to the perception that an actor's claim about himself has been discredited, providing the perceiver attends sufficiently to the discrediting event and does

not feel identified with the discredited claimant. Laughter and humour will be described as communicative signs whose meanings include a reference to amusement. This reference will serve as the basis for an analysis of the effects and uses of laughter and humour. A general ordering and placement of the humour research field will emerge from these considerations.

Chapter Two: Causal Theories of Amusement

1. Introduction

The great and long-standing riddle in the field of laughter and humour research concerns the 'spark' or 'trigger' of amusement. Known causes abound, of course: puns, jokes, mishaps, absurdities, paradoxes, tickling, obscenities, silliness, and rollercoasters, among others. What has evaded theorists is a general, formal, coherent description of the stimulus (or stimuli): what makes something funny?

The question has been rightly treated as *the* question of amusement, laughter, and humour; its solution, the key to a general theory of some type. Understanding amusement is the first step towards understanding laughter and humour, for both of these communicative displays refer back to the basal emotion. In subsequent chapters, I will suggest an answer to the question of amusement (Chapters Four to Six), on which a theoretical scheme integrating laughter and humour will be based (Chapters Seven to Nine).

In this chapter, I will review the most common theoretical approaches to amusement. The four most popular single causes attributed to amusement have been 'superiority,' 'incongruity,' 'tension-release,' and 'play.' The failure of each of these to account for all cases of funny event has led some authors to develop equally unsatisfying multicausal theories, or even to abandon the search for any sort of encompassing description. None of these approaches has been successful in reconciling views on the subject.

I will also provide some suggestions regarding theory and methodology in the search for the cause(s) of amusement. I will argue that the nature of the phenomena under study, and specifically their opacity to objective observation, precludes the application of conventional scientific paradigms (i.e., objective tests of hypotheses). The methodology I will label 'aggregate introspection' represents the most promising alternative, and indeed will be shown to have been tacitly adopted throughout the history of humour theory. This procedure begins with a continuous process of testing and reworking of the emerging theory with a growing body of empirical data from the theorist's own experience and those of others. The applicability of the resulting concepts and relations can then be tested by numerous others who are exposed to the theory, who together provide a judgment (a

kind of 'aggregate test') of its validity. A widely-acclaimed application of this unorthodox method will be described: Erving Goffman's theory of the interaction order.

2. Traditions in Amusement Theory

2.1. Monistic Theories

The reflexlike character of amusement, and the apparent unity of both exterior and interior manifestations, strongly suggests that the mechanism must be describable in terms of a single stimulus-response model. Many authors have been driven by this intuition to develop global monocausal theories. Though dozens could be listed, most of them have traditionally been classified under one of four general categories: aggression/superiority, incongruity, tension-release, and play.

2.1.1. Aggression/Superiority Theory

One common view presents laughter as an aggressive instinct which reacts to the errors, deformities, or vices of others.

This school of thought is commonly traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers. According to Plato, "when we laugh at what is ridiculous in our friends, we are mixing pleasure...with malice" (*Philebus*, 50a). Aristotle identified "a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others" as the source of amusement (*On Poetics*, v, I). It was Thomas Hobbes, however, who stated the proposal most directly:

Laughter is nothing else but *sudden glory* arising from some sudden *conception* of some *eminency* in ourselves, by *comparison* with the *infirmity* of others, or with our own formerly.

(1640: IX, 13; See also 1651: I, 6)

Hobbes' short words have been expanded upon by a number of 'superiority' theorists (see Bain, 1880; Carus, 1898, Dunlap, 1925; Leacock, 1935; Rapp, 1949; Sidis, 1913). Gruner (1979), a recent example, holds that the expression of amusement as laughter represents a kind of survival of the atavistic 'victory cry' which early hominids supposedly

experienced after defeating their enemy. In the present day, any situation of felt superiority over another would provoke amusement. Other writers have merely proposed an aggressive 'spark' in all funny stimuli: Whenever humor occurs, an element of aggression is present --on a broad spectrum ranging from the mild satisfaction of twisting the language out of shape to the malicious pleasure of watching a humiliating practical joke" (Feinberg, 1978).

Superiority and aggression theories can be discounted as global explanations of spontaneous laughter. One reason is that wit, puns, nonsense, and other apparently non-aggressive forms of humour cannot be plausibly accounted for by such a view. If we consider the abovementioned claim by Feinberg, for instance, his use of the loaded phrase "twisting the language out of shape" fails to convince the critical reader of any obvious similarity between laughing derisively and laughing at a pun. Rather, what seems twisted out of shape is the concept of 'aggression.' Without justification, Feinberg has assumed that people universally personify language and/or bear ill will towards the words they use. Moreover, verbal humour often provokes the most violent and explosive extremes of laughter, not just Feinberg's "mild satisfaction."

Gruner (1979) has proposed a more ingenious account of wit and incongruity : its perceiver laughs at a victory over himself, a self which has been fooled by a verbal ambiguity or trick. 'Victory,' or 'superiority' seems an inappropriate description of the relation between the amused self and the self to which the laughter responds, however. Triumphs and victories in their purest forms, whether over exterior enemies or over the self, do not necessarily or even usually result in amusement. Though derisive laughter may not be absent from football grounds, military battlefields, and election campaigns, victory in these arenas typically leads to expressions of shared joy: cheering, applause, shouts of triumph, smiles, and the like. Similarly with moments of great personal achievement, in which the victorious self will be able to perceive lesser previous selves. Naturalistic studies have not been conducted to determine what moments during a competitive or individual struggle may lead to amusement and which to joy. Everyday observation and subjective experience, however, suggest that the immediate reaction to victory, even sudden and unexpected victory, is other than humorous amusement.

The superiority explanation contains additional embarrassing consequences. For example, we may laugh at persons which we consider, despite their mistakes, better than ourselves in the relevant characteristic. Laughter at an opera singer's missed note does not require the audience member to consider his own singing abilities superior. Such a situation cannot be characterized as a 'victory.'

If not quite satisfying as general explanations of amusement, aggression/superiority theories contain undeniable value, and have led to intriguing experimental discoveries. Firstly, they draw attention to a set of stimuli which other theories (i.e., incongruity) either ignore or struggle with: the mishaps, mistakes, disparagements, defects, and blemishes of others. In these cases, the funny object is another social actor, or in some cases the perceiver himself --we have seen that both Hobbes and Gruner take this latter possibility into account. The casting of this interpersonal relation as one of superiority/inferiority or aggressor/victim has proven unsatisfactory, but the identification of such a relation at all continues to hold theoretical promise.

Such hopes are grounded in some of the best-confirmed empirical evidence in the humour research literature, what have been called **'dispositional' effects** (see Zillman, 1983, for a review). These effects are relevant to 'disparagement humour,' that is, "humour that disparages, belittles, debases, demeans, humiliates, or otherwise victimizes" (ibid.: 85); in other words, funny stimuli which include a human object that is 'disparaged' in some way. In most of the studies, jokes which disparaged the representative(s) of some social or ethnic group were presented to subjects who held varying attitudes towards these groups. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that amusement before such stimuli depends on the affective disposition towards the object of disparagement, in the following manner:

> 1. The more intense the negative disposition toward the disparaged agent or entity, the greater the magnitude of mirth.
> 2. The more intense the positive disposition toward the disparaged agent or entity, the smaller the magnitude of mirth.
>
> (ibid.: 91)

Additionally, similar effects have been found regarding the agent provoking the disparagement:

> 3. The more intense the negative disposition toward the disparaging agent or entity, the smaller the magnitude of mirth.
>
> 4. The more intense the positive disposition toward the disparaging agent or entity, the greater the magnitude of mirth.
>
> (ibid.: 91-92)

The finding that the perceiver's attitude towards a human object of amusement varies his overall level of amusement raises the question of how this perceiver-object relation may fit within a general theory of amusement, if such a theory is possible. Considering Hobbes' point that "men laugh at the follies of themselves past," (1640: IX, 13) and Gruner's analysis of wit, the possibility of 'self-disparaging humour' should also be taken into account.

2.1.2. Incongruity Theory

Perhaps the most popular approach holds that amusement results from the perception of an 'appropriate' incongruity, an unusual or surprising relation between two contrary or unrelated phenomena. John Locke's discrimination between judgment and wit represents the earliest statement:

> For *wit* lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting these together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; *judgment*, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another.
>
> (1690: II, xi)

Locke refers here to wit, the *creation* of funny stimuli, but implies that amusement is provoked when the perceiver of wit is "misled by similitude," when incongruous phenomena are joined in the mind by apparent congruity. This implication was developed by a number of eighteenth-century writers (Addison, 1711 and Gerard, 1759, in Grieg, 1923), most elaborately by the Scottish philosopher and poet James Beattie:

> Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts of circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them...unless when the perception of it is attended with some other emotion of greater authority.
>
> (1776: 320/419)

Schopenhauer in 1819 issued an almost identical and influential restatement of the proposal, and in the recent years it has been taken up and refreshed by cognitive

psychologists and linguists (Monro, 1951; Milner, 1972; Jones, 1970; Schultz, 1972; Suls, 1972; Wilson, 1979; Raskin, 1985; Norrick, 1986).

In line with current conceptions of cognitive interpretative mechanisms, the latest versions describe the incongruity as taking place between two 'schemas,' 'scripts,' or 'frames,' mental classifications of real-world objects and events, rather than between the real world phenomena themselves. Raskin (1985) claims that a text is a joke-carrying text if it satisfies the following two conditions:

(i) the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
(ii) the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposing scripts

(p. 99)

For example in the one liner, " I used to be an atheist but I gave up --no holidays" (Davis, 1993: 82), the 'script' covering the reasons for identifying with a religious idea is combined with an opposing script covering the reasons for holding a job.

Incongruity theories have been found most helpful in the understanding of verbal and visual wit. Their proponents, however, have rarely intended them as general explanations of amusement. Raskin attempts to put forward "a formal semantic theory of verbal humour" (p. xiii). Beattie distinguished the laughter aroused by ideas from that aroused by tickling, and both of these were contrasted with laughter at the "ridiculous". Suls admits that "the incongruity-resolution model is not a complete account, it describes a part of the humor experience" (p. 55). I have included incongruity accounts under the label of 'monocausal theories' firstly because in some fields (i.e., in linguistics) they are often employed as such in practice, and secondly because not all authors have been so modest:

All laughter is occasioned by a paradoxical, and hence unexpected subsumption, it matters not whether this is expressed in words or in deeds. This in brief is the correct explanation of the ludicrous (...) There will be no question that here, after so many fruitless attempts, the true theory of the ludicrous is given, and the problem propounded by and given up by Cicero definitely solved.

(Schopenhauer, 1819; 1:58-59; 2:92)

As a general explanation, 'appropriate incongruity' flags precisely where 'superiority/aggression' excels. The interpersonal aspect of amusement has no place in such theories, which consider the psychology of a single individual. Furthermore, they ignore or fail to account properly for the 'disparagement' elements of humour, or for funny events in which real or fictional actors make mistakes, display incompetence, or suffer attacks by fate or other actors.

2.1.3. Tension-Release Theory

Release theories propose that amusement is the body's way of discharging excess nervous energy, aggression, sexual excitement, or any number of other physiological emotions or tensions. The origins of this idea, though foreshadowed by Kant[1], are normally attributed to Herbert Spencer: "Laughter is a form of muscular excitement, and so illustrates the general law that feeling passing a certain pitch habitually vents itself in bodily action...strong feeling of almost any kind produces this result...joyous emotion...mental distress...tickling...cold, and some kinds of acute pain" (1891: 458). The claim that strong feeling of 'almost any kind' produces amusement lacks detailed empirical support and is contradicted both by intuition and by the paltry list of feelings enumerated by Spencer himself (i.e., where is fear? anger?). Nevertheless, the subsequent account of funny stimuli of the incongruity type has been influential. Spencer identified, "descending incongruities" as a major source of amusement, events which defeat built-up expectations to which the body had been emotionally attuned, such as a misbehaved goat that suddenly appears on stage and sniffs at the actors during a climactically poignant theatrical love scene (p. 461-63). The "large amount of nervous energy...suddenly checked in its flow" is released by the "half-convulsive actions we term laughter" (p. 462).

A recent version of this idea was developed by Arthur Koestler in *The Act of Creation* (1964). Koestler uses the metaphor of an inner 'pipeline' which carries emotions as an individual interprets a given narrative: "When the pipe is punctured [by a funny stimuli], and our expectations are fooled, the now redundant tension gushes out in laughter" (p. 51). Koestler is more specific than Spencer in the identification of both the accumulated feeling and the triggering cognitive mechanism. Though "a bewildering variety of moods" may be included in the emotional tension, "it must contain one

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[1] In his *Critique of Judgement* (1790: 203), he states that

> thoughts,...as far as they seek sensible expression, engage the body also. In the exhibition invoved in jest, the understanding, failing to find what it expected, suddenly relaxes, so that we feel the effect of this slackening in the body by the vibration of our organs, which helps to restore their equilibrium and has a benefical influence on our health...*Laughter is an affect that arises if a tense expectation is transformed into nothing*.

ingredient whose presence is indispensable: an impulse, however faint, of aggression or apprehension" (p. 51-52).

As for the 'spark' that ignites laughter, it is *bisociation*, "the perceiving of a situation or idea...in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (p. 32-37). In other words, elements of both aggression and incongruity theories are ingeniously combined.

More in line with current conceptions of physiological processes, Daniel Berlyne (1960, 1969, 1972) proposed that amusement results when an arousal 'boost' that produces unpleasantly high levels of arousal, is followed by a sharp drop or 'jag.'

Relief theories have been popular with medical practitioners, child psychologists, and some sociological fieldworkers. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, substantial evidence suggests that amusement helps to reduce stress and threat-induced anxiety, with consequent benefits to overall health. Furthermore, laughter in early infancy typically follows the exposure to highly arousing stimuli, previously found threatening, which are now judged to be 'safe': tickling, monster masks, jumping off a 'high' platform, etc... (Sroufe and Wunsch, 1972; Rothbart, 1973; McGhee, 1979: 127). A number of sociologists have also observed joking and laughter being used by social actors in real-life situations to relieve tension and anxieties. An example is the aforementioned study by Coser (1959), in which hospital patients used "jocular griping" to strip risky or dangerous situations of their threatening aspects.

Like other monocausal amusement theories, the 'relief' explanation seems more plausible in some cases than in others. Fear-related laughter of the type commonly observed in children can also be observed in adults who watch horror films, engage in 'danger sports' or ride rollercoasters. In these cases a truly strong emotional state is followed by relief and amusement, once the situation is perceived as safe. However, while 'nervous laughter,' Coser's 'jocular griping,' or Spencer's example of tragedy upstaged by a goat might be included in such a category of events, generalizing to other funny stimuli, such as jokes and puns, seems far-fetched. The 'tension' that a short nonsensical phrase ('a knife without a blade that has no handle') can produce in a hearer must be minimal, yet the laughter produced by such stimuli can be as explosive as any. In such cases, Koestler is forced to assume, ad hoc, the existence of unconscious reserves of

emotion: "a minute cause can open the tap of surprisingly large stores of energy from various sources: repressed sadism; repressed sex; repressed fear; even repressed boredom" (1964: 60). The only evidence provided for such stores is the amusement itself.

It is also unclear how this type of theory might account for humorous appreciation of the mistakes, slips, and blunders of the self or of others. As has been pointed out above, Koestler excludes these from analysis as 'entirely mirthless and humorless.'

Unlike most other amusement theories, empirically testable physiological claims are additionally made by relief explanations. These have failed to stand up to experimental scrutiny. Deckers, Jenkins and Gladfelter (1977) found that changes in the difficulty of a test presented to subjects (presumably affecting tension) had no effect on laughter at the incongruous resolution of the test. Moreover, it appears that Berlyne's arousal 'jag,' or the reduction in nervous or emotional 'tension,' does not occur with the onset of a punchline or with laughter itself. Measures of physiological responses to humour have shown amusement to be correlated *positively* with increased heart rate, increased skin conductance, increased muscle tension, altered respiratory patterns, and characteristic EEG changes (McGhee, 1983: 16). The idea that the build-up of an amusing narrative produces a tension 'burst' by its unexpected conclusion seems implausible. Godkewitsch (1976) found that arousal was related mainly to the punchline of a joke, rather than to its body.

Sigmund Freud proposed a slightly divergent 'relief' interpretation in his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Freud viewed 'tendentious wit' (i.e., disparagement, 'toilet,' sexual, or 'black' humour) as a technique for liberating repressed aggressive or sexual desires. Jokes were considered a socially acceptable way of expressing certain taboo topics or sentiments, thus serving (like dreams) as a kind of 'escape valve' for the unconscious.

Needless, to say, this theory cannot be applied to all types of funny stimuli. In fact, Freud did not provide a global and consistent definition for the techniques of wit, and admitted the existence of 'nontendentious humour'; this 'relief' interpretation was only meant as a part of a lesser-known theory encompassing what he called 'wit,' 'comedy,' and 'humour.' Nevertheless, a number of followers have taken its proposals to implausible extremes:

Question: Why did the moron jump off the Empire State Building?

Answer: Because he wanted to make a smash hit on Broadway.

The huge phallic shape is the father's penis, the sight of which impels the child to competitive exhibition. He hopes to have a sensational success, but also fears a catastrophic defeat. Unable to abandon his ambitions, he pays in advance.

(Martha Wolfenstein, cited in

Gruner, 1979: 78)

2.1.4. Play Theory

The fourth most commonly cited global explanation of amusement dates from 1902, when both M. Dugas (see Grieg, 1969: 271-72) and James Sully independently proposed that it follows the adoption of a 'play-mood' or playful point of view towards a particular object: "Even if the laughable spectacle does not wear the look of a play-challenge...it may so present its particular feature as to throw us off our serious balance, and by a sweet compulsion force us to play with it rather than to consider it seriously" (Sully, 1902: 150).

A more fully developed statement of the theory was provided by Max Eastman in his *Sense of Humour* (1921). Eastman considers the ability to create humour to be a human instinct in itself: "The sense of humor is a primary instinct of our nature...a very inward indispensable little shock-absorber...for making the best of a bad thing" (p. 226/21). According to Eastman, amusement reacts to the observation of failures, disappointments, and other unpleasant stimuli, when they are viewed through the playful lens of humour. This humorous interpretation of events supposedly allows actors to 'free' themselves from the constraints of social norms and 'serious' thought and behaviour, and to overcome anxiety by recasting threats as absurdities.

Gregory Bateson (1955), William Fry (1963) and Michael Mulkay (1988) have recently revived interest in the 'play' interpretation. According to Mulkay, the play-mode is characterized by an absurd multiplicity of meanings:

> in the serious realm we normally employ a unitary mode of discourse which takes for granted the existence of one real world, and within which ambiguity, inconsistency, contradiction and interpretative diversity are problems. In contrast, humour depends on the active creation and display of interpretative multiplicity. When people engage in humour, they are obliged to collaborate in the production. They temporarily inhabit, not a single, coherent world, but a world in which whatever is said and done necessarily has more than one meaning.

(Mulkay, 1988: 3-4)

To prompt the audience for such collaboration, it has been pointed out that comics and humourists of every type provide humour 'cues' to signal that what is to take place is 'not real' or 'not serious' (Fry, 1963; McGhee and Johnson, 1975).

'Play' theories reduce all funny stimuli to 'humour,' in the sense I have defined it -- *intentional* provocations of amusement, whether created by others or by the subject of laughter himself. Such a reduction strains credibility, however, in the case of amusement at spontaneously occurring mishaps, incompetence, or discredited claims. When laughter is directed at an individual, the laughter may sometimes be taken as 'not serious,' as 'just a tease/joke,' but other times may actually 'hurt' and be taken very seriously indeed.

Such examples are rarely even considered by play theorists, attention being almost exclusively focused on jokes, friendly teasing, comedy routines, and the like. Mulkay does occasionally attempt an explanation, as with the following excerpt from a political speech:

Conservative politician: The Labour Prime Minister and his colleagues are boasting in this election campaign that they have brought inflation down from the disastrous level of twenty-six per cent. But we are entitled to inquire who put it up to twenty-six per cent?

Audience: (laughter and applause for 8 seconds)

(example from Atkinson, 1984;
cited in Mulkay, 1988: 207)

According to Mulkay, such attacks by politicians represent a competitors' "version of the world as unreliable, illusory or not to be taken seriously." It would be more accurate to say, however, that the cited jibe presents the Labour Party's definition of the situation ('Labour keeps inflation down') as unambiguously *false* --indeed, Mulkay later describes the quip as attempting to "reveal the 'true character'" of Labour's claims (p. 207). This type of discrediting move cannot be described as 'playful,' and neither can the victim's

actions or words be seen as 'nonserious.' The audience is not presented with a multiplicity of meanings but with a clarification of reality: a clarification which to the right audience, nevertheless, is funny.

The specific trigger of amusement is never properly specified in 'play' accounts. 'Entering into a playful/humorous mode,' in this context, provides not an explanation but a tautology. Humour cues are not necessary to amusement; neither are they sufficient for it. As for the switching of contexts and the creation of ambiguous or multiple meanings, these are common occurrences in nonhumorous creative writing and other expressive arts such as poetry or abstract painting. They are also experienced in imaginative fancies and even true 'play' which is non-amusing.

Nevertheless, 'play' theory calls attention to interesting phenomena. The distinction between 'serious' and 'joking/play' modes may be a valid and significant one, even if we do not always laugh 'in jest.' How to characterize this binary contrast becomes an additional problem for any account of amusement. Relatedly, attention is drawn to the 'humour cues' which indeed recur under various guises in performances and presentations of humour. The play of children (and of adults) itself deserves more detailed observation than it has received.

2.2. Pluralistic Theories

The failure to achieve a single-cause explanation of amusement has driven many researchers to abandon the possibility altogether:

It is interesting to notice how, in the literature of laughter, the more ambitious contributors have vainly attempted to bring the varieties of forms of humorous experiences under some definite laughter-causing principle... In order to bring causes of laughter into the desired category attempts are made which are, in themselves, frequently humorous... It is a hopeless task...to secure anything approaching a common principle.

(Kimmins, 1928: 1)

In some cases, the diversity of causes posited is accompanied by the proposition that the explanandum behind felt funniness and observed laughter, therefore, can be divided into various essentially different phenomena.

It may be that, despite the apparent subjective and physiological unity of 'amusement,' and certain contextual similarities, various independent causes lead to its occurrence or to several species of it. Unfortunately, however, there has been little consensus regarding the classification of the various 'types' of amusement according to stimuli. Here follows a partial list of lists:

Quintillian: (1) urbanitas, (2) venustum, (3) salsum, (4) facetum, (5) iocus, and (6) dicacitas. (in Grieg, 1923: 227)

Hazlitt (1818): (1) the laughable --incongruous, (2) the risible --incongruous and contrary to custom, and (3) the ridiculous --incongruous and contrary to sense and reason.

Cordaveaux (1875): (1) slight imperfections, (2) slight annoyances, (3) the unexpected or surprising, (4) the indecent or obscene (in Grieg, 1923: 259)

Michiels (1886): (1) bodily vices or perturbations, (2) disrupted equilibrium among human faculties, (3) disadjustments of a person to the world (4) disadjustments of a person to his own society (in Grieg, 1923: 259).

Freud (1905): (1) wit (tendentious and nontendentious), (2) the comic, (3) humour.

Sidis (1913): (1) ascending laughter --difficult things become easy for the laugher, (2) descending laughter --easy things become difficult for others.

Gregory (1923): evolutionary scale of increasing "humanization" of laughter, from more aggressive to more sympathetic forms.

D.T. Wieck (1967): (1) laughter where there is no object, (2) laughter at someone, and (3) laughter at something.

Giles and Oxford (1970): (1) humorous, (2) social, (3) ignorance, (4) tension-release, (5) derision, (6) apologetic, (7) tickling.

Poyatos (1993): (1) affiliation, (2) aggression, (3) social, (4) anxiety, (5) fear, (6) joy, (7) comicality and ludicrousness, (8) amusement, (9) self-directedness, (10) certain random interactive occurrences.

Critical examination of any such list will find it no more adequate a description of the facts than one of the monocausal theories. "A priori," to Giles and Oxford "it would appear that laughter principally occurs under seven mutually exclusive conditions" (p. 97), as enumerated above. Are they truly 'mutually exclusive'? Amusement at the blunder of a long-standing enemy, for instance, might qualify as both 'derision' and 'tension-release.' Would an ethnic joke be classified under 'humour' or 'derision'?

        None of these typologies has proved particularly helpful in understanding the phenomena. None has achieved general recognition. Most of them seem relatively arbitrary, while the others discriminate according to either trivial or patently misguided

principles. However, at least they recognize the existence of real differences between funny stimuli which monocausal theorists have often ignored or fail to treat convincingly.

2.3. 'No Theory'

More prudent, and perhaps more popular today, is the agnostic stance, which withholds judgment on general theories or classifications until more is known about particular areas. Or rather, a pluralistic theory is generally assumed, without commitment to any particular classification:

If we have learned anything from the study of humor it is that oversimplified, global explanations are inadequate to the task.... The focus on specific issues within the broad area of humor, laughter, and comedy liberates the theorist and basic researcher from premature and unwarranted generalizations. By restricting their field of view, students of humor are better able to deal with the complexity of the phenomenon.

(McGhee and Goldstein, 1983, vol. I, p. vii)

For many, such an attitude will suffice. One need not always see the wood if it is a single tree that requires attention. Nevertheless, such statements seem post hoc justifications for a situation into which humour researchers have been forced. A general overview of the field would be of undeniable value, and such a perspective must be possible. Though laughter may not be a simple stimulus-response reflex describable in a single way, there must be some manner in which the various current or perhaps future theories can be integrated to form a coherent field. The relationship between incongruity and disparagement humour, for instance, must be clarified: are they to be subsumed under a larger explanation, divided by some subtle boundary, combined into a new structure, or fractionated into lesser elements along some undiscovered plane?

The current situation can perhaps then be characterized as one of increasing but disorganized or at least divided knowledge. Experimental and other types of data, interesting in themselves, continue to grow, but there lacks an encompassing framework within which to discuss the findings. Inevitably, without a coherent way to express the relationships between different isolated fields, individual researchers tend towards one or another of the general, outdated and unsatisfying old theories of superiority, tension-

release, incongruity, and the like. Or worse, they combine elements from each in a more or less unprincipled manner. There is no general agreement as to what the best questions to ask are, how the basic phenomena should be defined, or how the different types of stimuli should be classified. The search for a general theory has been abandoned as unrealistic, but the existing subtheories cannot be reconciled with each other.

3. Amusement Theory and its Validation

The preceding discussion constitutes a typical example of a popular sub-genre in the humour-research field, the critique of past and present causal theories (especially in preparation for the unleashing on the reader of a new-and-improved attempt). What has been less common, indeed rare, is the consideration of the general criteria and methodologies that can, have, or should be used for assessing or validating theories.

It will be argued in this section that most humour theorists have intuitively followed a methodology which, though distant from the ideal of scientific practice, represents the most promising procedure for understanding phenomena such as amusement. Making this procedure explicit, however, may be of use both to better follow it through and to better compare and assess its results. The methodology, which I will call 'aggregate introspection,' is most suitable for studying features of everyday thought, emotion, and experience which are familiar to all human beings but inaccessible to controlled and objective observation. The first step of the procedure is for the theorist to gradually develop a description of relevant phenomena through a process of continuous testing and modification of the description with an expanding body of diverse empirical facts derived from everyday experience. He must then communicate his results in a manner --normally by the use of many and varied illustrations-- which will allow others to understand his proposed concepts and relations, and to put them to the test themselves. The validity of the resulting theory can then assessed by all those who read and consider its proposals, by an identical process of testing with reference to their own experience. A successful theory of this type is one with which the largest and most varied body of competent readers will identify.

The aggregate introspection method is that which has been used to develop (and should be used to assess) the amusement theory proposed in Part Two of the thesis, as well as its extension (covering laughter and humour) in Part Three.

3.1. Amusement and Conventional Scientific Methods

A causal theory of amusement claims that a particular cause (the amusement stimulus) leads to a particular effect (the amusement response). Can such a relation be demonstrated? And if so, how?

In conventional scientific practice, causal relations ('A causes B') are proposed as hypotheses which may then be tested against empirical cases. Tests may be engineered by the artificial provocation of appropriate circumstances (i.e., in an experimental laboratory) or carried out by seeking, collecting, and reporting observations of naturally occurring events. Researchers will attempt to see if it is the case that when 'A' occurs or is brought about 'B' always follows, and whether occurrences of 'B' are always preceded by 'A'. These tests should be objective, in the sense that observation are of events external to the mind of the observer, and thus shareable by other observers. 'A' and 'B' should be describable in such a way that any trained researcher could carry out and report tests. If predictions are not borne out by any proper test, the hypothesis may be discarded or modified. Additional hypotheses may also be generated to account for variability of effects under different circumstances. A hypothesis which is highly falsifiable and yet remains unfalsified across all or most successive tests may be established as a theory.

In the case of amusement, this procedure cannot be undertaken in the same manner. A theory attempting to characterize the cause(s) of amusement is *not testable* in the conventional scientific sense, due to the obstacles to objective observation of the basic phenomena. In the testing of amusement theories, there can be no interobserver agreement regarding the observation of either cause or effect (at least in most cases).

Amusement, as we have seen, reacts to a cognitive stimulus of some type, that is, to a mental event. 'Appropriate incongruity,' 'non-seriousness,' or 'superiority over an other' all attempt to characterize certain perceptions experienced by a subject, who does not ordinarily conceptualize them in such terms himself. Without science-fiction brain scans or telepathy, these events cannot be observed directly, except by the subject himself. Thus, two observers can never agree sensibly on whether a particular period of mental activity within one of them, let alone a third party, could be plausibly

characterized as a case of 'superiority,' 'incongruity,' or whatever. Only one of the two observers would have direct sensorial access to the mental activity in question.

Amusement itself, of course, is an equally elusive phenomenon. As we have seen, laughter cannot be taken as a transparent sign of its occurrence, and neither can the assertions of an actor. Again, therefore, we encounter the essential impossibility of inter-observer agreement. Moreover, the expression of amusement is highly sensitive to observation itself. The experimental paradigm is notoriously effective in eliminating laughter from interaction. Subjects, often isolated in the experimental room, nervous, and aware of their condition of observed 'subjects/lab rats' rarely exhibit the uninhibited displays of laughter common in social interaction:

> An index as to the artificiality and sterility of much of the humor research to date is that the majority of researchers do not incorporate any measure of *laughter* in their work. One suspects that this is because they know from experience that many of the persons they are observing will not actually laugh.
>
> (Chapman, 1983: 137)

In my own short experience with the experimental approach (Jauregui, 1993) I noticed substantially more (and more suggestive) laughter in the few minutes before and after the procedure than during.

3.2. Aggregate Introspection

As objective tests of amusement theories appear unfeasible, the remaining alternative is for subjective tests to be employed. Any subject of amusement --that is to say, any human being-- may develop and test a theory of amusement by mere introspection. Normally, individuals do not devote much thought and effort to such endeavours, but they are nevertheless capable: at an intuitive level, all of us know what makes something funny (as well as many other features of the laughter triad), and can draw upon large pools of experience to make this intuitive knowledge more explicit.

Moreover, if a relatively accurate causal theory of amusement is presented in detail to any individual, he is likely to recognize its accuracy and prefer it to less accurate ones, by reference to his own experiences. In possession of an inexhaustible fountain of first hand data (i.e., past and present knowledge of his own amusement) as well as of second- and third-hand data (others' apparent/alleged amusement), he is sufficiently equipped to judge whether the theory accounts for the facts in a plausible way. Indeed, an individual *must* look inwardly to make any such decision. Only when considering his own experiences can he be certain of the presence and degree of amusement, as well as of the object of amusement and/or laughter. Only by reference to such experiences, by a process of identification or 'projection,' can he understand the potential reality behind others' laughter display (whether observed naturalistically or measured with a 'laugh-o-meter').

If causal theories of amusement can only be tested by an individual scientist, the results of any test will be valid only for himself. A more general validity may be obtained, however, *if many individuals carry out the relevant testing and agree on the result*. In practice, though not always explicitly, this **aggregate introspection** method has been the usual procedure applied in the field of humour (and, incidentally, in other areas of social and human sciences).

3.3. Aggregate Introspection in Humour Research

All amusement theorists have been driven to the 'aggregate introspection' procedure, though it has rarely been discussed explicitly. An analysis of the texts of humour theorists, from Plato to Raskin, will reveal a common attempt to engage the reader's imagination and self-reflective abilities. The use of hypothetical examples forced on the reader by the second-person 'you,' for example, is common:

> Take a case. You are sitting in a theatre, absorbed in the progress of an interesting drama.... There appears from behind the scenes a tame kid, which...walks up to the lovers and sniffs at them. You cannot help joining in the roar which greets this *contretemps*.
>
> (Spencer, 1891: 461)

> If you feel that such distortions of the human face do not really exist, that Daumier, deliberately exaggerating, merely pretended that they exist, then you are absolved from horror and pity and can laugh at his grotesques. But if you feel that this is indeed what Daumier saw in those de-humanized faces, then you are looking at a work of art.
>
> (Koestler, 1964: 70)

Equally rife is the inclusive 'we':

> For most of us laughter bubbles to the fore only rarely when there is no one else around. These are occasions when we relive amusing accidents or when in daydreams we conjure up thoughts of others. Sometimes an author can levitate us so that we 'lose' ourselves in the story and imagine ourselves as first-hand witnesses to funny events. When we laugh it is as though we were actually present.
>
> (Chapman, 1983: 148)

Such assertions are wholly unsubstantiated, except by the author's own personal experience and perhaps his knowledge of a few other cases. Nevertheless, humour theorists feel confident enough about their typicality and generalizability to offer them as 'stories' in which the reader himself is included. Even when the author retells examples from his own perspective, or uses the impersonal third-person terms 'he,' 'subject,' 'speaker/hearer,' 'actor/observer,' and the like, the use of hypothetical examples in itself invites the reader to consider the plausibility of the author's words by reference to personal experience. Such hypothetical examples are perhaps the most universal feature of humour theory writing:

> If I see a character in a film accidentally lean against the lever of a slot machine and thereby hit the jackpot, I might be amused by this incongruity. But if I were to do the same thing accidentally in a gambling casino, my laughter might be all the greater because my enjoyment of the incongruity would be boosted by my positive feelings toward my sudden good fortune.
>
> (Morreall, 1982: 251)

These may even be supplemented with direct requests to exercise the imagination, as in the excerpt from Spencer quoted above ("Take a case..."), or this further example from Morreall's article: "Even adult laughter need not involve incongruity; *consider* our laughter on winning a game or on anticipating some enjoyable activity" (p. 245, my italics).

Such true or imaginary anecdotes are often complemented by a second common technique for stimulating audience participation. Particularly in the case of verbal and pictorial humour, the reader can be engaged directly by being offered examples of amusement stimuli to be consumed on the spot for immediate analysis. Indeed, many books and articles in the field could be profitably ransacked by comedians for material and inspiration. Victor Raskin, for example, includes no less than 400 jokes in his *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (1985).

The substantive strategy employed by these authors has varied little. Commonly, illustrations are provided of funny events, which are interpreted according to the theory proposed (i.e., jokes contain incongruities, mistakes are incongruities, etc). As a contrast, situations where the causal factor is lacking or disappears are sometimes suggested, with claims that amusement in these cases is also absent or curtailed (i.e., scientific discoveries resolve incongruities, producing surprise and admiration). Illustrations may also be offered to demonstrate that variations in the causal stimulus cause variations in amusement (i.e., the greater the incongruity, the greater the amusement). The quotes by Spencer, Morreal, Chapman, and Koestler cited above include examples of all three types. Implicit in this procedure is the claim that if these descriptions of reality find resonance in readers, who thus find the theory plausible, such support will be evidence of its validity.

In such theoretical works, experimental evidence, statistics, and documented cases of amusement are rarely to be found. These types of observations are more common in analyses of topics at one remove from the question of the causes of amusement, analyses which often admit their indirect link to the central concerns of the field. Towards the end of a review of the experimental study of 'disparagement humour,' associated with 'superiority' theories, Dolf Zillman (1983: 103) concludes that "dispositional considerations (...) project *how funny* a disparaging event will be to whom; but they fail to predict whether or not it will *be funny* in the first place." In a review of research on cognitive models of humour, Jerry Suls admits that though this type of analysis "describes a part of the humor experience,...[it] is not a complete account" (1983: 54-55). For the reasons provided above in section 3.1, such research is fundamentally unsuited to the task of validating a general account of amusement.

When discussing the validity of theories, authors again most often resort to the presentation of hypothetical anecdotes and directly amusing stimuli, allowing the reader to falsify where supposedly appropriate:

> The familiar instance of a man joining in the laugh against himself makes nonsense of the [aggression] theory.
>
> (Baillie, 1921: 272)

> Others, with Locke, have supposed that heterogeneity or ... incongruity is naturally comic. Yet nobody need laugh at the combination of a hot sun with a cold wind.
>
> (Carritt, 1923: 554)

Reference to the aggregate level of assessment also takes place, most often during introductions which bemoan the lack of a generally satisfying explanation for amusement:

> No all embracing theory of humour and/or laughter has yet gained widespread acceptance and possibly no general theory will ever be successfully applied to the human race as a whole.
>
> (Chapman and Foot, 1976)

> In the first century the Roman Quintillian complained that no one had yet explained what laughter is, though many had tried. And even with all the philosophers and psychologists who have tackled the problem in the intervening centuries, the story is pretty much the same today -- we are still without an adequate general theory of laughter.
>
> (Morreall, 1982: 243)

These types of statements leave unsaid the implied conclusion that a theory of amusement which 'generally' does not convince is almost certainly untrue. Most readers will intuitively agree with the implication, however, especially after exposure to the theories themselves.

3.4. The Method in Detail

The 'aggregate introspection' method may be described as a three-stage process: (1) Development and testing of a hypothesis by its creator; (2) individual assessment; and (3) aggregate assessment.

3.4.1. Development and Testing of a Hypothesis

In the beginning, there is the untested hypothesis and its originator. Attempting to trace amusement theories to such roots would be pointless, considering the ancient interest in the subject, but we may assume that such roots exist. For the sake of simplicity, let us consider the case of a monocausal theory:

'X, and only X, causes amusement in all cases of X'
(i.e., the perception of incongruity, and only such a perception, causes amusement in all cases where incongruity is perceived)

The creator of this hypothesis, then, would be immediately able to test it against numerous events recorded from past experience in his memory; and against subsequent events as they occur in his unfolding daily life.

Causal relations can never be directly demonstrated in science, but they can easily be disproven. Thus, the above hypothesis would be supported if both of the following proposals should resist falsification over many trials:

a) In cases of amusement, amusement always follows X
b) In cases of X, amusement always follows

If both statements were found to be supported by events for all cases encountered over a reasonable period, our scientist would have transformed his hypothesis into a tested theory, albeit an *individually* tested one.

For example, if 'the perception of incongruity' were to be tested as the only and consistent cause of amusement, the assessor could consider his various experiences of amusement --verbal jokes, satire, parody, spontaneous mishaps, tickling-- and attempt to decide whether these antecedent events could be characterized as 'incongruities' in some consistent sense. Conversely, he could attempt to imagine 'incongruities' of varied types and observe whether and how amusement is related to them.

Guidelines for Testing

The testing procedure should be conducted according to three basic considerations. Firstly, the causal factor should be defined as precisely as possible. Vague concepts such as 'rigidity,' 'incongruity,' 'superiority,' 'tension-release,' or 'play,' may prevent a researcher from discriminating efficiently between relevant and irrelevant phenomena. They facilitate, rather, the application of the relevant term wherever convenient --not as undesirable a state of affairs in scientific practice as it is in scientific theory.

Secondly, the theorist should seek, as far as possible, to include within the testing programme the widest range of diverse instances of both the proposed cause (i.e., 'incongruity') and amusement itself. Though obvious, this guideline can prove difficult to achieve due to cultural and theoretical biases, as well as practical problems.

One common failing is the excessive focus on amusement, rather than the proposed causal event. Perhaps due to the greater saliency of amusement itself within their overall project, most theorists have organized their data according to a set of stimuli already known to be funny. The set of events generated by the definition of the cause, however, often seems to have been left unexplored. As we have seen, 'superiority' theorists have restricted their use of the term to certain misfortunes of others or to 'victory' in 'contests of wit' (i.e., Gruner, 1979), disregarding such events as success in sporting matches, or an army general's perception of relative rank when confronted with a private.

Regarding the full range of 'funny things,' the tendency to identify amusement with humour (i.e., *intentional* attempts to provoke it) has already been discussed in

Chapter One. In addition to the hugely varied range of unintentionally funny events, other relatively rare elicitors such as tickling, sensory illusions, magic tricks, amusement rides, or 'brain teasers' often escape mention. Certain instances of mirth may be difficult to test merely due to practical problems in overcoming barriers of distance: the laughter of young children or of peoples from radically different cultural backgrounds. Many situations also escape easy analysis due to their involving nature. Laughter is a pleasant experience occurring most often in relaxed, informal settings. These, however, are precisely the settings where an analyst will find the greatest obstacles to achieving the attitude of an observer. The nature of the hypothesis itself may make certain stimuli more salient and others relatively invisible. Furthermore, temptations (of a more or less conscious nature) to ignore certain events which do not fit comfortably with a favoured scheme may obstruct a fair survey. Finally, disliked mental occurrences (i.e., 'cruel' laughter) may be repressed or disguised by the mind of the theorist.

The third proposed guideline recommends that when testing particular cases, the analyst should seek to apply the definition of the cause of amusement in a consistent way. This uniformity will only be possible, of course, if a sufficiently clear and precise definition has been constructed. If the meaning of this definition must be stretched or distorted to accommodate a particular fact, the hypothesis is falsified.

Non-Falsification of the Hypothesis

If these three principles have been followed, and neither statement 'a)' nor statement 'b)' falsified, the hypothesis is confirmed by the researcher. In this case, the hypothesis should not only describe an element common to the range of funny events (and lacking in non-funny ones), but also plausibly account for and successfully characterize the evident diversity of amusing stimuli in terms of the definition proposed. Differences between jokes, tickling, gaffes, and other phenomena should be directly attributable to typical or logical variations in the characteristics or form of the cause identified.

Falsification and Reformulation

If statement 'a)' and/or 'b)' were falsified by facts, the researcher could attempt to modify the definition of X, yielding 'X_1 causes amusement.' Another option would be to add one or more 'exception clauses':

a) 'In cases of amusement, amusement always follows X (except when it follows Y)[1]'

b) 'In cases of X, amusement always follows (except if G is also the case, and then Q follows instead)'

The new revised hypothesis could then be tested as before. If such revisions yielded no better result, the hypothesis would have to be abandoned altogether.

In this process, a hypothesis guides the theorist to the empirical facts, and in turn these guide the theorist back to refreshing his hypothesis. The cycle may be repeated numerous times, ideally yielding an ever-closer fit between the two.

<u>Supporting Evidence</u>

Additional confirmation of the hypothesis could be obtained if it led to the explanation or understanding of well-known facts surrounding amusement, laughter and humour. Psychological, communicational, and social effects of amusement, laughter, and humour, as well as their uses and possible 'functions' (See Chapter Eight); the influence of 'affective disposition' on amusement at disparagement humour; the common presence of ambiguous or clashing elements in verbal and other types of humour; the use and effectiveness of humour 'cues' by comedians; the influence of interpersonal and interactional variables on amusement. If such phenomena can be accounted for naturally by a specific causal hypothesis of amusement, or its logical corollaries, the hypothesis would warrant additional credibility. In themselves, however, these sorts of elucidations cannot provide full validation of a thesis. It might be expected that a good theory will constitute a hub connecting many recurrent facts in the field, but the main test of its

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[1] This line would yield a 'pluralistic' hypothesis (See Section I.B.)

validity continues to be its explanatory power regarding the varied range of amusement-provoking situations.

3.4.2. Individual Assessment

I have outlined in some detail the first stage of the proposed validation procedure, the testing of a hypothesis by its originator. Stage 2 is, in form, practically identical to stage 1: A proposed cause of amusement is carefully defined and then considered as a description of events over as wide a range of phenomena as possible, leading to acceptance, falsification, or reformulation/retesting.

In this case, however, the hypothesis has been borrowed by a reader or hearer from the more-or-less developed theory of an originator. Faced with an explanation such as 'appropriate incongruity provokes amusement,' an individual can exploit his exclusive access to his own mental processes in order to test the idea.

As documented above in section 3.3, every theorist of amusement invites his audience to participate in the scientific endeavour by checking the facts presented for himself, and on himself. A successful humour theorist ideally constructs his text as a systematic soliciting of recognition from his readers. Indeed, humour theorists often refrain from providing actual cases of amusement as evidence, aware of the emptiness of such proof. Hypothetical cases and examples of humour will suffice, as the crucial testing is to be done in the reader's head. When facts are produced, these serve merely as illustrations to clarify a point. If the illustrations are well chosen, and the argument well-developed, the reader will have all the tools and materials necessary to follow the author's testing procedure. Whether in the end he agrees with the author's conclusions is another matter. As an experimenter himself, he may abandon the hypothesis or perform new modifications upon it.

3.4.3. Aggregate Assessment

The third stage of the testing process occurs at a higher level of analysis. Assuming a theory comes to be tested by numerous individuals, the proportion of these who generally accept/reject the hypothesis represents a kind of aggregate assessment of its validity, a meta-test. The theory as originally distributed can be considered as a sort of questionnaire of unusually large size (and only one rather leading question). In conventional science, a theory can be tested publicly, by a prediction or set of predictions which are either borne out or falsified by an appropriate experimental procedure. In the realm of the emotions, intentions, motivations, and thought, the experimental procedure must be carried out privately, but the *results* can be shared publicly.

For a theory of amusement to be considered validated, an extremely high proportion of 'experimenters' would have to agree on its validation. Mere numbers, however, cannot be the sole criterion. Particular weight should be granted to the opinion of professional social scientists, and especially those with experience in humour and related academic fields (i.e., emotion, communication, and other areas of psychology and sociology). Attention should also be paid to the possible adhesion to the view of assessors from widely divergent theoretical, disciplinary, ideological and other backgrounds and leanings. Ideally, and allowing for cases of poor comprehension of the theory and shoddy application of tests, an almost complete unanimity would be required. In less abstract terms, this could be achieved by the general acceptance of a single paradigm by the main of humour research.

Admittedly, the procedure is wanting in scientific rigour. The variability in completeness, quality, and method of individual 'tests' cannot be assessed in practice. Many extraneous factors are likely to bias these procedures: variable exposure to theoretical alternatives, preconceived ideas on amusement, time and effort devoted to the task, self-reflective and analytical skills, cultural distance from the idioms used in the theoretical text. There exists no higher authority, furthermore, charged with the task of 'counting heads' and deciding upon the outcome of the aggregate test, nor any systematized procedure for such head-counting or for the weighing of the relative importance of opinions.

Three justifications can be used to defend the method, though none of them will satisfy a committed skeptic. The most decisive of these, perhaps, is the lack of alternatives for humour theory. Due to reasons outlined above, traditional methods fall short of the task, and 'aggregate introspection' seems altogether less ineffectual. A case could be made, certainly, for abandoning the amusement project altogether. I will assume, on the other hand, that the search for answers may be worthwhile --though the certainty of such answers should not be overestimated.

The second reason is the historical derivation of the first: as documented above, proposals of causal amusement theories have always employed a more-or-less sophisticated version of this method. This 'safety in numbers' argument does not improve the intrinsic credibility of the approach, but it does bolster its claimed status as 'least awful of several evils.'

Finally, on a more positive note, 'aggregate introspection' has actually been used in other fields with great success, even acclaim (as well as, admittedly, considerable puzzlement and resistance towards the method itself). A case will be considered below.

<div align="center">3.5. A Successful Precedent</div>

It could be argued that silence on matters requiring such methods would be more prudent. On the other hand, they have in the past achieved results which have been widely recognized and applauded.

One outstanding example of aggregate introspection can be found in the work of Erving Goffman. This American sociologist developed a theory of the behaviour of individuals during social interaction which has had an enormous influence throughout the social sciences. Despite its success, however, his work has baffled researchers since its publication due not only to the novelty of the topic he treated, but also to the methods employed. These methods fit well with the description provided above of 'aggregate introspection.' Goffman's texts can accurately be characterized as following a systematic solicitation of recognition from his readers, a recognition which moreover has been largely achieved in the widest of academic and non-academic circles.

Goffman routinely made claims about social behaviour without what might be called 'proper empirical support.' Indeed, the bulk of his writings consist of such claims, and Goffman had no qualms about admitting the fact:

> Throughout the papers in this volume unsubstantiated assertions are made regarding the occurrence of certain social practices in certain times and among peoples of various kinds. This description by pronouncement is claimed to be a necessary evil. I assume that if a broad attempt is to be made to tie together bits and pieces of contemporary social life in exploratory analysis, then a great number of assertions must be made without solid quantitative evidence.
>
> (1971:   xiii-xiv)

In this and other passages, Goffman implies that (despite his own practice) empirical support *could* be obtained for his assertions, a possibility that many of his commentators have seconded: "Whether people share the interactional concerns identified by Goffman, and whether they orient to such concerns in the manner he suggests, are frequently

questions which await further inquiry" (Drew and Wooton, 1988: 6). As Drew and Wooton suggest, however, these questions still 'await' inquiry --they have not in fact been tested. Indeed, though many of his concepts have become widely accepted and applied, there has been little empirical work explicitly aiming to test and follow up on his ideas, no Goffman 'school' or research centre to study his 'interaction order' (Drew and Wooton, 1988: 2). Why is this the case? Considering "the breadth of Goffman's appeal and the popularity of his writings" (Burns, 1992: 1), and his alleged status as "one of the leading sociological writers of the post-war period" (Giddens, 1988: 250), it seems highly unlikely that mere lack of interest could explain such a state of affairs almost forty years after *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959).

I would argue that the nature of Goffman's assertions makes unfeasible, problematic, or merely superfluous any conventional empirical study. The everyday events, practices, and situations which he excelled in describing and classifying -- attempts to control bodily outbursts in public, the uses and meanings of eye-contact, the cues used by actors to interpret 'what is going on'-- together constitute precisely the types of phenomena least amenable to controlled, objective observation. How does one go about 'proving,' for instance, that people universally display 'greeting behaviour' in the manner that Goffman suggests (1971: 62-94)? Trying to reproduce the possible variables in 'the laboratory' (merely one of the infinite possible situations considered by Goffman) seems as far fetched as experimenting with the full range of laughables. Neither could any respondent (nor, hopefully, any researcher) possibly take seriously a questionnaire on the subject...

When bumping into a friend on the street (you see him, he sees you), do you

      A) Immediately make a sign of recognition ('Hello', waving, smile...)
      B) Wait until he makes a sign, then reply.
      C) Go about your business as before
      D) Consciously look away.

It is not that empirical corroboration of these sorts of findings, or at least some of them, would be impossible. Rather, such corroboration would be somewhat naive and superfluous, considering the immediate forcefulness of Goffman's technique at its best. Even naturalistic observation of a conventional kind, while missing what actors hide (arguably the very focus of Goffman's work), could offer only additional cases of the 'already evident.' All of us know, by an intuition founded on masses of first-hand experience, how and when people engage in greeting behaviours, or how and when we experience embarrassment, manage a three-way conversation, or consider someone a bit lunatic. There seems little need to carry out further tests to prove these things to us when a few choice illustrations by this "untiringly perspicacious" observer (Burns, 1992: 2) will suffice to convince each reader of such obvious (if not always verbalized) facts.

Goffman's unorthodox use of empirical data has been widely discussed. He drew his examples from a veritable ragbag of sources: "Some data have been drawn from a study of a mental hospital (hereafter called Central Hospital), some from a study of a Shetland Island community (hereafter called Shetland Isle), some from manuals of etiquette, and some from a file where I keep quotations that have struck me as interesting" (Goffman, 1963: 4). All of these (and other) sources seem to have been given equal weight, and no less than that given to countless hypothetical examples, such as the following:

> The social situation then may be the scene of potential or actual conflict between the sets of regulations that ought to govern. Note the famous conflict of definitions in the situation between summer tourists, who would like to extend summer-resort informality to the stores in the local town, and the natives, who would like to preserve proper business decorum in such places.
>
> (1963: 20)

A similar strategy seems to be in operation, therefore, as in the case of humour theory. The object of providing these examples being merely to illustrate ideas, their origin could be no less than wholly irrelevant: "By and large, I do not present these anecdotes, therefore, as evidence or proof, but as clarifying depictions..." (1974: 15).

Regarding the actual process by which he arrived at his ideas, Goffman left few hints. His books and articles represent complete and self-contained concept structures for which the 'building instructions' seem to have been thrown away. Robin Williams (1988), in attempting to distill them from the substance of Goffman's work, argues that a continuous restructuring of theoretical models was undertaken. Comparisons of a tentative model with a growing body of empirical data would prompt modification of the theory, which in turn would feed back on the range of facts to be analyzed. This technique (the very same I have recommended in my description of 'aggregate introspection') has been called "reciprocal or double-fitting" by W.W. Baldamus: "This may be envisaged by imagining a carpenter alternatively altering the shape of a door and the shape of the door frame to obtain a better fit, or a locksmith adjusting successively both the keyhole and the key" (cited in Williams, 1988: 74-75). A progression of ever-more-precise concepts emerges from a chronological analysis of Goffman's texts. Many critics have expressed puzzlement at the apparently cavalier way in which terms and definitions carefully crafted in one book are altered or abandoned in the next. This lack of cumulation is a feature of the method employed. The same field of events is attacked from various fronts to yield the most accurate description possible, each new thrust strengthening and refining a core of basic concepts while risking other, more tentative, innovations. All throughout, Goffman avoided overestimating the validity of his discoveries. These were to be treated as "exercises, trials, tryouts, a means of displaying possibilities, not establishing fact" (1981: 1).

The relevance of the 'aggregate introspection' process to Goffman's method can best be appreciated by reflecting upon the experience of reading his ideas. Commentators on Goffman have remarked upon the way in which the reader is stimulated to fill out the text with examples from his own experience, and 'seduced' by Goffman's prose into reaching the author's conclusions:

> Many of his more impressive achievements ... consisted as much as anything in the way he organised his subject matter so as to produce an array of instances immediately recognisable to his readers.
>
> (Burns, 1992: 358)

Goffman is the master of the darting observation, in a kind of analytical pointillism. His method seems to involve 'sociology by epitome'. It is a powerful method; it yokes the reader to its purposes; it impresses the reader's mind and experience into its service. It works in something like the following way.

His observations achieve their sense of typicality, however exotic their scenes may actually be, by using but a stroke or two, an observation or two, a detail or two, to indicate the scene which we as readers are to call up from memory, personal experience or imagination. If he succeeds, that is if *we* succeed in calling such a scene to mind, our very ability to do so from his detail or two is 'proof' of its typicality. The typicality of the scene or action has not only been 'shown', but has been enlisted and exploited, and the adequacy of his description, the bit or two of characterization, has *ipso facto* been demonstrated.

(Schegloff, 1988: 101)

These moments of 'recognition' are confirmations for the individual scientist (but *only* for him) that a proposed theory, or some element within it, describes certain events correctly.

As for 'aggregate assessment' itself, it can be argued that Goffman's work has both undergone such a procedure and, what is more, has generally achieved validity through it:

No one would question the claim that Erving Goffman was one of the leading sociological writers of the post-war period. His writings have been more or less universally acclaimed for their luminosity, their charm and their insight. Probably no sociologist over this period has been as widely read both by those in neighbouring social-science disciplines and by the lay public. (...) I want to propose that Goffman should indeed be ranked as a major social theorist, as a writer who developed a systematic approach to the study of human social life and one whose contributions are in fact as important in this regard as those of [Parsons, Merton, Foucault, Habermas, or Bourdieu].

(Giddens, 1988: 250)

[At the time of the publication of his last book *Forms of Talk*, 1981] the breadth of Goffman's appeal and the popularity of his writings outside the special interests of social scientists had been apparent for many years.... Sales of *The Presentation of Self* were over half a million, *Stigma* was reaching towards its thirtieth reprinting, and translations existed in over a dozen languages.... It was surprising to find the theatre critic of *The Guardian* adopting the term "Goffmanesque" for occasional use and, what is more, leaving it unexplained.

(Burns, 1992: 1)

Such statements of Goffman's "universally" acknowledged success attain their true significance when contrasted with the orthodox body of methodological complaints usually leveled against this unique sociologist. His bizarre and heterogeneous set of empirical examples do not prove his theories, his definitions shift and shimmer, the results seem difficult if not impossible to 'test' --and yet, the 'brilliance' of his insights is everywhere admired, within and without the academic circles. Even his 'enemies' speak well of him:

Rarely, if ever, are these weaknesses described by critics in order to undermine Goffman's whole endeavour. More often, the criticisms serve to legitimate the parceling out of some part of Goffman's work and make it possible for this part to be pressed into service for the critic's own project.

(Williams, 1988: 72)

A wide consensus, then, holds that many of Goffman's descriptions accord with the realities of everyday social interaction. Less clear are the precise aspects of Goffman's legacy which have been best corroborated by individual tests on a grand scale. Many will agree that "the conceptual apparatus he made use of proved defective on occasions" (Burns, 1992: 6), but no statistic exists to determine possible patterns in the assessment of success and failure. The generalizability of his findings also remains unknown: Which

elements of the 'interaction order' he described might be common to social interaction everywhere and which to lesser groupings? Though these questions of detail and scope suggest the limits of 'aggregate introspection,' the overwhelming success of Goffman's work demonstrates the considerable potential of this method.

4. Conclusions

I have considered a number of theoretical treatments of the possible cause or causes of amusement. **Monistic explanations** have identified a single cause -- **aggression/superiority, incongruity, superfluous tension, or a playful attitude**-- but none of these has proven convincing for all cases. Each of them, however, has drawn attention to thought-provoking phenomena, which should be taken into account by any theory: superiority theorists to amusement which is directed toward an object/victim, and to dispositional effects; incongruity research to amusement resulting from the mental union of clashing mental frames --as in jokes and wit; tension-release theories to amusement triggered by the inappropriateness of a felt emotion; 'play' interpretations to 'humour cues,' the serious/non-serious distinction, and the activity of play itself.

Pluralistic Theories have attempted to separate amusement into different types according to cause, but no single classification has proven satisfactory. The most common current attitude seems to be that of **non-committal** to any general theory at all, in view of the implausible explanations available. Nevertheless, some answer (whether monist or pluralistic) to the causal question of amusement is certainly desirable to researchers in the field, and almost certainly possible.

In the second half of the chapter I have considered the question of how a causal theory of amusement might be constructed and assessed, in preparation for the proposal of such an account in Part Two of the thesis.

I have argued that such a theory will not be testable according to the conventional scientific paradigm, due to the essentially private nature of the major phenomena. Full confirmation for the complete range of amusement scenarios is only possible by tests carried out by and valid only for an individual scientist. General validity of a hypothesis may be established by aggregate assessment, a consideration of the proportion of individual tests which the hypothesis passes/fails.

Despite the problems associated with this method of **aggregate introspection**, it seems the only viable option for amusement theory. The authors considered in Section I of this chapter, in fact, all resorted to this approach. Further justification has been offered

in the form of an outstanding example of its application in the social sciences: Erving Goffman's thought on everyday social interaction.

In Chapter Three I will suggest that Goffman's relevance to humour research goes far beyond the methodological.

Chapter Three:

The Discrediting of Actors' Self-Claims

1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will develop a theory of the laughter triad based on a fifth candidate to a 'cause of amusement': the discrediting of a social actor's self-claims. The central idea, to be developed fully in Chapters Four to Six, proposes that amusement follows the assessment, by a subject, that a claim made by a person about himself --about his intelligence, knowledge, beauty, strength, courage, possessions, history, or any other characteristic or competence-- has been discredited. A political speaker who portrays himself as a champion of environmental defense can draw laughter from environmental activists aware of his resistance to 'green' legislation in the past. Anyone claiming to be 'on a diet' is vulnerable to the mirth of others if spied secretly tucking into temptation at a pastry shop. Moreover, most self-claims are made tacitly: surgeons claim manual dexterity and care for patients; fashion models claim beauty, grace, and poise; university professors claim certain pools of knowledge and a substantial 'academic curriculum'; and all of us claim 'common knowledge,' 'common sense,' and the ability to see and hear accurately, think logically, coordinate and control our bodies, and talk properly. For these reasons, typical objects of amusement include surgeons who forget tweezers in patients, fashion models who stumble on the catwalk, university professors caught out as ignorant, and any of us found to be uncultured, scatterbrained, muddleheaded, oafish, or inarticulate.

The idea is not new. Indeed, in this chapter I will demonstrate that its history can be traced back as far as any of the better-known theories. Plato, Luigi Pirandello, and William G. Moore described the ridiculous individual as one who believes or presents himself to be different than he actually is. Aristotle and E.F. Carritt identified aesthetic defects --the failure to express what is intended-- as the essence of funniness. J.B. Baillie portrayed amusement as reacting to a perceived incongruity between a goal and its achievement. Henri Bergson, Orrin Klapp, Chris Powell, and J.A. Jauregui have argued that deviance from social norms of thought, appearance, or behaviour provokes hilarity. All of these suggested stimuli of amusement share a close kinship with the notion of 'self-claim discredit.'

Despite such proposals, this theoretical perspective has largely escaped attention. The neglect may have been partly due to the heterogeneity of metaphors and phrasings employed by theorists. A more important factor, however, may have been the lack of an encompassing theoretical framework or field within which such a view might have been more fully developed or understood. From 1959 to 1983, just such a framework was developed by the American sociologist Erving Goffman, around what he called the 'interaction order' (Goffman 1959; 1961; 1963; 1963b; 1967; 1969; 1971; 1974; 1981; 1983). In the second half of the chapter, I will present an introduction to Goffman's work, suggesting that it provides a general understanding of the area within which 'claim-discredit' theorists have struggled, and thus the opportunity for such a view to be more firmly established as an alternative to the better-known accounts of amusement.

2. Claim-discredits in Humour Theory

Numerous scholars and comic artists have developed one or another variety of what I will call 'claim-discredit' theories. The images and metaphors employed by these theorists have varied substantially: seeing behind the deceptive mask of a stage character, judging a work of art to be ugly, noticing a mismatch between ends and achievements, detecting the infraction of a social norm of propriety. This conceptual variety occludes an essential convergence of perspective rarely noticed either by commentators or by the authors themselves. In this section I will present some of the more notable versions of the claim-discredit theory of amusement, under a few basic headings.

2.1. False Fronts:
Plato, Moore, Pirandello

Plato and Aristotle are frequently cited as the respectable forefathers to theories of superiority or aggression (See, for instance, Zillman, 1983; Ziv, 1984). The original texts, however, do not fit comfortably with such a portrayal. In Plato's *Dialogues*, we find the following exchange between Socrates and Protarchus:

Socrates: That being so, observe the nature of the ridiculous.

Protarchus: Be kind enough to tell me.

Socrates: Taking it generally it is a certain kind of badness, and gets its name from a certain state of mind. I may add that it is that species of the genus 'badness' which is differentiated by the opposite of the inscription at Delphi.

Protarchus: You mean, 'Know thyself', Socrates?

Socrates: I do. Plainly the opposite of that would be for the inscription to read, 'By no means know thyself.'

(...)

Socrates: If anyone does not know himself, must it not be in one of three ways?

Protarchus: How so?

Socrates: First, in respect of wealth, he may think himself richer than his property makes him.

Protarchus: Plenty of people are affected that way, certainly.

Socrates: But there are even more who think themselves taller and more handsome and physically finer in general than they really and truly are.

Protarchus: Quite so.

Socrates: But by far the greatest number are mistaken as regards the third class of things, namely possessions of the soul. They think themselves superior in virtue, when they are not.

Protarchus: Yes indeed.

Socrates: And is it not the virtue of wisdom that the mass of men insist on claiming, interminably disputing, and lying about how wise they are?

Protarchus: Of course.

('Philebus', 48-49)

In this dialogue, Plato describes a kind of laughter which is directed *at* another individual. In a later passage he furthermore characterizes it as "delight in [others'] misfortunes" and as a kind of "malice." For these reasons, Plato's words have been classified under the 'disparagement' interpretation of laughter. The above lines, however, far from suggesting that mere disparagement, victory, or superiority result in amusement, specify *the discrediting of unjustified conceit* as the effective cause.

In the dialogue, Socrates defines the ridiculous individual as one who claims to be more/better than he actually is. Usually this occurs because he wrongly believes himself to be so, but the case of "lying" about the self is also considered. The cause of laughter implied in such a definition is **the observation, by a perceiver, that a socially valued self-claim put forward by an actor is false**.

A similar idea emerges from a twentieth century study of Moliere by Will G. Moore (1949). In this work of literary criticism, Moore adopts a new approach to the classic analyses of Moliere's theatre by emphasizing not the social critique they contain but rather the comedy itself. In doing so, he implicitly constructs a theory of amusement based on a theatrical metaphor of 'parts' and 'masks':

All of us play many parts; comedy delights in the situations that force us to abandon or interrupt the part, to remove the mask. Moliere is endlessly inventing such situations, in which men get excited or angry, and cannot keep up the part.

(p. 104)

Despite such general statements, Moore applies these ideas only to Moliere's own plays, which indeed provide countless fitting illustrations. In the case of *Le Malade Imaginaire*, for example,...

> Argan, by nature a healthy man, is persuaded to act as if he were ill. Diafoirus pere devotes all his energies to proving that black is white. His son is a nitwit pretending to be clever. Beline protests an affection she is all too ready to disavow. Toinette adopts a disguise that deceives nobody but her master. The suitor gets into the house under false pretences. Louison feigns death. Argan's doctors parade a power they do not really possess.

(p. 75-76)

Far from being restricted to the works of a French playwright, Moore's account can be applied even more generally than Plato's. Many of Moliere's characters fall neatly under Plato's category of people who turn out to be less venerable than they claim. However, the mask metaphor encompasses a wider range of amusing situations if applied not only to stage characters but also to 'social actors.' Plato gave examples only of standard, socially-valued self-claims such as wealth, wisdom, or physical beauty. Moore, on the other hand, recognizes that all manner of specific self-claims, even socially undesirable ones such as being ill or dead, can be funny when the mask falls or is torn off. The stimulus of amusement implied here is **the observation, by a perceiver, that a self-claim put forward by an actor is false**.

Forty years earlier, Luigi Pirandello had defined the role of the humourist in similar terms. The Sicilian comic playwright described his trade as one of creating and then unmasking fictional characters, who are merely reflections of real human 'mask-wearers':

> Unwillingly, unknowingly, [man] is always wearing the mask of whatever it is that he, in good faith, fancies himself to be: handsome, good, courteous, generous,

unhappy, etc., etc. To think of it, all this is so ludicrous ... yet we lie psychologically just as we lie socially. Everybody straightens up his mask the best he can -- that is, the external mask, for we also have the inner mask, which often is at variance with the outer one.

The humorist readily perceives the various simulations used in the struggle for life; he amuses himself by unmasking them, but he does not become indignant: it's the truth!

<div align="right">(1908; 132, 134, 139)</div>

2.2. Bad Art: Aristotle, Carritt

Aristotle provided a slightly different perspective on the claim-discredit idea. Though his full thoughts on 'Comedy' have been lost, a short passage in *Poetics* provides a tantalizing clue:

> As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.
>
> (*On Poetics*, V, 1)

This view has been taken to depict a particularly cruel and unfair sort of laughter: mockery at the gross deficiencies of fellow human beings. I suspect that Aristotle has been misunderstood in this regard, however, the short paragraph that remains of his thoughts on Comedy having been interpreted without reference to the philosopher's wider views on relevant topics.

The above passage does not actually offer a theory of amusement, but rather a description of stage comedy. If a 'cause of amusement' is to be read into these words, however, Aristotle defines it as "one particular kind of [fault in men] which is a species of the Ugly" -- in other words, an *aesthetic fault*. Specifically, it is that set of ugly things (in persons) which are not productive of pain or harm to others, the 'harmlessly ugly.' What does it mean to say that something is ugly? Though Aristotle did not provide a definition or theory of beauty, his writings on the arts provide some keys to his understanding of the notion and its contrary (see *Poetics*; and Butcher, 1902, for a detailed commentary).

According to Aristotle, objects in nature all tend towards, but rarely achieve, some ideal prototype. All things have a permanent essence, partly occluded by minor deficiencies, damage, and decay: each of a dozen apples, for example, is a slightly flawed

example of the same perfect 'appleness.' Artists attempt to 'imitate nature,' not by copying the observable objects around them, but by discerning and reproducing the ideals towards which nature strives. Similarly, practitioners of the 'useful arts' (scientists, educators, doctors...) attempt to actually supplement the work of nature with activities that build on the existing state of events to produce outcomes ever closer to the perfect model.

If we assume that Aristotle saw beauty as the outcome of a successful work of art, then the beautiful would be that set of things, natural or man-made, which most resemble the ends at which nature aims. Ugliness in persons, then, would be found wherever an aspect of a person (a characteristic or a behaviour), left much to be desired in comparison with the hypothetical 'perfect human being.' If such a shortcoming was not seen as harmful (to either the observer, the actor, or to anyone else), it would be found amusing. Two categories of human ugliness were offered by Aristotle: mistakes and deformities. Following from the above analysis, mistakes can be considered failures to achieve a minimum standard (i.e., sufficient closeness to perfection) regarding a particular skill or competence. Deformities constitute failures to achieve a minimum standard regarding appearance.

Considering the wide range of activities embraced by the label of 'art' in Greek thought (from painting to politics), 'mistakes' and 'deformities' could include a vast array of varied mishaps, errors, and distortions. Aristotle's view of amusement, therefore, probably went beyond the sorts of unseemly images that the phrase 'laughing at ugliness' evokes in the modern reader:

> Taking account of the elements which enter into the idea of beauty in Aristotle, we shall probably not unduly strain the expression [ugliness], if we extend it to embrace the incongruities, absurdities, or cross-purposes of life, its blunders and discords, its imperfect correspondences and adjustments, and that in matters intellectual as well as moral.
>
> (Butcher, 1902: 374)

The notion that nature 'tends' towards a single perfect ideal may well be doubted. In this century, the social sciences have torn apart the idea of a single, objective, 'correct'

and 'natural' ideal of behaviour or appearance: such ideals vary from culture to culture, and from one generation to the next. A more relativized version of the 'ugliness' concept would be required for the Aristotelian view to withstand modern scrutiny.

Just such a perspective was developed in a little-known paper by political theorist E.F. Carritt (1923) who also defined 'the ludicrous' as an "aesthetic defect." Carritt did not recognize the closeness of Aristotle's view to his own, drawing his inspiration rather from Benedetto Croce's *Aesthetic* (1901). According to the Italian philosopher, all fields of human endeavour --logical, moral, economic-- have their aesthetic side. Ugliness was defined by him as a failure in expressiveness, and Carritt identified this failure as the cause of amusement (p. 561):

> A vice, a fallacy, a blunder are, from the moral, logical, economic points of view, serious enough; they are in fact wicked, false, dangerous; and the man who cannot see this is fatuous. Regarded as incoherencies of expression, bits of mechanism adhering to life, faults of style, so to speak, they are ugly and absurd. The man who cannot see this has no sense of humour.
>
> (...)
>
> What, then, is the typically amusing thing? I should say a work of art that misses its mark. The most immediately and undeniably funny thing in the world is what seems to us a bit of high-faluting tragedy or unintended bathos. Of the same kind is any breakdown of dignity or intensity, whenever a man has wished to present himself or his position as venerable or tragic or passionate and is betrayed into words or action inconsistent with the part he would play. (...) Next comes the failure of life, especially in its bodily aspects, to express congruously either the human spirit, which we naturally assume a body should express, or some definite feeling which we expect it to express in a given context.

Carritt holds that when an individual regards the aesthetic side of any human state, action, or production --a work of art, a political speech, a business transaction, a plate of *spaghetti alla carbonara*-- the discovery of ugliness provokes amusement, that is, the discovery that what was meant to have been expressed has not been: the composition of

the painting is confused, the prime minister stutters, the spaghetti turn out to be overcooked and pasty.

Noticing an aesthetic defect is equivalent to discovering that an artist has not produced beauty, that he has **failed to fulfill an expressive self-claim**. In the eye of the beholder, an artist can be held accountable for not only explicit claims about what he sought to achieve (such as the artist's words, cues in the work itself, or its title) but also for implicit self-claims applicable to every artist in the relevant society, and others applicable to artists within the relevant genre or school (i.e., specific standards of quality and style applicable to the mode and genre of expression).

According to Croce, however, every man, in so far as he thinks and acts, can be considered an 'artist': as a manager running a business, as a professor giving a lecture, or as a pedestrian gracefully ambulating and avoiding collisions. What is conventionally labeled 'art' is merely the specialized activity in which expression constitutes the primary aim. Plato's self-deluded boasters and Moore's mask-wearers are objects of ridicule because they fail to actually express what they explicitly or implicitly claim about themselves. Thus, the Aristotelian view can be subsumed under the earlier general statement: **amusement results from the observation, by a perceiver, that a self-claim put forward by an actor is false** (i.e., has not been expressed).

2.3. Unfulfilled Ends: Baillie

J.B. Baillie (1921) developed a further variation on this basic idea. In his words (p. 259),

> Laughter arises when the character or process of an object, which is considered to refer to an end, real or supposed, is judged to be partially or wholly incongruent or incoherent with the end in view. It is important to note that the end must not be given up but must still hold good in spite of the incongruity; and also that the object laughed at must not give way and must be none the worse for its incoherence with the end.

Baillie illustrates with the image of "a malicious wind playing havoc with a dandy's dignity and carrying his hat by leaps and bounds far down the street, with its owner in hasty pursuit." The man insists on the relation between him and his hat, while the forces of nature continue to deny the existence of such a relation.

This theory can be considered a close relation of those discussed so far. A precondition to amusement stipulated by Baillie is the 'appreciation' of an object: "The peculiar character of this mental attitude [appreciation] towards the situation is that we look at it in the light of an end which it seeks to fulfill" (p. 257). In the view developed by Carritt, the mental process exercised upon an object by the individual could well be labeled 'appreciation' in this sense, though he would have added the adjective 'artistic.' Baillie defines 'the ludicrous' as that which falls short of the end aimed at, congruent with the earlier definition that we laugh at that which falls short of expressing the intentions of an 'artist,' or the quality attributed to himself by a stage character.

Baillie's formulation takes for granted the interpersonal nature of the amusement situation. By making this element explicit, the conclusions of Aristotle/Carritt are again reached. The concept of an 'end' implies the existence of (normally human) volition; the concept of 'appreciation' assumes a human appreciator. The fact that "the end must not be given up" and is aimed at "certainly" (p. 259) communicates to the observer that this end is claimed by the actor as his --as in the case of the dandy claiming the ownership of his

hat by running after it. To judge the actual achievements of a person in relation to the intended outcome is to treat the former as aesthetic creations (in Croce's sense).

This particular version, however, helps to clarify an important point: Two different stances may be adopted towards a work of art, and only one may result in amusement. Firstly, the object can be merely perceived or experienced, the individual opening himself up towards it in a freely accepting, non-judgmental way. Secondly, the object may be *judged*, given a critical treatment on the basis of stylistic criteria. The naive museumgoer and the jaded art critic personify the two opposing attitudes, though in practice, of course, both are exercised to various degrees and at different points during an aesthetic experience[1].

It is only when an observer adopts the critical stance that amusement may result, once a shortcoming is spotted. Noticing an expressive fault *as a fault* requires such an attitude of critical assessment. Though the point is implicit in Carritt's article, and even in the ideas of Plato, Moore, and Pirandello, Baillie's focus on the mental attitude of 'appreciation' brings it to the fore.

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[1] This distinction has been made by a number of philosophers who have dealt with aesthetic questions. Gadamer (1966: 5) writes:

...when we judge a work of art on the basis of its aesthetic quality, something that is really much more intimately familiar to us is alienated. This alienation into aesthetic judgment always takes place when we have withrawn ourselves and are no longer open to the immediate claim of that which grasps us.
Gadamer, of course, was interested in emphasizing the moment when a work of art 'grasps' the observer; in the case of amusement, it is rather the distanced 'judgement' which must be applied.

2.4. Deviance:

Bergson, Klapp, Jauregui

Only one variation of this 'claim-discredit' cause of amusement has received much attention among humour researchers and beyond, that of Henri Bergson (1900). For Bergson laughter constituted a corrective for inelasticity in man's behaviour. Social actors are expected by each other to adapt continuously to changing situations, their failures in this regard provoking mirth in others. The trigger of amusement is identified (p. 21) as,

> a certain rigidity of body, mind, and character, that society would still like to get rid of in order to obtain from its members the greatest possible degree of elasticity and sociability. The rigidity is the comic, and laughter is its corrective.

Bergson's personification of society and his identification of an exclusive social 'function' of amusement jar with current sociological thinking. His struggle to extend the idea of 'rigidity' to diverse types of amusing stimuli eventually itself becomes a prime example of risible mental rigidity. Nevertheless, the work contains an unusually exhaustive analysis of the range of amusing events, and many thought-provoking passages.

As Carritt and Baillie, Bergson considers laughter a kind of judgment, indeed an aesthetic one, and makes the distinction between this judgment and the consideration of serious (i.e., tragic) consequences. He also closely paraphrases Plato, identifying "vanity" as "the one failing that is essentially laughable," (p. 174) and arguing that, "however unconscious [an individual] may be of what he says or does, he cannot be comical unless there be some aspect of his person of which he is unaware, one side of his nature which he overlooks; on that account does he make us laugh" (p. 146). In many passages, Bergson could be said to agree that amusement is provoked by the discrediting of actors' self-claims, though the analysis is limited to cases of *socially valued* self-claims. His 'elasticity' requires the achievement of conformity to the many characteristics expected of actors by society in specific situations, to the social norms of proper behaviour[2]. Deviance from these rules, to which most actors claim allegiance, provokes the

amusement of others. In this case, Bergson falls closely in line with the Platonic view, which fails to encompass specific self-claims of neutral or negative social value.

Baillie (p. 289) recognizes a "vague insight" of his theory in Bergson's essay, and Carritt (p.560) finds some sections "extraordinarily near the truth". However, the unfortunate metaphor of 'rigidity' or 'mechanism' is applied in so many other senses that the former considerations often seem lost within a large and incoherent whole. For example, his treatment of verbal humour requires the acceptance of a forced notion of language as a living thing and the joke-work as a 'mechanism' or 'rigidity' encrusted upon it (pp.103-131, esp. 129-30).

The evidently misconceived central metaphor[3] has prevented *Le Rire* from serving as the foundation for a theory of laughter, despite the wide-ranging popularity of the work. It has, nevertheless, exercised a considerable influence, primarily in stressing the social aspects of laughter: the idea that amusement is directed at human beings, whether others or the self; the influence of other participants on mirth; the conception of laughter as a social corrective.

Several other theorists have proposed a view of amusement in terms of violated social norms. Orrin Klapp (1950) described a 'social type' which he claimed was universal throughout human society, a kind of person who is laughed at and ridiculed everywhere (p. 157):

> The fool is distinguished from the normal group member by a deviation in person or conduct which is regarded as ludicrous and improper. He is usually defined as a person lacking in judgment, who behaves absurdly or stupidly. The antics of the fool, his ugliness, gracelessness, senselessness, or possible deformity of body represent departures from corresponding group norms of propriety. The fool is the antithesis of decorum, beauty, grace, intelligence, strength, and other virtues...

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[2] More will be said about the relationship between self-claims and social norms of 'demeanour' or 'propriety' in Chapter Four, 2.4.

[3] Bergson's reliance on the mechanism/life contrast stemmed from his wider philosophical programme, often referred to as 'vitalism.' Bergson (1907) viewed the cosmos as infused with an *elan vital*, a vital impetus or force responsible for the development of time (ie, of events). Human intelligence, through the

This conception of the fool identifies the infraction of social "norms of propriety" as (at least) one cause of spontaneous laughter. Citing *Le Rire*, Klapp also agreed with Bergson in his identification of "social control" as one of the chief functions of the fool.

Chris Powell (1977) has defined humour as "a cornerstone of everyday social order" (p.55) which is targeted at deviant or unconventional individuals and behaviours: "We respond with humour where our attention is drawn to 'events' in the widest sense, which from our perspective seem to break some kind of rule, be it of 'rational' opinion, taste, manners or behaviour" (ibid.: 53). Powell further suggests that to be found funny, such deviance should be perceived as not "too serious" or threatening (p. 53).

Jose Antonio Jauregui (1990) has recently proposed a similar view more explicitly as an amusement theory, within a general model of the emotions. According to Jauregui, the brain is "bionaturally programmed to trigger off the emotional mechanism of laughter --urges to laugh-- each time it receives information through its sensory channels of the infraction of a social norm...with the object of drawing attention to, judging, and penalizing the infraction" (p. 158). Though the precise nature of the 'social norms' referred to is not specified further, both the illustrative anecdotes offered and the examples of codes alluded to ("norms of dressing, walking, reasoning...talking" --pp.162-63) appear to circumscribe a similar domain to that of Klapp's 'impropriety,' Bergson's 'inelasticity,' or Powell's 'non-serious' deviance.

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process of a guided evolution, was a product of this vital force. Within this scheme, amusement could serve a corrective function by punishing deviations (ie, rigidity) from the natural and creative vital flux.

2.5. Others

The views cited above document the existence of a rarely mentioned[4] tradition in humour theory identifying the discredit of self-claims as the cause of amusement. Plato, Will Moore, and Pirandello, with their reference to masks and pretense, provided some of the most direct statements of this interpretation: amusement reacts to the failure by an actor to be who he claims to be. Aristotle and E.F. Carritt phrased the argument in terms of failures by an actor to *express* what he overtly intends (i.e., aesthetic faults), and J.B. Baillie as failures to *achieve* what he overtly intends. Henri Bergson, Orrin Klapp, Chris Powell, and J.A. Jauregui, on the other hand, have couched the theory in the language of normative deviance: amusement follows failures by an actor to achieve what he *should* intend.

This historical introduction to the idea of a 'claim-discredit' theory of amusement is not meant to be comprehensive. It represents a personal selection which will inevitably leave out relevant contributions. Henry Fielding (1742: 249) wrote in preface to *Joseph Andrews* that "the only source of the true Ridiculous ... is affectation". According to Hegel (1842), "any contrast between the essential and its appearance can be ridiculous." Emerson (1843) defined the source of amusement as a contrast between 'being' and 'seeming.' Murray Davis (1993) devotes three chapters of his book to a comic form characterized by the "debunking [of] social units that have become idealized in various ways" (p. 218). It would be surprising to find that several other similar views did not exist, either as monocausal hypotheses, parts of multicausal ones, or implicit ideas in various works. Too many have expressed an opinion on the pan-human topic of laughter for full credits to be allotted. My principal aim has been to illustrate the basic idea with a range of varied attempts to describe it, and to document the support which this theory has enjoyed through the ages.

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[4] 'Claim discredit' accounts have been generally excluded from reviews of amusement theories. Davis' mention of "humour theories...that unmask the ideal self to reveal the actual self" (1993: 219; see also pp. 149-306) is an unusual exception. The authors of these theories have also rarely cited each other.

3. The Sociology of Erving Goffman

The expressive dimension of human behaviour, as such, has not received much attention from social scientists, particularly as it impinges on ordinary interaction. Only limited aspects of the topic have been studied, by some linguists, sociologists of religion, anthropologists interested in symbols and ritual, and researchers in the field of face-to-face communication. Croce's 'Science of Aesthetics' (1901) has not materialized. This may have been one reason why the 'claim-discredit' ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Baillie, Carritt, Bergson and others have not yet found their proper place in humour research.

One sociologist, however, devoted his entire career to delineating a field of study that would focus specifically on the expressive aspect of everyday action: Erving Goffman. In my view, the accounts of amusement that have been presented in this chapter can best be understood in relation to his theory of the 'interaction order,' a theory which according to Anthony Giddens has earned him a place among the "major social theorists" (1988: 250).

Goffman described participants of social interaction as actors who present particular images of themselves before specific audiences. Smooth social interaction, as well as the social standing and emotional stability of participants, depend crucially on maintenance of the individual self-claims which make up these 'stage characters.' Consequently, much is made of situations where self-claims are discredited, and of the resulting embarrassment, ritual reparations, and relevant sanctions. As might be gathered from the preceding discussion, this is the point at which amusement theories of the 'claim-discredit' variety intersect with the analysis of the interaction order.

Before returning to the question of laughter, I will present a short summary of Goffman's thought.

3.1. Self-Claims on the Everyday Stage[1]

Self-claims and their discredit are primarily relevant to human behaviour in situations of **co-presence**, where persons are close enough to mutually observe each other in whatever they are doing. A group of co-present individuals composes a **gathering** located in a **situation**, the spatial environment within which co-presence exists: the driver and passengers on a bus compose a gathering within the situation of the 'bus interior.' If a gathering shares a focus of attention, such as a conversation or a team pickpocketing operation, it becomes an **encounter** (one or more of these may exist within the larger gathering of the 'bus riders'). Co-presence allows each interactant not only to give and receive linguistic messages but to **give off** information about himself and about the way in which he perceives the situation; in fact, even if no **linguistic messages** are transmitted, no participant can avoid giving off such **expressive messages**: clothing may speak of profession, respect for the occasion, and/or vanity, among other things; accent may reveal social class, region, or ethnicity; facial features and expression may give away nervousness, illness, age, and/or gender (1963).

Individuals are generally aware that others will look to these sorts of signs for information about themselves, and thus will manipulate them more or less strategically to give **performances** (including setting, appearance, and behaviour) which they consider to be useful, truthful, appropriate, or desirable in some way. They can be conceived of as **actors** who represent various **parts** to particular **audiences**.

Self-claims are the constitutive elements of such parts (or **self-presentations**), the building blocks out of which these 'stage characters' are constructed for others. Self-claims are attributions explicitly or implicitly made by the actor about himself: self-claims of skill, of possession, of appearance, of experience, of knowledge, of intelligence, of identity, or of any other characteristic imputable to a person. They may be made verbally ("I can drive a large bus through heavy traffic") or non-verbally (bus driving = "I can drive a large bus through heavy traffic"). Self-claims are also, to a great extent,

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[1] The remainder of Section 3 will be based entirely on Erving Goffman's writings. His name will thus be omitted from citations, and I will include only the date of the relevant work at the end of each section dealing with ideas from a different book. Citations will rarely be exhaustive, as many of the ideas are treated in several texts under different labels.

imposed from without, as many are automatically associated by the relevant culture with social roles and categories, or simply with the status of a 'normal' individual. Most of us, both on and off buses, do and are expected to claim a respectable and well kept appearance, control over 'our' spaces and things, the possession of what are referred to as 'common knowledge' and 'common sense,' and competence in walking, talking, and controlling emotional and bodily outbursts, among other attributes. A bus driver, by assuming this specific role, may further be held responsible by his passengers and others for fulfilling numerous requirements implied as self-claims of the post: the ability and willingness to drive his vehicle quickly, safely, and competently along a predetermined route, the ability and willingness to enforce passenger discipline if it should exceed certain limits, the abstention from alcohol or drug intoxication during work, and the possession and readiness to share information about bus routes and city streets.

Performances are carried out by teams (of one or more members) on a **front stage**, where facts incongruent with the qualities of the enacted self are concealed; these performances are planned and rehearsed in the **back stage** regions, where the impression generated by an act is contradicted "as a matter of course." For example, a bus driver may put on an appearance of calm dexterity at the wheel, of respect for his passengers, of toughness, of cool professionality; with his companions at the bus depot, however, he may freely slander passengers who arrive with no change or perhaps even share half a bottle of whisky before returning to the job.

This 'dramaturgical model' of interaction does not imply that individuals do not act in earnest: belief in the part one is playing varies from cynical acting and deception to heartfelt sincerity. The bus driver may become quite involved in his tough, cool, dexterous, professional act; on the other hand, the pickpockets in the back will be sharply aware of the discrepancy between their normal appearances and the fancy handiwork going on 'under cover' (1959). Neither is this model a restatement of role theory. Performances of a front include the enactment of a claimed relationship between the self and relevant institutionalized roles. For example, the bus driver may express **role-distance** when an old friend jumps on board, by jokingly putting on a caricatured version of his own 'bus driver' behaviour. Such an act is carried out to demonstrate to others that

there is a complex self behind the mask worn, different from and detached from the role itself (1961).

3.2. Discredit and the Sacred Self

The complex organization of modern Western societies, with their well-bounded and protected spaces, permits individuals to develop many different 'selves' for different situations, audiences, and moments, without excessive danger of having their constitutive self-claims continuously discredited by leakages of damaging information (1959). On the other hand, it could also be said that complex societies positively require the performance of numerous, often contradictory characters which will be discreditable. Each category within the system of social classification --father, friend, husband, bus driver, male, Protestant, British, human being-- includes "a complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members." Inevitably, there are attributes held by every individual which conflict with expectations for one of his relevant categories, **stigmas**, and these should be hidden if the person does not wish to be rejected by the relevant social group. If a stigma cannot be hidden and affects a major category (physical disfigurement is the prototype), the person may become practically cut off from normal social interaction. However, all individuals are vulnerable to such discreditings (1963B).

Goffman treats the self not only as an actor, but also as a ceremonial object, in the Durkheimian sense. Everyday interaction habitually includes many minor ritual offerings, tributes, and avoidances designed to protect the sensitive and fragile self-presentation projected by each participant. The 'sacredness' of the self is nevertheless 'spoilt' occasionally, intentionally or otherwise, and must be repaired by further ceremonial work.

An actor's performance makes an evaluation of the situation and its participants, especially himself. **Face** is defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact (...;) an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes". Every individual is emotionally attached to his own face and to those of certain others: if events establish a better than expected face, he experiences positive feelings; if a worse than expected face, negative ones. Goffman in fact concentrates throughout his work on events which threaten or damage face, and the feeling which these events cause in those emotionally attached to the face is **embarrassment**. If a sudden jerk of the bus causes a well-groomed

executive to topple awkwardly over an elderly lady, the qualities of politeness and grace he had been projecting and to which he is attached will be discredited, and this will cause him great unease and perhaps to fluster.

Two basic types of **face-work** may be undertaken to counteract such incidents. One set is composed of **avoidance** practices, which keep the person at a safe distance from threats: avoiding certain persons or topics of conversation, modesty, ignoring the threatening event, etc.... Riders on the bus may, for instance, grab onto handles and bars not only for the sake of physical safety but to avoid unseemly encroachment on others' personal space. If the incident cannot be avoided or overlooked, however, the self will find itself in a state of ritual disgrace, requiring some sort of repair. This **corrective process** consists of 4 "classic moves": (1) a **challenge** calling attention to the misconduct; (2) an **offering** by the offender; (3) an **acceptance** of the offering; and (4) an expression of **gratitude** by the offender. This basic model varies in practice. Continuing our example of the businessman's fall, he may immediately offer apologies and self-recriminations, reassure the aggrieved woman that his intentions were far from those implied by the sudden bodily contact, and ask concernedly about her physical state --these would combine a self-initiated challenge with the offering stage. She may reply with a forced smile and an acceptance of the apology (stage 3) or perhaps continue the challenge with a scolding speech, which would necessitate further apologies. Gratitude may be expressed by word or gesture (such as a deferential nod and an embarrassed smile), or be merely implied (1967).

Gatherings are ordered, their participants being subject to the norms of what Goffman variously calls the **communicative**, **expressive**, **public**, **ceremonial**, or **interaction order** (1963, 67, 71, 83). These norms are different from **substantive norms,** which guide conduct in matters felt to be important in their own right, roughly covering such concepts as 'morality' and 'ethics.' Ceremonial norms limit the performances of actors and protect the sacredness of each individual in two ways.

Rules of **deference** define what action must be taken to convey the appropriate respect and appreciation to other persons. These include all manner of respectful avoidances, tact, and verbal or physical offerings necessary to safeguard the sanctity of these others. Willfully transgressing such norms can be interpreted as an aggression.

Rules of **demeanour**, on the other hand, relate to the upkeep of the individual's own sacredness. Individuals must not claim a face which they cannot sustain, and must struggle to sustain it at all times or be subject to disgrace. Dress, personal hygiene, discretion and sincerity, modesty, sportsmanship, command of speech and physical movements, self-control over emotions and desires, poise under pressure, and other behaviours must constantly reinforce the line taken by the actor. When his front is discredited, his self is spoilt, and embarrassment may result (1967).

A general conformity (or at least apparent general conformity) to the exigencies of the ceremonial order is essential to social life. Norms of deference and demeanour seem trivial and arbitrary, 'mere' matters of etiquette, but these conventions create a symbolic world by which to guide our every action. We can usually assume that people who wear certain uniforms, sit in the driver's seat of a bus, and act within certain behavioural limits have been trained to maneuver these large vehicles through city traffic and will do so along a predictable path, with the greatest concern for the security of passengers. Thus, the latter can feel safe in the belief that by boarding bus 171 they will reach a stop at Trafalgar Square within a reasonable time, though in fact it could easily be crashed into a wall or driven in the opposite direction. A bus driver wearing a loud T-shirt and bathing trunks, or who steered the vehicle while bouncing on his seat, hooting and neighing loudly, would not inspire such confidence: Passengers would be likely to supervise his behaviour closely for further alarming signs and perhaps step off at the first possible stop or challenge his right to continue driving. Individuals who routinely violate the norms of the public order are threats to the predictability of the environment necessary for the efficient pursuit of goals by others. In Western society, such deviants may be labeled 'insane' and confined to mental asylums, powerful proof of the importance of 'mere' etiquette (1967).

3.3. Frames of Experience

An individual perceives the world at any one time according to a particular definition of the situation, a socially constructed **framework** of interpretation which gives meaning to unfolding events. Performances, whether in gatherings or in encounters, express such a definition of the situation. Conversely, the framework which actors agree on (this agreement being basic to interaction) determines the type of performance which will be appropriate. This **official** definition of the situation can differ from the private frames actually applied by specific individuals.

There are **natural** frameworks, describing an unconscious and deterministic universe (i.e., about the world of 'things'), and **social** frameworks, interpreting events incorporating "the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence" (i.e., about the world of people). All actors perceive events by use of such frames, but not always are they in agreement over the correct frame to be applied. Most passengers of our bus would presumably (1) assume the vehicle to be a man-made machine powered by fossil fuels and guided by a conscious, trained driver at the instruments (natural frame); and (2) see the 'bus situation' in terms of a public transport service along a set route, useable by individuals for the purpose of traveling from one programmed stop to another (social frame). A small child, on the other hand, might well (1) believe the bus to be a magically powered device, or even a living being; and (2) see the event as an amusement ride designed for everyone, for children, or perhaps even just for himself.

The natural and social varieties are **primary** frameworks, "seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful." These may be contrasted with **keyings**, which are ways of transforming events already meaningful according to some primary framework into something else. Playfully pretending to ride a bus, a filmed bus ride, a bus driver's driving practice --these are all keyings of a real bus ride, patterned on but distinguishable from the original event. Another type of transformation is a **fabrication**, the managing of activity by one party to deceive others about what is going on. The behaviour of the group of three pickpocket artists who enter the bus is designed to reinforce the definition of events applied by most passengers: The thieves enter the crowded bus from separate doors, and two act as shields

for the third who, looking abstractedly in another direction, will surreptitiously direct his hand towards a promising pocket or purse. Clearly the pickpocket and his victim apply very different interpretations to the behaviour of the former, one having more information about the real state of affairs than the other. The interaction order is vulnerable to such pretenses of normality because people inevitably depend on a limited number of signs on which to base their judgments.

Different types of framing troubles are common. One may apply the wrong frame (a bus passenger who calmly ignores the pickpocket as his wallet disappears). Or events may be ambiguous and permit a confusing multiplicity of contradictory frames to be applied (a bus passenger suspects the pickpockets of deceit but is not quite sure). A **frame break** may take place when events are perceived which cannot be managed by the frame (a passenger notices a foreign hand in his pocket). Finally, open contests and debates may flare up over the correct frame to be applied (a passenger challenges the pickpockets and they claim innocence in outraged tones). People who, due to frame breaks, are left devoid of any coherent framework on which to base their behaviour, undergo **negative experience**, a situation of flustered confusion which is the opposite of an "organized and organizationally affirmed response" (1974). Another possible problem is the excess or insufficiency of **involvement** in a frame, the psychological engrossment in framed events, for which an appropriate level is normally defined.

Frame analysis is relevant to self-claims and their discredit in at least two separable senses. On the one hand, social frameworks include the specification of the self-claims applying to all participants in a situation, and of the criteria by which to judge their fulfillment. Self-claims are the constitutive elements of self-presentations, and these in turn form a major part of the content of social frameworks. Thus, the official framework defines what events participants openly agree would discredit which self-claims within the situation to which the frame applies. For example, the definition of a bus situation includes the bus driver's self-claim of driving skill and passengers' self-claims to maintain balance and sufficient interpersonal distance despite the movements of the vehicle. Each participant's private individual frame will simultaneously provide him with his own criteria on these subjects.

Frameworks do not only include self-claims, however, but are also *included within* their domain. The possession of frames, and frame management as an activity and a competence, are themselves attributes about which self-claims may be made: "I'm very good at figuring people out," "I'll tell you what your problem is...," "No one fools me," "I know these streets like the palm of my hand," "I *am* paying attention." These kinds of self-attributions, which regard the claimants' mental possessions and abilities, can indeed be considered among the most fundamental claims that can be made about the self. Failures to know basic facts about the natural or social world, to interpret events correctly, or to display an appropriate level of involvement in framed events, can itself result in discredit, or can lead to discrediting behaviours (1974: 308-321).

3.4. Summary of Goffman's Thought

Individuals are actors who create and maintain self-presentations before specific audiences, usually in accord with socially given frameworks of interpretation defining the relevant situations of co-presence. These characters are built out of claims about the self which may be supported or discredited by events. Actors are emotionally attached to the social value associated with these self-presentations, so that their emotional peace depends on their own and others' behaviour and on unfolding events continuously supporting the current character and the framework within which it fits. The interaction order is the result of actors jointly trying to maintain these public projections, and it provides actors with a continuous guide for action. Embarrassment is the common result of failure, and confinement to a mental hospital is the common Western remedy for those who provoke too many failures.

4. Mutual References

There exists an evident congruency between Erving Goffman's thought and the 'claim discredit' notions of amusement. The concept of the self-claim --a claim implicitly or explicitly made by an individual about himself-- is central to Goffman's theory, and the vicissitudes of maintaining self-claims and managing their discredit constitutes one of the main themes of his work. It is no mere coincidence that Carritt, Pirandello, and Moore resorted to the dramaturgical description of individuals as part-playing actors. Goffman's writings examined and dissected the very perspective on human behaviour which had been applied by the claim-discredit theorists. With this lens, one focuses neither on the grand and distant social institutions of sociology nor on the individual in the immediate foreground. Rather, it is a rarely-seen middle ground which comes into view: the actual *situation* in which two or more individuals interact. The very fact of mutual observability which defines a 'situation' transforms every participant into both performer and audience. Each of his characteristics and behaviours becomes an expressive sign, while he himself becomes a potential critic of the everyday 'stage' or 'exhibition.' Thus, Goffman's field covers precisely the aesthetics of social life.

Two questions immediately arise:

1) Did Goffman have anything to say about the laughter triad?
2) Have humour researchers had anything to say about the sociology of Erving Goffman?

The remainder of this chapter will concern itself with their answers.

4.1. Goffman on Humour Research

Goffman himself did not address the question of amusement directly. Outside of scattered comments and his extended treatment of 'embarrassment' (1967), his emphasis was on the conscious attempts of interactants to manage situations, rather than on the less-controllable eruptions of emotion. His pursuit of the interaction order and its establishment as a field separable from the study of not only social structure but also of the individual social actor excluded, as far as possible, the psychological underpinnings of phenomena from analysis. Moreover, his concerns lay more on the side of participants as performers than as audience members.

However, there are countless implicit references to amusement in the form of mirth-provoking illustrations used in the texts. The discussion of the interaction order inevitably placed a strong emphasis on examples of 'disorder': interactional disasters, breakdowns, and sabotage. As we have seen, embarrassment often results when certain types of these disordering events occur. However, according to Baillie, Carritt, and the other claim-discredit theorists, an observer's reaction to happenings or behaviour of these types should be amusement, however upsetting they might be for the participants responsible.

Indeed, wherever Goffman's analysis turns to events which discredit a front, to errors of frame, situational improprieties, ceremonial blunders, or the unusual behaviour of mental patients, humorous examples abound. Chapter 9 of *Frame Analysis*, entitled "Ordinary Troubles" and dealing with ambiguities and errors of frame application, is a good source:

[excerpt from The San Francisco Chronicle, 11/29/1967]

The way Dave Niles reported it on KNBR, this guy is lying face down on Powell St., with traffic backed up for blocks. A Little Old Lady climbs down from a stalled cable car and begins giving him artificial respiration -- whereupon he swivels his head and says: "Look lady, I don't know what game you're playing, but I'm trying to fix this cable!"

(1974, p.310)

The "classic cases" of embarrassment cited by Goffman (1967) --changes of role or status, being in the 'wrong' social scene, inordinate physical proximity, the lack of basic skills or attributes of society, and clashes of one role with another-- are no less classic comic situations. Similarly with many of the examples of minor inconsistencies between projected front and performance:

Men trip, forget names, wear slightly inappropriate clothes, attempt to buy a too-small amount of some commodity, fail to score well in a game, arrive a few minutes late for an appointment, become a trifle overheated in argument, fail to finish a task quite on time.

(1961, p.92)

An entire essay in *Forms of Talk* (1981), a case study of radio announcers' mistakes, draws its empirical illustration "mainly" (p.242, footnote) from "eight of the LP records and three of the books produced by Kermit Schafer from his recording (Jubilee Records) of radio bloopers" (p. 197, footnote) which presumably were prepared for sale as 'humour':

"In Pall Malls, the smoke is traveled over and under, around and through the tobacco; thereby giving you a better tasting smoke..." (ENGINEER FLIPS WRONG SWITCH AND PICKS UP UNSUSPECTING DISC JOCKEY) "...How the hell can smoke go through a cigarette, if it don't go over, under, around and through the tobacco?"

(p. 268)

Merely by exposing individuals as actors with embarrassing secrets to hide, Goffman causes the reader to find amusement at his own secret discredit, as well as to feel some measure of unease. Emanuel Schegloff has commented on this experience

(1988: 89): "How many readers, and hearers, felt revealed and exposed, gave out embarrassed giggles at the sense of being found out by [Goffman's] accounts?".

Even in his own dealings with others, it appears that Erving the social actor, at least in his younger days, derived pleasure from playing with the projected selves of others. Paul Bouissac has characterized him as a "comedian-experimenter" who "enjoyed straining social interactions by obnoxious behavior in order to gain some insights into the 'frames' at stake" (1990: 417). He cites Paul Ekman's anecdote about a psychology experiment:

> I pointed to Erving some of their more interesting expressions which we would be able to dissect later when reviewing the videotape. He however was taken with the fact that serious people were willing to engage in such conversation in a laboratory setting, and decided to test how much interference they would tolerate. Dressed in his usual casual style, he posed (quite credibly) as a janitor. He walked into their room, saying that he had to remove some of the furniture. He removed one piece of furniture after another while they continued their argument, until finally he took away the chairs in which they were sitting. They continued their argument standing up!
>
> (Ekman, in Bouissac 1990: 417)

In addition to such implicit references to amusement in Goffman's work (and life), his interest in the laughter triad is also reflected more explicitly in his writings. From one of his first publications (1955), a (not very favourable) book review of Martha Wolfenstein's (1954) *Children's Humour*, mentions of humour theory and of its domain recur frequently throughout his books and articles. He considers, among other topics, strategic use of laughter displays (1981: 88, 118), informal social control through ridicule (1961: 77), clowns and jokers (1961: 64-65; 1963b: 141-142), the acting out of improprieties 'in jest' (1967: 86; 1974: 48-53, 188-97, 515; 1981: 154), the appearance of subversive ironies and gallows humour (1961: 76-77), the use of humour to carry embarrassing or critical messages (1967: 26-30), the surreptitious communication of amusement through 'collusive by-play' (1961: 62-63; 1963a: 179-88; 1981: 154), the

possibility of laughter (among other emotions) 'flooding out' and causing an actor to lose his expressive control (1961: 55-61; 1974: 350-59), the use of joking to create 'role-distance' (1961: 'Role Distance', esp. 98-117), joking with strangers following an impropriety (1963a: 125), techniques of fictional comedy (1971: 296-7; 1974: 327, 369-74, 381-382, 444; 1981: 81), pranks and other 'benign fabrications' used to fool a victim (1974: 87), different 'types' of amusement depending on frame level (1974: 130), amusement caused by the 'upkeying' of a situation (1974: 359-368), and amusing wordplay (1974: 441-443).

As will be seen in later chapters, these scattered ideas can be integrated within a theory of the laughter triad based on a claim-discredit account of amusement. The very relationship between self-claims and hilarity, however, is more directly hinted at by Goffman himself on a number of occasions. In "Radio Talk" (1981), he considers the major self-claim attaching to the role of a radio announcer, "the production of seemingly faultless fresh talk." As seen above, Goffman obtained the empirical illustrations of announcer claim-discredits from a set of 'blooper' records marketed as humour. And indeed, Goffman asserts that in managing the basic capacity required of radio announcers, the behaviours that must be avoided go beyond committing clearly identifiable errors: "...the progression from faults to faultables must be extended to the *risibly interpretable*, and this last appears to be the broadest category of all" (p.244, my emphasis). In this passage Goffman clearly equates (1) the production of a fault which discredits the self-claim to a specific competency (according to the fair or unfair valuation by an observer); (2) embarrassments; and (3) (at least one type of) funny stimuli[1]. Subtitled, "a study of the ways of our errors," this article focused on announcer talk merely as a case study of the countless abilities and characteristics that may be claimed by an individual in public. Thus, this tantalizing suggestion could have easily been (but was not) generalized and expanded upon by Goffman to refer to all self-claims.

It is also significant that the only extended discussion of humour theory regards one of the claim-discredit theories treated in Section 2 of this chapter: Henri Bergson's "fine essay" on the comic (1974: 38). After agreeing that "individuals often laugh when

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[1] This equivalence is alluded to again in the same article (pp. 253, 307, 321-322).

confronted by a person who does not sustain in every way an image of human guidedness," Goffman adds the tie to his own ideas:

> Bergson only fails to go on and draw the implied conclusion, namely, that if individuals are ready to laugh during occurrences of ineffectively guided behaviour, then all along they apparently must have been fully assessing the conformance of the normally behaved, finding it to be no laughing matter.

(1974, p.38)

Interestingly, Goffman also once requested a translation of another of the 'claim-discredit' theories of comedy mentioned in Section 2 of this chapter, Luigi Pirandello's *L'Umorismo* (Pier Paolo Giglioli, personal communication).

His brief mention of Freud's interpretation of jokes (1961: 60) is also revealing. It occurs during a discussion of the suppressive work carried out by participants of interaction, who normally attempt to ignore events 'officially' irrelevant according to the current definition of the situation. Goffman agrees with Freud that when the official frame of interpretation changes radically, the liberation of actors from the need to suppress certain aspects may result in laughter. However, he adds in a footnote: "Freud, of course, saw the suppressive function as associated often with sexually tinged matters, instead of *merely socially irrelevant properties that disrupt identity-images*, one instance of which is the sexual" (ibid.; my emphasis). Though Goffman refrained from providing his own view of amusement in general terms, these comments on humour theory suggest his probable sympathy for claim-discredit accounts --at the very least as partial explanations.

4.2. Humour Research on Goffman

From the time of the first major publications by Erving Goffman, humour researchers have recognized the interest of his work to their own. In a footnote of her celebrated article "Laughter Among Colleagues: A Study of Humor Among the Staff of a Mental Hospital" (1960), Rose Laub Coser expresses her gratitude to Goffman, who is cited both in this and in an earlier article (Coser, 1959), for a critical reading. Alfred Walle (1976) considered "Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis...a useful model" (p. 203) for dealing with the use of jokes by clients at an all-night diner, as have Joan Emerson (1973; 1975) and Robert A. Stebbins (1993) in similarly ethnographic studies of specific 'situated activity systems.'

Examples can be multiplied. Greg Smith has explicitly attempted to "explore the potential of some of Goffman's writings as an analytical resource for the close sociological examination of laughter" (1996) and humour (1993). Marina Mizzau (1984) has partly grounded her analysis of irony use on Goffmanian conceptions of strategic and ritual interaction. Isabelle Van de Gejuchte (1996) has defined the limits of amusement elicited by political satire in terms of Goffmanian 'frames.' Zajdman (1995) has employed the terms 'face' and 'face-threatening acts' in order to study joking behaviour and its possible consequences. Bouissac (1990) has analysed the performance of comedian George Carl as a "systematic violation of the rules of performance" (p. 426). These and other authors[2] have recognized the benefits of studying amusement, laughter, and humour in their natural environment, the domain of face-to-face interaction which Goffman so tenaciously explored.

At least one writer on humour has argued, as I have done, for a more profound relevance of Goffman's work to humour theory:

The foremost contemporary theorist to expose the discrepancy between our ideals and our actuality, to unmask our current vanities, was the late sociologist Erving Goffman. Although seldom mentioning humor,... Goffman's sociological studies

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[2] Some authors have recognized these benefits without a direct reference to Goffman. Pollio (1983), for instance, proposes the need for a humour theory that takes account of laughter as an "embodied activity," and as one which takes place in social situations.

clearly parallel humor theories and practices...that unmask the ideal self to reveal the actual self. No other social scientist's work has produced as much amusement as Goffman's, especially through the particular examples by which he illustrates his general insights.

<div align="right">(Davis, 1993: 219)</div>

Davis' grouping of "humour theories...that unmask the ideal self to reveal the actual self" is rare, and he devotes a number of chapters of his book (pp. 149-306) to funny stimuli which involve discredit --though this is treated as only one category of funniness. In the following chapters, I will develop a detailed account of all amusement in these terms, and on this basis a larger theory also encompassing laughter and humour.

5. Conclusions

I have presented a historical introduction to a causal theory of amusement substantially different from the traditional views discussed in Chapter One: **the discrediting of a claim made by a social actor about himself**. There have been four main keys in which the idea has been proposed by different authors:

1) Plato argued that we laugh at those who claim to be more than they actually are, in terms of possessions, appearance, or virtue. W.G. Moore generalized this idea in his analysis of Moliere by identifying *the falling off or removal of any 'mask' worn by an individual* as the source of mirth. Pirandello described the role of the humourist as the tearing away of such masks.

2) Aristotle, and in this century E.F. Carritt, presented *aesthetic defects* as the cause of amusement. If viewed as failures of expression, in Croce's sense, such defects can be held equivalent to the discreditings of self-claims.

3) J.B. Baillie developed the idea in terms of an *incongruity between the end sought by an individual and his actual achievements*, highlighting the specific attitude of 'appreciation' that must be adopted by a perceiver in order to notice such an incongruity.

4) Bergson, Klapp, Powell, and Jauregui have written instead of *deviance from a certain class of social norms,* those regulating conduct and appearance proper to specific social situations (i.e., propriety as opposed to morality).

I have briefly summarized Erving Goffman's theory of the interaction order, which shares an evident affinity with this school of humour theory. Goffman presents individuals as performers enacting situated selves made up of constituent **self-claims**. If a self-claim is **discredited** by events, the discredited individual feels **embarrassment** and his 'sacred' self becomes spoilt and in need of ritual repair. Respect for norms of deference and demeanour (i.e., of propriety) safeguards all projected identities within a

relevant situation. Such norms are internalized in the minds of participants as situationally-specific **social frameworks**, providing them with both a guide for action and for interpretation of others' actions. The result of general conformity to these apparently trivial rules is an ordered social world intelligible to participants --continuous deviation may result in the confinement of the transgressor to a psychiatric institution.

In the final section, I have identified a number of mutual references between Goffman and humour research, supporting the proposed link between the two. Though Goffman did not treat the question of amusement directly, occasional comments or allusions to the laughter triad can be found in most of his books and articles, as well as countless amusing anecdotes and illustrations. These tend to express ideas congruent with those of claim-discredit theorists of amusement.

Conversely, humour research has been increasingly rummaging through Goffman's theoretical toolbox, with a growing recognition of the essential belongingness of the laughter triad within the realm of situated interaction. One writer, Murray Davis, has recently argued for the profound relevance of the 'interaction order' to amusement itself. In the following chapters, I will attempt to describe the nature and extent of this relevance, reconstructing the amusement theory Goffman himself did not write, and proposing a new way forward for humour research.

Situating Laughter:

Amusement, Laughter, and Humour in Everyday Life

PART TWO

In this central part of the thesis,

I develop a causal account of the amusement emotion,

based on the notion of the self-claim discredit.

Chapter Four

A Hypothesis of Amusement

Chapter Five

A Typology of Funny Events

Chapter Six

Elaborations of the Model

Chapter Four: A Hypothesis of Amusement

1. Introduction

In Part One of the thesis, I defined amusement as the pan-human emotion the manifestation of which is observable as laughter, and which may be provoked by humour or by other types of funny stimuli. I argued that an understanding of the laughter triad -- amusement, laughter, and humour-- required a valid and coherent account of the cause of amusement, which has not yet been agreed upon despite a large catalogue of proposed theories. Finally, I proposed some general guidelines for developing a causal theory of amusement --the procedure of 'aggregate introspection'-- and identified a promising alternative to the most well-known causal accounts: amusement as triggered by the perception of another's self-claim having been discredited.

In Part Two I will present a detailed exposition of this 'claim-discredit' hypothesis of amusement for 'aggregate assessment' by readers. Following the guidelines set out in Chapter Two, I will define as precisely as possible the proposed cause of amusement (this chapter), and attempt to apply it consistently throughout the widest range of funny stimuli (Chapter Five), distinguishing these also from closely related unfunny phenomena (Chapter Six). In Part Three, a general theory of the laughter triad will be developed on the basis of this causal hypothesis.

The basic proposal can be briefly stated as follows:

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.

Discussion of the latter two points will be reserved for Chapter Six. These amendments, which distinguish between funny and unfunny claim-discredits, are secondary to an understanding of what claim-discredits consist of in the first place.

In this chapter I will specify, in great detail, the meaning of the two central concepts: the self-claim and its discredit. A self-claim will be defined as the ascription of

some attribute to a claimant by himself (or by a legitimate agent): "My name is Napoleon Bonaparte"; "I can beat you at chess"; "my other car is a Porsche"; "I have never used illegal drugs"; "my arm hurts"; "I can read and write"; "I'm a trustworthy kind of person"; "I don't believe in marriage"; "this is my seat"; "I hate spinach"; "don't move or I'll shoot." The discredit of such a claim will be said to take place when events fail to confirm the attribution: the claimant (respectively) proves to be other than Napoleon, repeatedly fails to beat his opponent at chess, does not own a Porsche, was once a regular cannabis smoker, faked the pain, is illiterate, proves a scoundrel, marries, lacks a valid ticket for the seat, enjoys the taste of spinach when he actually tries it, or does not have the nerve to fire a gun. Both a self-claim and its discredit are realities in the mind of a single perceiver, whose observation of these phenomena depends on the social frameworks of interpretation he applies to the current situation. Different opinions on what 'pain' or 'literacy' mean or entail, for instance, will lead to varying judgments as to whether a bee sting could possibly be considered a cause of claimed discomfort, or whether a certain written text constitutes proof of great literacy or glaring illiteracy.

Much of the analysis will be devoted to identifying and describing the main variables relevant to self-claims and their discredit. This will not only allow the reader to obtain a better conceptual grasp on the phenomena at issue, but also provide an order with which to classify the heterogeneous range of funny stimuli in the following chapter.

Self-claims may be classified according to perceived 'origin' and 'content'. The **origin** of a self-claim is the way in which (according to the perceiver) the attribution has been ascribed by a claimant to himself: by explicit assertion (**independent**), by role membership (**role**), or by mere participation in human society (**universal**). The **content** of a self-claim is the actual substance of the attribution: the skill, quality, emotion, mental state, identity, possession, relationship, or other characteristic that is claimed. Five types will be distinguished: **skill**, **mind**, **territory**, **appearance**, and **biography**.

Self-claim discredits will be said to vary according to their perceived 'cause,' 'claimant', and 'location'. The **cause** of a discredit can be either mere **accident** or the intentional actions of an **agent**. The **claimant** affected by discredit can be either the **perceiver** himself or some **other** individual. The **location** of the discredit may be either **untransformed reality** or some **transformation** of events such as oral recountings,

literature, theatrical representations, film or audio recorded material, rehearsals, games, or mental imaginings/distortions.

This discussion of variables will permit, in Chapter Five, the development of a typology of amusing stimuli on the basis of the natural variability of claim-discredit situations. In this way, I will attempt to systematically account for the vast range and diversity of funny objects from the starting point of a single eliciting cause of the emotion. Jokes, gaffes, wind-ups, coincidences, tickling, theatrical comedy, nonsense rhymes, satire, slapstick, and other triggers of amusement will be shown to cause, constitute, or include claim-discredits of one type or another.

Clearly, not all self-claim discredits lead to a perceiver's amusement. Being 'caught out' in a lie or exaggeration may be experienced as deeply embarrassing. Political corruption scandals involve the discrediting of a public servant's basic role self-claims of honesty and commitment to public interests, but result in humiliation (for the accused) and moral outrage (for the general public). Accidentally driving a car off the edge of a cliff, while constituting a clear failure to maintain one's claim to drive properly, is anything but funny to the passengers or to their families.

The differences between amusing and non-amusing claim-discredits will be treated in Chapter Six. To anticipate, these differences will be accounted for by two further variables relating to the perception of claim-discredits: perceiver-claimant **identity** and perceiver-discredit **involvement** --that is, the extent to which the perceiver identifies himself as the claimant, and the extent to which the perceiver attends to discrediting events (as opposed to other features of the situation)[1]. A pedestrian who walks into a lamppost while talking to a friend may be laughed at by his friend for this failure to keep up self-claims of watchfulness and competent ambulation. The careless pedestrian may also experience amusement himself, due to his ability to detach and disown (i.e., not identify himself as) the part of himself which was so careless. On the other hand, if the accident was witnessed not by a friend but by a first-time acquaintance before whom the pedestrian wished to make a good impression (a sexual interest, a prospective employer), he might find such detachment more difficult, and feel acute and unpleasant embarrassment instead. Moreover, if the accident was quite serious, involving

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[1] See the brief statement of the causal hypothesis above.

severe pain, loss of consciousness, or bleeding, the victim's laughable/embarrassing carelessness would probably be ignored (i.e., not the main focus of cognitive involvement) by most participants, with pain, fear, concern, empathic suffering, and the like dominating reactions.

A full discussion of the boundaries between funny and unfunny claim-discredit situations will be held off for the moment. The following pages will focus on the meaning and variability of such self-claims and claim-discredits in general.

2. Self-Claims[1]

2.1. Definition of 'Self-Claim'

During interaction the individual is expected to possess certain attributes, capacities, and information which, taken together, fit together into a self that is at once coherently unified and appropriate for the occasion. Through the expressive implications of his stream of conduct, through mere participation itself, the individual effectively projects this acceptable self into the interaction, although he may not be aware of it, and the others may not be aware of having so interpreted his conduct. At the same time he must accept and honor the selves projected by the other participants. *The elements of a social encounter, then, consist of effectively projected claims to an acceptable self and the confirmation of like claims on the part of the others*. The contributions of all are oriented to these and built up on the basis of them.

(Goffman, 1967: 105-06

my emphasis)

One way of viewing social interaction is in terms of the self-claims being made by participants before each other, and the subsequent attempts to sustain them. A **self-claim** is defined as *a skill, quality, emotion, mental state, identity, object, relationship, territory, or any other attribute ascribed to a **claimant** by a **claim-maker** who is either the claimant himself or someone seen to legitimately represent the claimant.* The phrase 'making a self-claim,' or simply 'claim-making,' will refer to the action of ascribing such an attribute to the self. To simplify the exposition, I will consider initially only cases where the claim-maker and the claimant are one and the same person.

Self-claims may be made verbally and explicitly, in such typical forms as "I am...", "I can..." or "I have...". A random assortment of examples follows.

I am...

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[1] The use of the term 'claim-making' in this chapter and in the thesis is in no way related to the concept of 'claims-making' in the social problems literature (ie, Spector and Kitsuse, 1977: 73-96).

the king of the mountain
polish
chaste, humble, and obedient
pretty good at chess
just joking
ill
a rationalist
going to the office

I can...

drink while making my ventriloquist doll whistle
beat you up
prove the existence of an infinite set of prime numbers
walk
convince Maggie to come to the party
smile in the face of adversity
handle snakes

I have...

brown eyes
a daddy who can beat up your daddy
nothing up my sleeve
a Visa Gold card
10,000 beer cans from all over the world
secrets you will never know
an answer to your question
this here piece o' land
three brothers and one sister

Writing curriculum vitae or application forms, and introducing oneself to a stranger, are common activities which involve much claim-making of this explicit type. Most self-claims, however, are made non-verbally, and often even unconsciously. Any aspect of a participant's performance --setting, dress, accent, poise, manner-- may express self-claims of one type or another. For example,

Leaving a coat on a chair: I have temporary rights over the use of this chair; I own this coat; I will be returning to this chair shortly.

<u>Walking up a pavement confidently</u>: I am walking in this direction; I know where I am going; I can walk; I have temporary rights to the space immediately in front of me.

<u>Being attired as a policeman</u>: I am a policeman; I have respect for the law; I have good knowledge of the criminal code; I am willing to risk my life in the battle against crime.

Even though not always consciously aware of having made such self-claims, actors can be held accountable to them, and may on occasion be confronted with or even forced to defend them.

Individual self-claims constitute the elements or building blocks of the various 'presentations of self' (i.e., 'faces,' 'parts,' 'routines,' 'projections') put forward by a participant on the various stages of social interaction. The self-claims I make define who I am. Relatedly, the fact that I make self-claims determines my being someone at all: a person who makes a point of claiming the least possible is said to have "no personality."

The 'existence' of a self-claim, the question of it having been made or not in actual fact, is *always relative to the opinion or point-of-view of an individual or group of individuals*. Self-claims cannot exist in a void, being subjective interpretations of social action or being. No self-claim is possible in the absence of an observer, if only the claimant himself. During an interactional situation, the self-claims seen to have been made by a single participant may vary from one observer to the next, and from any observer to the observed claimant. Thus, when speaking of self-claims, a subjectivity is always implied, whether real or hypothetical, within the world of an anecdote retold, within a specific reality, or merely in the minds of the theorist and/or reader. It is worth noting that this feature of self-claims creates the potential for confusion between the supposed initial imputation of an attribute to the self ("I'm the hottest thing in town") and the secondary attribution of this attribution by an observer to the claimant ("He thinks he's the hottest thing in town").

2.2. Self-Claim Variables

The foregoing examples illustrate another feature of self-claims. Covering no less than the entire range of characteristics that may be attributed to a person, self-claims are not only infinite in number but enormously varied. Two theoretical distinctions may be found useful in ordering this concept: the **origin** of a self-claim --whether it has been made independently or else by virtue of a role membership or mere 'humanity'; and the **content** of a self-claim, the actual substance of the attribution (i.e.: Is it about skills, mental contents and abilities, owned territories, appearance, or biography?).

2.2.1. *Origin* of Self-Claims

Firstly, self-claims can be classified according to their **origin**. On what basis is a particular self-claim attributed to an actor by an observer? How has it been made? Where does it 'come from'? Three types of origin can be distinguished: independent, role, and universal.

2.2.1.1. Independent Self-Claims

At one extreme are singular or exceptional assertions which the claimant is not bound by rule or expectation to make. An actor independently chooses to make this sort of self-claim, adding an element to his sense of self-determination, his individuality, and his personal identity. Independent self-claims are not necessarily exceptional in the sense of 'extraordinary,' though they may be. "I can walk a tightrope between two skyscrapers," "I saw *The Seven Samurais* last night," and "I'm hungry" may qualify as independent self-claims in the sense that (and in so far as) they are not strictly required of the relevant participant by social constraints.

Another necessary qualification regards the freedom of 'choice' I appear to have attributed to such self-claims by the use of the word 'independent'. This freedom is severely limited by the fact that almost any action or feature of an actor presented before others will express an assertion about the self. Idle pieces of chit-chat express all manner

of claims about what the speaker knows, has experienced, or believes; attempts to perform ordinary activities such as automobile driving or museum visiting constitute self-claims of competence in specific areas; even disclaimers represent assertions of inability or non-possession. Making independent self-claims (not to mention other types) is an unavoidable side-effect of interaction.

Thus, there is more freedom regarding which independent self-claims to make than regarding whether to make them at all (the latter will vary roughly with the amount of presence and activity undertaken in public). Moreover, all manner of pressures, limitations, and difficulties may influence choices made regarding independent self-claims. It may be quite desirable, for instance, to make a certain claim ("Yes, I have seen *The Seven Samurais*") in the light of currently accepted values (i.e., among a group of film enthusiasts). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is *other participants* of interaction who attribute 'independent' volition to the claimant, rather than the claimant himself. Nevertheless, the claimant does at least potentially have some scope for carving out a unique self-image out of such assertions.

As will be seen, only this type of self-claim may be expressed verbally (though even here non-verbal expression is most common).

2.2.1.2. Role Self-Claims

Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories.

(Goffman, 1963: 2)

By fate and by life-choices individuals are classified by themselves and others according to various schemes of social roles[2]: professional, kinship, age, sexual, territorial, political, ideological, artistic, religious, organizational, and situational. A role, from one perspective, can be viewed as a projected image of self shared by all roleholders. All doctors enjoy the prestige and the financial rewards of belonging to this

restricted group. All gain prestige from the publicized successes of a few, and all suffer from the publicized errors of a few. More relevantly to the current discussion, any doctor is expected to fulfill the self-claims attaching to this role: a history of successful medical studies (preferably framed and displayed on the wall of his practice); accuracy in reaching medical diagnoses; a commitment to care; emotional tolerance to sights of nakedness, blood, disease, deformity, and death; adequate, clean, and sterile equipment and surroundings. No one can escape making countless self-claims by virtue of membership to the various social groupings with which he is identified.

Roles vary in specificity from the most particular to the most general. At one end of the spectrum we find characteristic parts or routines regularly enacted before certain audiences by a single individual: 'Jo Smith with his office colleagues', 'Dr. Twistbone with a patient,' 'Attila the Hun on the battlefield,' 'Attila in private with his concubines.' These individual routines are built up on the sediment of countless past independent self-claims, on consistencies of behaviour and appearance observed over several performances.

Progressing towards greater generality, we find roles shared among larger groups of people: antique car collectors, skiers, Mormons, plumbers, Frenchmen, contract killers. Each of these categories is associated with a set of self-claims expected of members. In his article "Radio Talk" (1981: 197-330), Goffman analyses the vicissitudes of maintaining the central claim attributed by radio broadcasters to themselves: "the production of seemingly faultless fresh talk" (p. 242). At the opposite extreme from individual routines we find such inclusive categories as 'male' and 'female' or 'child' and 'adult.'

Role self-claims cannot, by definition, be established verbally: the very fact of belonging to a social role is the effective assertion of such self-claims, and their verbalization provides mere redundancy.

It should be clarified that the self-claim of *membership* to a role is not necessarily or even usually a role self-claim itself. 'I am a trapeze artist' or 'I belong to Amnesty International' would qualify as independent self-claims (of membership to a role), unless implied in the definition of a super-ordinate role. As an example of the latter 'I am white'

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[2] By 'role' I will mean no more than a socially-defined category of persons associated with a set of

could be seen as a role self-claim associated with the independent self-claim 'I am a neo-nazi.'

2.2.1.3. Universal Self-Claims

The concept of 'person' or 'human being' can be considered a role in the sense I have been using the term (i.e., as a collective 'self-presentation'), the most general of all roles.

This 'universal' role is not free from requirements. Most of us normally remain unaware of the many self-claims we make and are expected to make by mere virtue of being persons in society. On the other hand, some individuals suffer crippling handicaps in dealing with simple everyday activities due to failures in this regard: physical deformities, stigmatized racial or ethnic backgrounds, problematic sexual identities, psychological disorders, or criminal records (Goffman, 1963B). Occasionally all of us become sharply aware of these basic expectations, finding ourselves in situations which expose a particular deficiency:

> The most fortunate of normals is likely to have his half-hidden failing, and for every little failing there is a social occasion when it will loom large.

> Competency in regard to common-human abilities is something we tacitly allot to all adults we meet with, an achievement and qualification they are taken to start with, credit for which they receive in advance. An individual's failure to sustain these 'normal' standards is thus taken as evidence not only that he doesn't (or might not) measure up in these respects, but also that as a claimant he has tacitly presented himself in a false light. With reappraisal goes discrediting and an imputation of bad faith.

> (Goffman, 1963B: 126; 1981: 202)

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attributes. In *Stigma* (1963: 1) Goffman uses the term 'social identity.'

A universal self-claim is one assumed to be made by 'everybody' or 'all normal people.' They are not necessarily truly cross-cultural self-claims. Every society creates and defends its own version of what constitutes 'normal' behaviour, appearance, and other characteristics of personhood. A self-claim is 'universal' only from the point-of-view of a single individual or of a social group. However, there may be a number of basic requirements to social interaction:

> Participation in any circuit of face-to-face activity requires the participant to keep command of himself, both as a person capable of executing physical movements and as one capable of receiving and transmitting communications.
>
> (Goffman, 1961: 93)

> There is a special family of competencies seen to be common to the human estate by virtue of involving ongoing requisites for living in society: the ability, for example, to walk, see, hear, dress appropriately, manipulate small physical objects and, in literate societies, write, read, and compute with numbers.
>
> (Goffman, 1981: 201)

In the following discussion regarding the substance of claims about the self, some general categories of claims will be suggested which all societies require of members. In each case, however, the specific substance of requirements will vary. For example, the level of competence and detailed characteristics associated with 'walking' in an urban environment, with its hard surfaces, broad but restricted pedestrian areas, and crowds of people, differ from those associated with walking in arctic, mountain, or tropical forest surroundings. Social definitions of what 'walking' competence entails will vary accordingly.

As in the case of role self-claims, and for the same reasons, universal self-claims cannot be made verbally.

2.2.2. *Content* of Self-Claims

Self-claims can additionally be classified according to their **content**, though here the choice of distinguishing criteria tends to be rather more arbitrary. Plato, as we have seen (Chapter Three, Section 2.1), identified 'virtue,' 'wisdom,' 'wealth,' and 'physical beauty' as the four aspects regarding which a man may or may not 'know himself'. I will adopt a somewhat different division, including self-claims of **skill**, self-claims of the **mind**, self-claims of **territory**, self-claims of **appearance**, and self-claims of **biography**.

2.2.2.1. Self-Claims of Skill

Self-claims of skill assert a specific level of ability by the claimant regarding some observable and/or complex activity: tennis-playing, nation-conquering, lock-picking, speech-giving, or brain-transplanting. "I can do..." would provide a verbal statement of this type.

From the point of view of a particular individual or society, certain self-claims of skill will be associated with certain claimants by virtue of role-membership or merely by virtue of being human beings. In Europe, parents must be able to teach their children 'proper manners,' dentists to pull teeth and fill cavities, and males to play football (soccer). In Italy, *all* individuals are expected by most natives to be able to cook a proper pot of pasta, in Brazil to dance the samba, in Great Britain to tolerate the ingestion of large quantities of beer.

Certain self-claims of skill must be demanded of all members (i.e., will be considered 'universal') by almost every human society. In order to be able to interact at all, or to interact at an adequate standard, social actors must demonstrate competence in a number of domains. Firstly, they must be able to produce **language** and other accepted means of communication efficiently. Errors may occur at various levels: pronunciation, handwriting, spelling, lexicon, syntax, style, interest of content, relevance of topic, continuity of thought, conversational turn-taking[3]. **Sensory-motor coordination** is a second basic category of universal skills, including such abilities as walking, orientation,

guiding the various bodily parts through space, and manipulating objects[4]. Thirdly, each society sets an optimum level of **control over the body**, restricting freedom in regards to acceptable bodily movements, emotional expression, and 'creature releases'[5]. Individuals must therefore develop the necessary competence in managing their body.

2.2.2.2. Self-Claims of the Mind

Self-claims of the mind assert either

> a) the possession of a fact, belief, memory, desire, opinion, attitude, or other latent mental state or property by the claimant; or,

> b) a specific level of ability by the claimant regarding some mental activity (including perception): calculating square-roots, forecasting stock market tendencies, appreciating modern art, recognizing musical notes, communicating telepathically, understanding Slovenian.

Verbalized statements would be of the types "I think...", "I believe...", "I feel...", "I understand...", "I want...", "I know...", "I can see/hear/smell/touch/taste...".

Again, social roles are typically associated with certain self-claims of the mind. Charity workers are required to possess philanthropic ideals and motives; geometry teachers to know the formula for calculating circumferences. Other mental self-claims will apply to whole societies: knowledge of earthquake emergency procedures in Japan, pride of 'being an American' in the United States, understanding three languages in Switzerland.

It is possible to distinguish a number of categories of mental self-claims which all societies demand of the individual[6].

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[3] See "Radio Talk: A Study of the Ways of Our Errors" in Goffman (1981) for a consideration of speech as a basic human competence.

[4] At least the ability to maneouver the body through space as a pedestrian has been discussed at some length by Goffman (1971: 5-18).

[5] Mary Douglas (1971) has treated the social control of the body from a cross-cultural perspective.

[6] Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974) can be interpreted as a study of such claims.

Firstly, individuals must be able to report with some accuracy on what occurs within their perceivable environment, a mental competence I will term **immediate perception**. They are expected to perform to a certain level with their 'exterior' senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch; likewise with their 'interior' senses of hunger, thirst, pain, itchiness, and such bodily messages. They must be able to offer reasonably accurate judgments of colour, bitterness, sharpness, weight, size, tone, loudness, and other culturally-relevant sensory characteristics of stimuli.

Secondly, individuals must possess and, when relevant, apply the 'correct' (i.e., culturally defined) **natural frameworks of interpretation**. Natural frames, as mentioned in Chapter Three, are those which we use to view things in terms of an unconscious, mechanistic universe. In Western society, our scientific theories tell us, among other things, that billiard balls pushed off a table drop down towards the ground. A force called 'gravity' prevents them from floating in space or spiraling up towards the ceiling. Individuals should interpret events within the conceptions and ideas currently held about how the world 'works.'

Thirdly, individuals should be seen to possess and correctly apply the appropriate **social frameworks of interpretation**. Social frames are ordered classifications of knowledge by which actors interpret events guided by conscious action, the social world. Individuals are expected to possess the frames considered 'common knowledge' by their society, and to apply them with 'common sense.' They are expected to be 'cultured,' knowing about their own personal histories, the history and geography of the world around them and of their society, the laws of fashion and good taste, practical information essential to everyday life, the rules of morality and etiquette, and the various types of social occasion and their workings. Individuals must additionally manage these matrices of knowledge according to accepted procedures. One thing is to know that cups are designed for drinking. Another is whether they are actually used accordingly or rather as hats, juggling balls, or representations of a deity. Thus, social frame discredits would include not only revealing a lack or incompleteness of a basic social frame, but also using the wrong frame to interpret events, failing to identify an element from a particular frame, misjudging a particular item (according to values attached to the item within the frame),

or using items (objects, ideas, or activities) from one frame in an inappropriate context (i.e., mixing frames).

Fourthly, individuals should be able to decode verbal and other forms of symbolic communication efficiently, when such messages are offered competently within the receiver's range of attention. **Language interpretation** is a subset of the interpretation of situations, but it is an important one, for language is the main tool used by participants to intentionally communicate meanings to each other.

Fifthly, a participant in a situation is expected to display **appropriate cognitive and emotional involvement** in the frame shared with other participants. Indeed, participation is synonymous with involvement. Situations --card games, board meetings, funerals-- seem real only as long as participants generally appear to be genuinely engrossed in them. On the other hand, a situation may be threatened by overinvolvement (i.e.. by 'excessive' emotional displays). Thus, all societies must require a self-claim of 'appropriate' involvement.

Finally, individuals must be required to display **logical and consistent thought**, what might be called calculation 'within the parameters of a frame.' The simple rules of rational computation must be followed by members of a society if they are to be considered fully capable for social interaction.

2.2.2.3. Self-Claims of Territory

Self-claims of territory concern the control over certain 'fields of things' which Goffman (1971) refers to as the "territories of the self": personal possessions, clothing and the body itself, permanently-owned spaces such as homes and gardens, occupied areas such as phone booths or tables at a cafe, the 'place' held in a queue, guarded information, the right to talk during a discussion.

A territorial self-claim belongs to one of two complementary types:

a) Self-claims of *control* over the claimant's own preserves.

A self-claim to control is a claim of ability and willingness to defend and protect the preserve from unauthorized intrusion. Examples include purchasing a

commodity, 'saving' a place at a canteen table, conquering a castle, and the child's taunt "I've got a secret."

b) Self-claims of *respect* for the preserve of another.

A self-claim to respect is a claim of intention to avoid intruding upon a preserve without previous authorization. Examples include shows of tact and deference, pledges of allegiance/obedience, a door-to-door salesman's "This will only take a minute of your time...", a politician's vow to abstain from increasing taxes, a bank robber's "Nobody's going to get hurt (if everyone cooperates)...", and a peace treaty between two nations after a war of territorial conquest.

Certain territorial self-claims accompany specific social roles. A shopkeeper claims control over the goods displayed, and respect towards the customer's questions and requests. A customer, conversely, claims control over the shopkeeper's attention (at least as much as any other customer), and respect towards the goods displayed.

Other territorial self-claims are considered universal within a single society. In Great Britain, for instance, unacquainted individuals passing each other on the street respectfully avoid 'staring' at each other --only the briefest scan is permitted for purposes of maneuvering and possible identification. The more prolonged looks common in Mediterranean countries would be seen as invasions of privacy, transgressions of one's right to be ignored.

Five categories of territorial self-claims can be applied cross-culturally.

Material territories include personal possessions, objects to which the owner has temporarily lain claim to, human dependents, and the controls of creature comfort systems such as lights, heating, or music players.

Spatial/bodily territories include the body of an individual, the space immediately surrounding it, and all spatial preserves which he is responsible for protecting.

During focused interaction (encounters), and even during unfocused interaction, there are a number of bounded **interactional territories**, both in space and in time, which participants have a duty to protect and/or respect. The encounter itself can be thought of

as a closed unit which outsiders may enter and participants may leave only according to certain rituals of entrance and exit. Similarly, interaction is organized sequentially in time, as a series of turns, and certain rules of turn-taking must be enforced if individual selves are to be preserved undamaged. (Goffman 1961, 1971, 1981)

Informational territories refer to the facts, ideas, or feelings which an individual is expected to maintain private, or secret, concealed from certain others. Personal information about sexual, toilet, and criminal activities, for example, are commonly withheld (and, by others, not requested) during public interaction in our society. Physical blemishes and deformities are also normally disguised, if not hidden altogether (and, by others, ignored). More generally, any information known to clash with an image of self being presented, should be concealed by the actor and disattended by fellow interactants.

The **ego territory** is the symbol or idea of the very self, sometimes referred to as 'honour' or 'dignity'. This can be damaged or mistreated in various ways. What we call an 'insult' is a direct affront to the self, and it is something which an actor should not tolerate, and which others should avoid causing. Insults may be 'active' (a sign of disrespect is offered) or 'passive' (a sign of respect due is not offered).

2.2.2.4. Self-Claims of Appearance and Condition

These refer to the physical aspect and condition of the claimant (or the possessions and settings for which he is considered responsible), and may be verbalized as "I look...", "my things look..." or "My physical condition is...". Some elements include the beauty, cleanliness, and orderliness of possessions and owned spaces, bodily and facial configuration, posture, body odour, audible qualities of voice, skin/hair colour and texture, dress, hygiene, age, constitution, and health.

Role self-claims of appearance and condition include the fashionable standards of beauty required of 'top models,' the advanced age typical of national leaders, the large size of night-club doormen, the cleanliness of a chef's kitchen, the colourful suit and elegant poses of a bullfighter, the stamina of long-distance runners, and the scars, piercings, tattoos, stretchings, flattenings, and other bodily disfigurations applied to initiated members of several Western and non-Western social groups.

Universal self-claims of appearance vary from one society to another. In the United States, standards of teeth whiteness and straightness are extremely high in comparison to European standards. Europeans, on the other hand, are much less tolerant regarding obesity than Americans. All societies, however, impose some basic norms of appearance 'universally'. A few basic cross-cultural categories can be obtained from the above listed 'elements' of appearance.

2.2.2.5. Self-Claims of Biography

The types of self-claims presented thus far concern *potentialities* of the claimant (I *can* do, I *can* control...), which may or may not be realized in actual circumstances. This fifth category, on the other hand, regards allegations of actual fact, of events that did, do, or will take place (whether visibly to observers or not).

Biographical self-claims describe the circumstances, activities, mental and bodily states, relationships (to objects, persons, or categories), or mere presence of the claimant at more or less specific points in space and time. They may be put into words in these and similar ways: "I was there (at that time)", "This happened to me (then)", "I felt/am feeling...", "I did it (this many times/for the first time at this age)", "I am now doing this", "I am going to do this (within this amount of time/as soon as possible)", "I am/was a friend/nephew/colleague/business partner of...".

Specific roles demand particular 'careers' to be undergone by individuals within a specific time frame. In some cases, this required history may extend beyond the individual's life through his genealogical roots. The process of recruitment for specific occupational roles, for instance, often includes testing not only of abilities, knowledge, and appearance, but also of such biographical facts as specific types of education undertaken, work experience undergone, residence taken up, gender, and, in some cases, socio-cultural/hereditary background. Once part of a role, continued membership may require further biographical additions --publications in the case of academics, supernatural perception, protection, and healing in the case of Amazonian shamans.

Each society expects specific biographical facts from all individuals. Some 'universal' expectations of this type which are almost unique to the Western world include

the experience of 'falling in love' (to be had at least once in a lifetime) and the fact of having traveled at least several hundred miles from one's birthplace. In many other societies, undergoing a prolonged initiation ceremony into adulthood and forming part of vastly extended matri- or patri-lineal families would seem equally obvious biographical essentials.

There are also a number of basic cross-cultural categories of such self-claims that may be identified:

a) **typical experiences** which are taken for granted by members of the society: rites of passage, socialization practices, typical economic, recreational, and ritual activities, emotional and physiological events, first-hand perception of typical natural and social phenomena. In the Arctic, for example 'dressing warmly' and 'walking in snow' might constitute basic life experiences; these would be lacking, however, in members of a Pacific island society, where swimming naked in bright, clear, warm water would seem equally 'basic'.

b) **typical places** where each individual is expected to have been at appropriate times. These include not only specific locations, such as 'London' or 'Red-Rock Mountain' but abstract concepts such as 'home', 'a city', or 'outdoors.'

c) **typical social relationships** with categories such as 'mother,' 'friend,' or 'object-of-sexual-desire.'

d) **typical possessions**, which among nomadic hunter-gatherers would be no more than a few hand-made portables, and in middle-class suburban America might include a large closetful of clothing, an automobile from age 16-20, and a large furnished house with front and back garden from 25-35.

2.3. Claim-makers and Claimants

Most often, the individual who actually makes a self-claim by word, deed, or observable condition is also the one about whom the self-claim is made. This will invariably be the case if the attribution is of role or universal origin. Thus, unless specified to the contrary, I will use phrases such as 'X makes a self-claim' in a loose sense, meaning 'X makes a self-claim *about X*.'

It is possible, however, that with some independent assertions claim-maker and claimant are not equivalent. Performances on the everyday stage are sometimes given by groups of individuals or **teams** (Goffman, 1959: 82-100) who share a set of self-claims that apply to the group as a whole. The self-claims to be made may be discussed in private, but once in public any self-claim made by a single member of the team must be supported by all others --a front of agreement must be maintained at all times. Thus, one individual may be a claim-maker for a large group of claimants which includes himself. A specialized role of director or spokesperson may institutionalize this relation.

Another possibility is for one person or group to act as claim-maker for a separate claimant. This may occur if the former is seen to have taken the role of legitimate agent or representative. Examples include the agent of an author or performer, the lawyer who represents a client, the slave auctioneer, the football player advertising a brand of sports shoes, and the employee who tries to 'sell' a friend as a candidate for an available job in his company. In this case, the claim-maker is not a claimant himself --or at least not of the same claims-- and yet the actor represented will be held responsible for the self-claims made on his behalf.

2.4. Self-Claims and Social Norms

Self-claims are involved in the maintenance of social order. As suggested above in section 2.2.1, many such claims --specifically, those of 'role' and 'universal' origin-- derive from a social definition of who the claimant is. A lawyer does not need to verbally declare his knowledge of basic legal theory, or his respect for the law, but if questioned will readily provide such declarations (perhaps in an offended tone). These self-claims are implicit, but they are most certainly present, and their discredit will elicit the same sorts of consequences as if they had been explicit. Our society has previously associated the role of 'lawyer' with a whole host of essential attributes, and likewise with all other conceivable roles, including the universally applicable role of 'human being.'

These associations can also be characterized in terms of the social **norms** (rules, expectations) applying to a specific role, or to all people generally. Social norms, which can be defined as socially shared ideas about the required or recommended actions or characteristics of individuals. Not all social norms are related to self-claims, however. A contract killer, for instance, does not violate any self-claims when he 'rubs out' each new victim, though he breaks both criminal laws and widely-shared moral codes. On the contrary, he fulfills his self-claims to competence at his job and willingness to carry it out despite moral and criminal prohibitions. In other words, he is punctilious in observing the norms of appropriate behaviour for a person of his office.

What kind of norm would we be referring to in this latter case, and how might it be distinguished from other kinds? Goffman treated this question in his essay "The Nature of Deference and Demeanour" (1967: 47-95). Here he defined in detail the type of norm which arises from the association of particular self-claims with particular social categories: norms of demeanour. These norms are one of two types of what have been variously characterised in sociological and anthropological theory as 'expressive', 'ceremonial,' or 'ritual' norms: "A ceremonial rule is one which guides conduct in matters felt to have secondary or even no significance in their own right, having their primary importance --officially anyway-- as a conventionalised means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation" (p. 54). These norms are to be distinguished from

'substantive' (also 'instrumental' or 'intrinsic') rules, which cover matters important in their own right: thou shalt not kill, injure, steal, deceive, etc. Substantive norms are not based on what we expect others to have claimed about themselves, but rather on absolute (i.e., moral) ideas of what is 'right' and 'wrong.' Violations of substantive norms may sometimes constitute violations of ceremonial norms (as when an 'upright' citizen poisons his spouse), but they may also constitute the *fulfillment* of ceremonial norms (as with our contract killer's immoral and criminal routine).

A second distinction within the set of ceremonial norms is between those by which the individual "conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation" --norms of **deference**-- and those by which he "expresses his character" --norms of **demeanour**. Norms of deference include rules about tact, politeness, offerings of respect, and other behaviours by which the dignity of others is protected. They involve taking care to avoid discrediting the self-claims of others. Norms of demeanour, on the other hand, are designed to protect the standing and dignity of the actor himself, by upholding the "character" or self-presentation he has created for public display. They involve the fulfillment of self-claims, normally of role or universal origin[7].

This relationship between self-claims and social norms is relevant to a number of issues in humour research. For example, in Chapter Three, 2.4, it was seen that some of the 'claim-discredit' theorists of amusement phrased their account in terms of rule-violation. These theorists focused on the discredit of role and especially universal self-claims, but otherwise provided accounts of amusement closely akin to that being proposed in this thesis. Another relevant point concerns the social 'conformity' or 'control' effect/function that has often been attributed to laughter and humour. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Eight, 4.1.3 - 4.1.4.

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[7] Independent self-claims are by definition made independently of social expectations.

3. Claim-Discredits

3.1. Definition of 'Claim-Discredit'

Assuming a self-claim has been made by (or for) a claimant, how may this claim be discredited? What does it mean to say such a thing? It should be recalled that the existence of a self-claim depends on the opinion of a single perceiver (or group of perceivers). Likewise, the discrediting of a self-claim can only occur relative to a perceiver, and moreover to the same perceiver of the original claim.

Noticing a discredit is the result of an assessment of a self-claim's truth by the claim's perceiver. This assessment consists in a comparison of a self-claim's meaning with all available facts relevant to the claim. Such facts include those previously known to the perceiver, those currently observable, and those which become accessible with the passing of time.

The assessment of a self-claim's truth may have one of three outcomes. If a self-claim is supported by known facts, and the perceiver has no further reasons or disposition to doubt the claim, it may be accepted (at least temporarily) as true. Another option would be for the perceiver to doubt the truth of the self-claim, without deciding on its falsity --the agnostic position. This could be due to a suspicious nature or habit, concrete grounds for skepticism (such as past deception or error by the claimant), importance of the assessment, scarcity of relevant facts, or any combination of these elements. Such a state of indecision may give way to either positive or negative outcomes after additional information becomes available or 'testing' is performed.

Finally, the perceiver may conclude that some observed event or circumstance contradicts the self-claim, revealing its inaccuracy or falsehood. In this case, the self-claim is said to be **discredited**. The circumstance which contradicts the self-claim will be referred to as the **discrediting fact**, and the occurrence of its coming to light as the **discrediting event**. As the shortfall between claimed reality and the reality disclosed by the discrediting fact may be greater or lesser, discredits admit of degrees. Thus, I will refer to the greater or lesser **seriousness** of the discredit.

It should be noted that the act of 'perceiving a discrediting event' does not only include discredits of self-claims made before the perceiver himself, but also of claims made before third parties. The perceiver may be aware of many self-claims made by participants to each other (not all of which will apply to himself), and will be able to recognize situations where one's perception will result in the other's discredit. For example, John might know that Henry is being unfaithful his wife, and could witness Henry's discredit if she found incriminating evidence of the fact --even though this would not discredit Henry in John's eyes. From this possibility, it follows that the same discrediting fact may allow a single perceiver to witness a number of discrediting events, as additional participants become aware of the new information. Someone who spreads gossip observes a new discrediting of its subject with each retelling of the 'juicy' story to a different audience.

3.1.1. Requisites of Discredit Perception

Experience, in a general sense, can be defined as the subjective mental continuum of an individual, composed of the perceptions of all objects in the world which become available to the senses and attention throughout his conscious lifetime. Individual perceptions are not directly and automatically provided by the senses, but rather mediated by cognitive frameworks of interpretation, which direct attention and provide relevant meanings, values, and contexts[1]. The same running man, for instance, could be perceived as 'a moving object,' 'a human organism at maximum speed,' 'someone who is late,' 'a pursued criminal,' 'a reckless pedestrian,' 'a trained athlete,' 'a symbol of our stressed-out urban life,' 'a difficult target,' 'an interesting photographic subject,' 'a sexy guy,' a growing speck in my field of vision,' 'Jeremy,' 'an orthodontist from Ohio,' 'the spitting image of Harrison Ford,' 'Cynthia's husband,' and 'a selfish lout.'

Frames of interpretation, shaped largely by the social environment to which the individual has been exposed, can be divided into natural and social frames (See Chapter Three, 3.3). Self-claims and claim-discredits clearly relate to the latter category, and thus they can only be noticed when a social framework is being applied to a situation by a perceiver.

The requirements necessary for a perceiver to detect the discrediting of a self-claim can be listed as follows:

a) The observation through sensory means of a circumstance interpretable as the making of a particular self-claim.

A potential observer of a discrediting could fail to detect the event if he was not present or not paying appropriate attention when the original self-claim was made; or if barriers to sensory reception prevented the perceiving of the relevant circumstances.

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[1] The term 'perception' (ie, of a claim-making or a claim-discredit event) will be intended throughout in this wide and 'constructivist' sense: 'perception' as the end-point and output of a cognitive interpretation rather than as a direct and unprocessed sensory imprint.

b) The observation through sensory means of a circumstance interpretable as the discrediting of the self-claim (i.e., a discrediting fact).

Again, physical presence, attention to relevant details, and absence of barriers are essential.

c) The possession of an 'appropriate'[2] social framework.

According to this framework, the observed occurrence required by point 'a' should constitute the making of a particular self-claim, and the observed occurrence required by point 'b' should constitute a more-or-less serious contradiction of the claim.

What are seen as self-claims by some are not seen as such by others. In Southern European 'classroom' situations, students do not often contribute to the class discussion. Speaking to the class implies a self-claim of substantial knowledge about the current topic, and thus a risk of embarrassment by the professor or other knowledgeable pupils. In the Anglo-American educational system, on the other hand, offering opinions is actively encouraged. An Italian 'Erasmus' student at a British university, therefore, was continuously surprised by the 'shameless' and 'ridiculous' displays of classmates who constantly revealed their ignorance with ungrounded contributions. In this case, the British students did not possess a framework under which speaking publicly in a classroom situation would constitute a claim of knowledge on the current topic.

Even if a self-claim has been perceived as such by an observer, a potentially discrediting event may be interpreted otherwise by the use of frameworks possessed. Consider the case of a French citizen of African descent. A xenophobic French nationalist may agree with a more tolerant compatriot that the man claims to be French. Their varying social frameworks, however, could lead to disagreements over whether the man's ancestry discredits his self-claim of nationality.

d) The application of the 'appropriate' social framework.

The same strip of activity could be experienced by the same individual in twenty different ways depending on the framework of interpretation applied to the scene. It is not enough that the individual *possess* the appropriate framework of interpretation; he must also *apply* it at the relevant moment.

For a claim-discredit to be perceived, an observer must engage in an assessment of a self-claim's truth. In other words, he must apply a framework which establishes the requirements of a self-claim (seen to have been made) to a set of facts known about the claimant; and, he must judge whether these facts 'fit' with the requirements. Though such assessments are routine aspects of mental behaviour, they cannot take place always and for all the self-claims that could potentially be assessed at any given moment. There are severe limits to the allotment of attention by a human individual.

During a radio programme, for instance, many spoken errors by an announcer could be overlooked by a listener interested by the content of the transmission itself. These mistakes, on the other hand, would not pass undetected by the programme director as he judges the announcer's performance. Such errors have also been compiled and sold as 'humour' by various entrepreneurs, and bought by consumers who presumably listen with a continuously critical attitude.

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[2] By 'appropriate' in this context I mean only appropriate for an interpretation of the percept in question as the discrediting of a self-claim. No connotation of 'correctness,' truth, or accuracy is intended.

3.1.2. Catalysts of Assessment

Testing the truth of observed self-claims seems to be a routine mental activity carried out by human beings, whose accurate knowledge of their social surround is essential to their safe and effective pursuit of ends[3]. Generally, it takes place almost unconsciously, either closely following the observation of a self-claim, or closely following the observation of new relevant information which subsequently comes to the attention of the perceiver. In certain environments where little trust is placed in self-presentations --i.e., those of international espionage (Goffman, 1969: 3-84), police or judicial inquiry, journalistic investigation, and, of course, social science research-- it may occur more frequently and intentionally.

In some cases, the behaviour of third parties may elicit a moment of claim-assessment by the perceiver. One example is provided by agents who intentionally attempt to cause discredit by testing or disproving self-claims. The mere appearance at a situation of a new participant may also cue the perceiver to re-assess the informational state of affairs regarding self-claims made by all present towards the new arrival, and vice-versa. Also, a discrediting event may be retold, verbally or otherwise, to the perceiver, often stressing or exaggerating the extent of the discredit (See Section 3.2.3.2). Gossip, satire, and much comedy and humour can be classified here. The mere labeling of an upcoming performance as 'humour' predisposes the audience for claim-assessment in the directions suggested by the performer --as was seen in Chapter Two, such humour 'cues' are a common feature of attempts to stimulate the amusement of others. Relatedly, the sounds and images of others' laughter or embarrassment can incidentally act as 'alarm signs' (Goffman, 1971: 238-328) for the perceiver, to which he may respond by consciously testing the self-claims active in his immediate environment. Eyebrow-raises, finger-pointings, 'significant' stares, whispered messages, and other collusive or open communications may also put the perceiver on guard, in these cases more intentionally.

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[3] In "Normal Appearances," (1971: 238-328) Goffman suggests that actors continuously monitor their current situation for a match with their concept of what is 'normal' --an activity he labels "dissociated vigilance." He presents a number of phenomena, such as the practices and tribulations of con-artists and other conscious 'fakers' as powerful evidence of this idea.

3.1.3. Uncertainty, Disagreement, and Bias

An assessment of fit between self-claim and fact shares many features of judgments, including the possibility of bias and error, a certain amount of decisional leeway, ultimate uncertainty, scarcity or abundance of relevant facts, and limits of time and attention. Disagreements among a multiplicity of observers as to the funniness of any single event are intrinsic to the process.

In the case at hand, the major issue whose outcome will be influenced by such features may be stated as follows: 'Has self-claim X been discredited by fact Y, and if so, to what extent?' This general problem, however, may be broken down into two constituent points at which disagreement, error, and the like may be more specifically located.

The first concerns the question of whether or not the self-claim has actually been made by the alleged claimant, and if so how strongly. Was it made recently or years ago? Has it been repeated often? Do other witnesses corroborate the existence of the self-claim, or is it the perceiver's individual belief? Has the 'claimant' perhaps made a point of offering disclaimers? Are alternative interpretations of the claiming act possible? How well does the perceiver know the alleged claimant personally? How familiar is the perceiver with the alleged claimant's cultural background? If a role self-claim, how familiar is the perceiver with the expectations of the role in question, and with the claimant's membership status? The story about the 'shamelessly ignorant' British students --from the Italian perspective-- exemplifies the type of disagreement which may arise.

Secondly, the issue of whether or not the facts at hand represent the self-claim's discredit must be decided. Is the claimant just pretending? Is he knowingly and intentionally breaching rules merely to make a point? Is the event in question an exception? Are other alternative interpretations possible? Is the perceiver aware of the claimant's interpretation? Does the perceiver have all the evidence at his disposal? How large is the gap between self-claim and fact? Are other participants in agreement with the perceiver's version of the event?

These decisional variables, of course, are merely abstract possibilities of uncertainty or disagreement. They do not normally engage the perceiver's attention at the

time of assessment, this being primarily an unconscious process. In practice, most of these questions are taken for granted, or have been resolved previously to the moment at which the assessment takes place. In other words, this high-speed, semi-automatic judgment is based more on prejudice --i.e., on the use of internalized frames of interpretation-- than on conscious sifting and weighing of evidence. A perceiver may believe rationally that laughing at a blind man's stumble is unfair --the blind cannot claim the same kind of walking competence as the sighted-- and yet he may find himself smiling or snickering at the unexpected event against his own better judgment. Similarly, new employees at a mental home must probably undergo a learning period before they may cease to react with amusement, shock, and outrage at the pathological behaviour of patients, and begin to accept them as 'normal' in this context[4].

One major source of bias, however, can be confidently identified: the opinion of other participants in the situation, for example as expressed by their laughter or non-laughter. It appears that the assessment process, though too rapid to allow much reasoning, may allow the influence of others' assessment outcomes. If other individuals sharing the social situation of the perceiver --particularly if these are friends or liked individuals-- appear to find an event funny, the perceiver's probability and intensity of amusement will increase. Varied empirical findings, such as the psychological experiments carried out by Anthony Chapman and Hugh Foot on 'companion effects' (See Chapman, 1983) and the effectiveness and widespread use of 'canned laughter' (Fuller, 1977) testify to this phenomenon (see Chapter Eight, 4.1.2). The opinion of culturally 'close' others confirms the perceiver's own suspicions or beliefs that a self-claim has been discredited according to the appropriate frame of interpretation, tipping the scales of assessment in the positive direction. The presence of an unamused friend, or of strangers/outgroup members, may on the other hand reduce amusement, as the perceiver may be less sure of his judgment.

In cases where the discredit has been caused by an agent, or retold as 'humour', the action of the agent/teller reveals his assessment of the event in question as funny, and thus exerts an identical effect on the perceiver. As noted in Chapter Two (2.1.1), it has been demonstrated that amusement varies proportionally with the positiveness of the

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[4] And indeed, it appears that such reactions are never completely eliminated (See Chapter Eight, 4.1.4)

perceiver's affective disposition towards the disparaging agent. A skillful comedian is able to guide his audience's interpretations, and thus their amusement reactions.

3.2. Claim-Discredit Variables

Situations in which a self-claim's discredit is perceived, following a process of claim assessment, may be classified according to at least three variables: the **cause** of the discredit, which may be mere chance or accident on the one hand, some conscious agent on the other; the personal identity of the **claimant** discredited, which may be that of the perceiver himself or else some other actor; and the **location** of the event in one of many types of framed reality --either 'untransformed' reality or some kind of 'transformation' (book, story, film, imagining, play, etc.).

3.2.1 *Cause* of Discredit: Accident/Agent

A discrediting fact may be exposed spontaneously over the course of everyday events. The claimant may let something 'slip,' challenging situations may arise which test his self-claim beyond the breaking point, or others may unintentionally trespass his 'backstage' regions and witness normally hidden parts of his self. These types of circumstances give rise to what I will call **accident**-caused discreditings. On the other hand, discrediting facts may be sought and/or publicly exposed intentionally by fellow participants, for various reasons: to discomfit the claimant, ruin his reputation, or 'teach him a lesson' in humility/honesty; to learn the truth of a self-claim when much is at stake (as in the case of espionage); for sheer pleasure, fun, or 'malice'. Various strategies (i.e., 'uncovering moves' --Goffman, 1969: 11-27) may be adopted: the claimant may be put under 'pressure' by engineering situations that will test his self-claim, information may be sought from other sources, illicit trespassing of backstage regions may be undertaken, and 'evidence' may even be invented, deliberately misinterpreted or exaggerated, 'planted,' or faked. In such cases I will refer to the discreditings as **agent**-caused.

3.2.2. *Claimant* of Discredit: Perceiver/Other

Another variable concerns the personal identity of the discredited individual. Normally we envisage a perceiver who observes the discredit of someone else, but occasionally he may also find *his own* self-presentation damaged by some fact. Every actor is frequently aware of himself from the perspective of an observer. Indeed, his ability to see himself 'from the outside' is crucial to his development of his own concept of self, and for managing social interaction (Mead, 1974). Thus, on this basis we may distinguish between **perceiver** and **other** discredits.

As will be seen in Chapter Six (Section 2), discredits of the perceiver often lead to embarrassment rather than amusement (See also Goffman, esp. 1967: 97-112). Nevertheless, when the perceiver does not closely identify with the part of himself discredited (i.e., it was 'just a silly mistake', 'not the real me'), amusement is also possible.

3.2.3. *Location* of Discredit: Untransformed/Transformed Reality

3.2.3.1. Levels of Reality

The location of a discredit refers to its place within the layered framework of interpretative matrices through which individuals experience the worlds of fact and fantasy (Goffman, 1974; see also this thesis, Chapter Three, 3.3). This variable is considerably less straightforward than the causes and claimants of discredit, and will thus require a more elaborate presentation.

By saying that a perceiver 'observes' the discrediting of a self-claim, I do not necessarily imply his physical presence at the scene of the discrediting. He could be watching a television newscast, reading a novel, listening to 'gossip,' scrutinizing a photograph, or recalling an old memory. Much observation of social events takes place at one or more removes from the actual happenings in question --which need not have even occurred in 'real life.'

How may a social event (or indeed, any event) be positioned in relation to its perceiver? The most basic distinction to be made is between events which take place in **untransformed reality** and those which take place in any number of **transformed realities**.

'Untransformed reality' refers to the level which a perceiver would refer to when asked what was 'really going on' in a particular situation[5]. It is the most basic level of interpretation, beyond which the natural or social world would cease to have meaning: in Goffman's terms, a 'primary framework,' either natural or social. What is seen as real warfare, with real weapons and real deaths, occurs in untransformed reality. By contrast, the warfare within a film such as *Apocalypse Now* is a 'transformation' of this primary frame, as is the warfare in a board game such as *Risk*, the warfare in a military drill during peacetime, or the warfare we imagine now as I use the word 'warfare.'

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[5] The term 'untransformed reality' does not imply events within this 'reality' have not actuallybeen transformed in some way by a perceiver. All experience (or at least, all shareable experience) is mediated by cognitive frameworks of interpretation. The label 'untransformed' alludes rather to *the perceiver's own* separation of the 'real' world from less real ones: it is he who would label it so.

It is a remarkable fact that perceivers can and do become engrossed in worlds they know to be 'unreal': they not only follow events in these worlds, but even become emotionally involved in them. The theatre, film, and fictional literature are obvious and familiar examples within our culture, but the range of 'non-real' types of realities commonly available to experience is truly vast, and the potential range infinite. These genres are not absolutely removed and disconnected from the primary frameworks that perceivers use to interpret an otherwise meaningless universe. If they were, they would cease to have meaning themselves. Rather, each of them constitutes a transformation, a particular type of frame with certain standard, consistent, and well-known deviations from reality, which are conventionally disattended in order to 'enter into the spirit' of the framed reality. To enjoy a film properly, one must forget about the seat he is sitting on, the room in which the film is projected, the people with whom he has come, the events before and after the projection, the technical and stylistic considerations of the film, the scandalous love lives of the flesh-and-blood actors on screen, and all other distractions. If successful, he becomes an observer and even participant of another social world.

Within transformed realities, all manner of events may take place, and varied emotions elicited in perceivers. Tragic deaths of the virtuous may lead to tears, the triumph of underdogs may provoke joy, and the threat of violence may frighten. More relevantly to this thesis, the quirks of eccentrics, the clumsiness of oafs, the downfall of the pompous, and fooling of the gullible may bring on the audience's laughter. Discreditings do not necessarily have to be 'real' to provoke laughter, so long as the perceiver has accepted the conventions of the transformed frame and finds himself engrossed within it.

3.2.3.2. Types of Transformations

Transformations can take many forms. One way of classifying this variety is according to the relationship between the perceiver of transformed events and the production of the frame by some actor or group: a **retelling** is a transformation observed by a passive perceiver; a **play act** is a transformation observed by a perceiver who collaborates in its very production as part of a group who perform to each other; an

imagined sequence is a transformation observed by a perceiver who mentally produces it for himself. In the following analysis, I will describe each of these in more detail, identifying some of the further variables which might be used to generate sub-categories.

a. Retellings

A **retelling** is the exhibition of a strip of activity to a passive audience. In this case the perceiver merely observes a reality that has been transformed and presented by others.

Retellings can vary according to the **medium** of retelling. Events may be recounted,

- by written description in notes, letters, newspaper and magazine articles, books, advertisements, faxes, encyclopedia entries, e-mails.
- orally in conversation, after-dinner speeches, conferences.
- in static visual depictions: photographs, drawings, paintings, comics.
- in moving visual depictions: feature length films, shorts, cartoons, documentaries, 'home movies,' closed-circuit TV images.
- by role-playing: theatrical productions, imitation during talk, and instructive, examined, practiced, or commercial demonstrations of an activity.

The **purposes** of an exhibition may also vary widely: entertainment of the audience, instruction of pupils, persuasion of consumers, ridicule of political figures, enlightenment of the masses, deceiving a 'mark,' obtaining criminal evidence, shocking the art world.

The **complexity** of the exhibition may range from the improvised anecdote told by a fellow conversationalist to the staging of a lavish London West End Musical.

The exhibition may be more or less **grounded in 'reality,'** i.e., in events that did actually take place in untransformed reality. It may consist of (in approximate order of decreasing depth of grounding),

• a direct recording of real events: 'live' filming or videotaping, audio recording, recorded measures of bodily changes recorded in real time, sonar records.

• a description of observed fact: a fieldworker's notes, a diary, an eyewitness police report, an oral recounting of observed events.

• an description of unobserved but allegedly true facts: reported 'hearsay', a 'gossip column', urban myths.

• a fictional description based on some verified facts: films or novels 'based on a true story,' police 'reconstructions' of a crime.

• fiction in a relatively factual world: 'realist' fiction

• fiction in a relatively fictional world: fantasy, science-fiction, surrealism and other similar genres.

A final variable concerns the **intentionality** of the exhibition. Most are designed for display (conversational contributions, scientific research, art and literature), but there may be limits on the audience for whom display is intended. An anthropological text may be targeted for social science circles, less so to the general public, and certainly not (in most cases) to the natives under observation.

b. Play Acts

A **play act** refers to the acted exhibition of a strip of activity by a group of participants to which the perceiver belongs. In these cases, the actors who create the transformed reality also react to the events within it. The perceiver is part of the team who transform and present the framed events in question for the appreciation of all participants of the encounter.

Some purposes of play acts include:

• Entertainment: child's play, 'role-playing' and 'board' games.

• Improving mental health: psychoanalytic role-playing sessions.

• Practice: simulations of surgical operations, fire-drills, play or concert rehearsals, football training, military exercises.

• Ceremonial: rites de passage, etc.

With regards to other variables suggested above, play acts are by definition intentional and role-played, but, the complexity of the frame's production may vary widely, from that of a child's game of 'police and thieves' to a sophisticated and costly military exercise over a whole continent. Also, the play act may be more or less grounded in reality. A simple game of 'police and thieves' is more 'realistic' in this sense than elaborate fantasy role-playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*.

c. Imagined Sequences

An **imagined sequence** is the mental exhibition of a strip of activity by a perceiver for himself.

These exhibitions include what we call 'reminiscing about' or 'remembering' past events, 'daydreaming,' 'imagining' stories, 'fantasizing' about future possibilities, dreaming, and hallucinating. Another possibility is merely the distorted (i.e., poetical, symbolic, or metaphoric) interpretation of currently observable or reported events. For example, animals or natural objects might be anthropomorphized (a group of penguins seen as a 'black tie' party).

The **intentionality** of these sequences may vary, from conscious attempts to recall a particular experience to unbidden associations, drug-induced hallucinations, or dreams during sleep.

They may also be more or less **grounded in reality**. For example, memories are usually considered to be deeply rooted in fact (however illusory this may turn out to be), whereas predictions for the future have only weak ties with confirmable truths, which become increasingly tenuous the further in time one projects.

3.2.3.3. Frame Structures

Transformations may be retransformed. A boy may blow out the candles of his birthday cake. The candle-blowing scene may be videotaped; this home video may be used as evidence in a child-molestation trial; the using of this video may be commented upon in a legal text; this commentary may be photocopied for use in a law course.... Such recursive 'nesting' of frames can continue almost indefinitely, though a perceiver may not necessarily be aware of all intervening transformations. Increasing depth of a particular frame within such a layered **frame structure** may create greater difficulties for involvement, but perceivers nevertheless routinely penetrate even quite complex structures: The reader of the abovementioned 'final photocopy' may be able to imagine the child-molestation trial, various legal hypotheses, and the initial candle-blowing scene quite 'realistically,' even when many of these imaginings might be objectively different from the original sources.

4. Conclusions

I have provided a basic statement of a proposed causal hypothesis of amusement, an alternative to the more well-known theories listed in Chapter Two. It follows the line of the claim-discredit accounts described in Chapter Three:

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.

Dividing this statement into an initial central assertion and two subsequent amendments (points '1' and '2'), it is the former which has been the topic of this chapter.

I have clarified in detail the concepts of 'self-claim' and 'claim-discredit,' as well as what their perception entails. Furthermore, I have identified five variables which account for the vast heterogeneity of claim-discredit situations: the *origin* and *content* of self-claims and the *cause*, *claimant*, and *location* of claim-discredits.

A **self-claim** has been defined as *a skill, quality, emotion, mental state, identity, object, relationship, territory, or any other attribute ascribed to a **claimant** by a **claim-maker** who is either the claimant himself or someone seen to legitimately represent the claimant.* These verbal or non-verbal attributions are the basis of the self-presentations constructed by participants before each other.

Self-claims may be classified according to their origin and content. The **origin** of a self-claim (i.e., how it has been made) is **independent** if the claimant was not bound by rule or expectation to have made it. Otherwise, a self-claim may derive from membership to a particular **role** which implies it, or merely due to the consideration of its content as a **universal** possession.

Self-claims may also be distinguished by **content** into those concerning competence in specific **skill**s; mental content, attitudes, abilities, dexterity and other

possessions of the **mind**; control over and/or respect for various types of **territory**; **appearance and physical condition**; and details of **biography**.

I have distinguished between the concepts of **claim-maker**, the agent who actually executes the attribution in question by word or deed, and the **claimant**, the participant(s) to whom the self-claim applies, and who will be responsible for maintaining it. Though often equivalent, the claim-maker and claimant may be separate in cases of independent assertions.

The requirements and variables concerning the perception of a self-claim's discredit have also been discussed. Noticing a **discrediting event** follows an assessment of a self-claim's truth by a perceiver, a judgment arrived at by the comparison of the claim's meaning with all available relevant facts. The shortfall between the self-claim and the reality disclosed by the discrediting fact constitutes the **seriousness** of the discredit. The claim discredited may have been intended for the perceiver himself or for other audiences present. Perception of a discrediting event requires the physical perception of relevant informations and the possession and timely application of appropriate social interpretative frames.

Claim assessments, though a normal part of social participants' mental routines, may also be stimulated by specific events, such as new arrivals, others' laughter, humour cues, and collusive or overt signaling. The assessments are subject to indecision, uncertainty, bias, and disagreement regarding two questions: 1) Has a self-claim in fact been made by the claimant?; and 2) Has the claim been discredited by facts? Though such questions are not normally confronted rationally, but rather settled by prejudice or immediate appearances, they may be strongly biased by the social context. The opinion of other --and especially socially close-- participants has an important influence on the perceiver's assessment.

Variables of discredit include the **cause** of discredit, the personal identity of the **claimant** discredited, and the **location** of discrediting events within the various possible cognitive frameworks used by a perceiver to interpret reality. The cause of a self-claim's discredit may be pure chance or **accident**, or else the intentional actions of some **agent**. The claimant whose self-claim is discredited may be either the **perceiver** himself or else some **other** actor. The location of the discrediting event may be either what is seen as

untransformed reality or else any number of **transformed realities**. The latter category refers to the exhibition of a strip of activity, based on but removed from what we would consider 'real' events, either to a passive audience of perceivers (**retellings**), by a group of participants to each other (**play-acts**), or by a single participant to himself (**imagined sequences**). Transformed events may be retransformed.

Table 1 summarizes the variables relating to the perception of a discrediting event.

Object of Variation	Variable	Possible Values
Discrediting Event	*Location*	Untransformed Reality / Transformed Reality
	Cause	Accident / Agent
	Claimant	Other / Perceiver
	Origin	Independent / Role / Universal
Self-Claim	*Content*	Skill/ Mind / Territory / Appearance / Biography

Table 1. Variables relating to the perception of a discrediting event.

Combining the possible outcomes of each of these five variables results in 120 categories, which provide a starting point for coping with the immense variability of claim-discredit situations (See table 2). The viewed televised accusations of financial corruption by one politician to another could be described as a transformed agent-caused discredit of an other's role claim to respect certain material territories (•). A stutterer's perception of his own linguistic troubles could be described as the accidental discredit (in untransformed reality) of the perceiver's own self-claim to the universally required skill of correct speech production (*). In Chapter Five, this multiple intersection of variables will be used as the basis of a classification of funny stimuli.

Table 2. Classification of discrediting situations on the basis of the five self-claim and claim-discredit variables identified (See Table 1)

	Claim Situations																	
Location of Discredit	Untransformed Reality												Transf					
Claimant Discredited	Other						Perceiver						Other					
Cause of Discredit	Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Age		
Origin of Self-Claim[1]	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																		

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[1] I = self-claims of Independent origin, R = self-claims of Role origin, U = self-claims of Universal origin.

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Chapter Five:

A Typology of Funny Events

1. Introduction

In this Chapter I will describe, illustrate, and classify self-claim discredits which stimulate amusement when perceived: funny claim-discredits. As has already been conceded, not all perceived discredit events are experienced as funny. In Chapter Six, unfunny claim-discredits will be considered, including those where the main focus of attention is other than the discredit itself (the boy's bleeding head rather than his clumsiness on the bike), and those where discredit affects the perceiver himself ('the real me is discredited' rather than 'someone else is discredited').

It will be argued, however, that amusing claim-discredit percepts exhaust the set of amusing stimuli. A typology of funny claim-discredits is also a typology of all funny events. This does not mean that jokes, tickling, irony, Punch and Judy shows, and banana-peel slips should be treated 'in the same way' or that they are, in the end, 'the same thing.' The crude application of a single-cause explanation to lists of funny stimuli can only meet with disappointment, as the heterogeneity of such phenomena is real and evident. I will try to demonstrate, however, that this variety arises from the natural diversity of self-claim discredit situations, as they may appear to a single individual, the **perceiver** of the discredit. It is not 'the same thing' to crash into a lamppost while walking, distracted by the simultaneous reading of a fascinating historical article about the sinking of the Titanic, as it is to read the article itself, in which the Titanic promoters' loud boasts about their ship's 'unsinkability' are recounted. The reader of the Titanic article and victim of this crash could interpret both of these events as claim-discredits, and find both funny. However, in one case the discredit is perceived in the primary interpreted world of the individual himself, in the 'real' here and now, requires self-observation, affects his own universally claimed skill of sensory-motor coordination, and it is perceived while still reeling from a bump on the head. In the second case, discredit took place decades before, is experienced through the symbolic world created by a magazine writer, and involves the failure to keep a bold, verbal, independent claim of appearance and condition about the claimant's property. Different again would be the perception by the crash victim, momentarily impressed by the synchronicity between reading about a crash and crashing in reality, that he has mentally accepted some kind of

causal connection between the collision of a cruise liner and an iceberg in the remote past and the impact between his own body and an urban lighting fixture. Such a violation of his self-claim to appropriate interpretation of natural events could also lead to an experience of hilarity. I believe that all manifestations of amusement can be accounted for in a similar way, as reactions to claim-discredit perceptions of one type or another.

This chapter represents a protracted demonstration of how a claim-discredit theory of amusement can be used to account for funny stimuli of all the types imaginable. In the literature of humour theory, as has been noted in Chapter Two (3.3), such demonstrations have been standard practice, and have been the main tests of theory validity. The reader is invited to consider the plausibility of the descriptions offered, and thus test for himself the usefulness of the classification for the task of engaging in thought and discussion about amusement, humour, and laughter.

The typology has been developed directly from the two self-claim and three claim-discredit variables identified in Chapter Four (2.2, 3.2), and thus adds little theoretical novelty to the preceding discussion. In fact, it is identical in form to the typology of claim-discredit situations provided in the 'Conclusions' of this previous chapter (See Table 1).

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)

	Events																	
Funny																		
Location of Discredit	Untransformed Reality											Transforme						
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		

Assumed: A perceiver has identified the discrediting of a self-claim, and has thereby experienced amusement.

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.

The first three variables relate to the perceiver's interpretation of the claim-discredit event, and their combined possible values result in eight main types of funny stimuli (referred to as *Types I-VIII*):

- *Location* of Discredit: Untransformed Reality / Transformed Reality

    A discrediting event may take place either in what the perceiver takes to be 'real' everyday life (Untransformed Reality) or in some 'transformation' of real life: retelling, play act, or imagined sequence (Transformed Reality).

- *Cause* of Discredit: Accident / Agent

    The discrediting may occur accidentally --by mere chance-- (Accident) or may be caused intentionally by a conscious agent (Agent).

- *Claimant* Discredited: Other / Perceiver

    The claimant discredited may be or may have been the perceiver himself (Perceiver), or another participant (Other).

Each of the eight main types of funny stimuli has been subdivided into 12 classes on the basis of two further variables, this time relating to the self-claim discredited:

- *Origin* of Self-Claim: Independent / Role / Universal

    A self-claim may be seen to have been made independently (Independent), by virtue of a role which the actor assumes (Role), or by mere virtue of being a social actor who must interact in society (Universal).

- *Content* of Self-Claim: Skill / Mind / Territory / Appearance and Condition / Biography

    Self-claims may be made in regard to five basic types of attributes: specific levels of competence in particular skills (Skill); specific mental contents, attitudes, abilities, and dexterity (Mind); control over owned territories, and respect for the territories of others (Territory); a specific physical appearance and condition (Appearance and Condition); specific facts about the actual history of the individual (Biography).

Table 1 shows how the combined outcome possibilities of these five variables result in 120 types of funny stimuli. In addition, some of the content classes for self-claims of universal origin will be subdivided in the discussion according to the basic types listed in Chapter Four:

- Universal Self-Claims of Skill:
    - ∗ Language production
    - ∗ Sensory-motor coordination
    - ∗ Control over the body
    - ∗ Other culturally-specific skills considered 'universal'

- Universal Self-Claims of the Mind:
    - ∗ Immediate perception
    - ∗ Possession/correct application of natural frameworks of interpretation.
    - ∗ Possession/correct application of social frameworks of interpretation.
    - ∗ Language interpretation
    - ∗ Appropriate cognitive and emotional involvement

- Universal Self-Claims of Territory:
    - ∗ Material territories
    - ∗ Spatial/bodily territories
    - ∗ Interactional territories
    - ∗ Informational territories
    - ∗ Ego territory

In the remainder of the chapter I will provide numerous examples of funny stimuli to illustrate the classification. Many categories will be left 'blank,' in the sense of no illustration being specifically provided. This has been purposefully done in order to avoid excessive redundancy. Once the full range of Type I stimuli has been illustrated,

providing an equivalent coverage for each of the remaining eight main classes will be unnecessary. The differences between discredits affecting claims of the three 'origin' and five 'content' types should have been made clear, and the possible resulting combinations of these variables should be imaginable for Type II stimuli, as for the remaining classes. In other words, Type I illustrations may serve as Type II illustrations in all but a single aspect --the identity of the claimant discredited; Type I and Type II illustrations, in turn, map onto Types III and IV, but for the existence of an agent causing the discredit; and I-IV, of course, can be transformed into IV-VIII by a shift in the location of the discredit. Successive examples, therefore, will focus primarily on the effects of each new complicating variable introduced, with occasional reference to particularly novel or interesting categories.

As a preliminary guide, a short sketch of the Eight main types can be advanced:

• *Type I*: The Accidental Discredit of an Other (In Untransformed Reality)

Here are included the spontaneous everyday errors, slips, accidents, failures, gaffes, faux pas, unwanted revelations, misinterpretations, stigmas, deformities, awkward moves of those around us (friends, acquaintances, and co-present strangers). The first-hand observation of a braggart's failure to fulfil his boast, of a sportsman to display elegance and skill on the field, of a speaker to construct a decent English sentence --such constitute typical examples.

• *Type II*: The Agent-Caused Discredit of an Other (In Untransformed Reality)

In this type we find similar events, but for which some responsibility can be attributed to the actions of a third party: the tripping of a pedestrian with an outstretched leg, the throwing of a custard pie in a victim's face, the calling of a bluff, the stripping of a friend naked in a public place, the questioning or testing of a supposed expert, the publication of a private letter, the engineering of a hoax, illusion, or practical joke. Such events, witnessed first hand by an observer, can be considered examples of Type II.

- *Types III and IV*: The Accidental (Type III) and Agent-Caused (Type IV) Discredit of the Self (In Untransformed Reality)

These two types include the very same sorts of events as Types I and II (respectively), but from the point of view of the person whose self-claim has been discredited: *one's own* errors, gaffes, misunderstandings, deformities, and the like, whether occurring spontaneously (Type III) or due to the trippings, questionings, challengings, hoaxings, trespassings, or other claim-discredit activities of an agent (Type IV).

Worthy of special mention are certain funny events to which the self has unique or privileged access, due to his private 'interior' perspective on his own mental and bodily processes: 'fear games' (from peek-a-boo to horror films and rollercoasters) provoke errors of emotional management, tickling causes a bodily control lapse, sensory illusions cause perceptual failures, magic tricks and coincidences cause natural frame management mistakes, and jokes, puns, irony, absurdity, twist endings, and other phenomena cause social frame management errors. Each of these errors or failures is experienced in a unique way by the subject/observer.

- *Types V-VIII*: Transformed Self-Claim Discredits of an Other or of the Self, either Accidental or Agent-Caused

Here we find the same types of events listed for Types I-IV, but experienced at second or third hand from what the perceiver considers 'the real here and now': incompetence, gaffes, misunderstandings, debunkings, failures, and the like which are recounted in gossip, literature, staged plays, home video recordings, and motion pictures; re-enacted in child's games, group psychotherapy meetings, improvisational theatre interaction, ironic and joking interchanges; or conjured up mentally in memories, daydreams, fantasies, distortions, and the like.

It is worth pointing out that the reader himself will probably not find funny all or even many of the jokes and anecdotes listed as illustrations. Some may simply not appeal

to him, or may be 'badly' retold. In addition and for reasons to be developed in Chapter Six, their very location within a 'serious' academic text should tend to dull their humour globally. The purpose, however, is not to entertain the reader, and so any amusement experienced should be taken as a pleasant epiphenomenon. All illustrations fulfil the requirement that someone --a joke-teller, a publisher, a theatre critic, an audience, the current author-- at some point found them funny. The elements which that perceiver reacted to should hopefully be apparent.

More serious would be the impression that the source of amusement has been misattributed. For example, it might seem that the explanation provided for a joke is insufficient, accounting for perhaps some of the humour, but disregarding what seem to be crucial elements. In this regard, I should clarify that actual events, anecdotes, and jokes may include several amusing stimuli at various conceptual levels, each of which may or may not make an impression on any single perceiver. The telling of a verbal joke may include not only an amusing punchline, but also minor silliness, disparagement, obscenity, parody, and funny 'faces' and accents along the way. These 'complex stimuli' will be analysed more fully in Chapter Six. I have avoided them as far as possible, but some inclusions have been inevitable. If 'additional sources' of humour are noticed, therefore, these should be temporarily ignored in order to focus on the type of funny stimulus at hand.

Even after weeding out such irrelevancies, however, it may be felt that a particular example has been misclassified, or that it is inherently ambiguous according the terms of the model. The purpose of the classification, however, is not to provide a convenient filing system into which amusing events can be correctly, unambiguously, and unproblematically slotted. I am not claiming the existence of distinct, well-bounded categories of funny stimuli. On the contrary, the aim is to establish the unity of such events, while accounting for *apparent* difference where relevant. The typology makes evident some of the common features which actors themselves discriminate, and which are used in the configuration of the loose and inconsistent layman terminology of humour and amusement. By applying these distinctions consistently, and in combination with each other, it becomes possible to establish unexpected relations between apparently diverse phenomena. For example, there is no essential difference between experiencing

what we take to be 'untransformed reality' and experiencing engrossment in 'transformed realities.' All experience is interpreted, and even brushing our teeth in the morning is seen through a severely limiting filter similar to that which blacks out the living room while we watch television. However, as people *do* differentiate between the real and the non-real, and between different types of reality. These distinctions also have important effects on subsequent thought, emotion, and action: interpreting a mentally disturbed individual as a character in a joke, for instance, may allow the interpreter to enjoy and exhibit amusement at the 'madman' in a way that might be impossible if the person was seen as 'real.' It is well worth structuring the discussion of funny events according to a systematic version of such distinctions. In this way, it is possible to observe that the differences we see in funny events are merely the application of these distinctions to claim-discredit situations.

I have attempted to present highly stereotypical illustrations where differences will be most obvious; not to reify these differences, but rather, to provide a few reference points of the type that participants, including humour researchers, habitually employ. I wish to present a way of talking about funny stimuli, a vocabulary that will reduce the level of imprecision of commonly available terms such as 'irony,' 'jokes,' 'satire,' or 'wit.'

Not only am I aware that in-between cases exist for distinctions such as 'accident-caused/agent-caused discredits' or 'claims of mind/skill/biography...'; demonstrating the continuous nature of such phenomena is the very point of the exercise. Thus, it is irrelevant whether a specific illustration could be classified elsewhere --or indeed whether alternative classificatory systems could be envisaged. The examples are not meant to 'prove' the solidity of the model, but to provide understanding of it. It will be sufficient, for the moment, if specific illustrations *could be interpreted* as belonging to the types and sub-types in question, or even if other perhaps more representative examples *could be imagined*. If such interpretations or imaginings are indeed possible, and the logic of the cross-cutting variables has been followed consistently, a unitary scheme for the interpretation of funny events will emerge. The extent to which this model accords with the observations and experiences of actors will determine its validity.

2. Funny Events in Untransformed Reality

The *location* of a funny self-claim's discredit may be either what is considered 'everyday reality' by the perceiver or else some type of transformation such as a book, film, or story. When we think of 'funny things,' it is usually jokes, funny anecdotes, stand-up performers, televised sit-coms, comedy films, animated cartoons, comic strips, and similar transformations of everyday events that come to mind. In Section 3, I will seek to show that the humorous elements in such productions consist of transformed claim-discredit events. However, many of the occurrences which stimulate our amusement take place at what we would consider to be the most basic level of reality, what is 'really going on' in a situation (Goffman, 1974): flesh-and-blood individuals have displayed self-claims which fail to be sustained before co-present observers. Everyday life is full of such moments, when we or others appear ridiculous in the eyes of someone, and amusement is evoked by events in the 'here and now.' These will be the focus of the present section.

As advanced in the introduction, four of the eight main types of funny events include events in untransformed reality: the accidental discredit of an other (Type I), the agent-caused discredit of an other (Type II), the accidental discredit of the self (Type III), and the agent-caused discredit of the self (Type IV).

Categories will be illustrated mainly with examples of true discreditings from real life. In most cases, these are taken from published sources which claim to recount true happenings and which treat the particular instances quoted as humorous. Some are entries from the 'humour diaries' of university students who participated in a study conducted by Polyxenie Kambouropoulou in 1930. A few will be taken from my own collection of real-life observations, taken from either my own experiences or those of trusted others, and in this case they will be selected either because I or someone else was amused in reaction to them. These anecdotes will be identified by the words 'personal observation' and will be recounted as factually as possible, apart from the substitution of names. Finally, a small remainder will be illustrated with hypothetical examples.

It should be pointed out that the examples provided do not necessarily represent actual instances of funny stimuli which were perceived in untransformed reality. They

constitute events which actually occurred and have been found funny by somebody, but not always somebody who was present at the time and place of the event itself. When no actual amused perceiver was present, he must be assumed or imagined. Furthermore, to the reader of this paper, inevitably, they represent transformations of the original event, descriptions within an academic text; and even to myself, the author, the large majority have been experienced only 'second hand.'

Nevertheless, they did occur (as far as we know), and they conceivably *could* have been experienced as funny by a 'live' observer. Interpreted in this light, they may serve their purpose, which is merely that of elucidating the structure of the classification proposed. Hopefully they will prompt the reader to recall additional examples which he or she *will* have experienced in real life.

2.1. *Type I*. The Accidental Discredit of an Other's Self-Claim (in Untransformed Reality)

Funny Events																							
Untransformed Reality												Transformed Reality											
Other						Perceiver						Other						Perceiver					
Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent		
I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U
I			II			III			IV			V			VI			VII			V III		

Table 2. *Type I* Funny Events. See Table 1 (p. 200) for full chart.

Type I represents the simplest case. The claimant discredited is some person or group other than the perceiver (i.e., student sees professor misspelling word on chalkboard), so that there is no question of him feeling embarrassment at the event. Secondly, the discredit is not intentionally caused by any agent, but rather occurs spontaneously (i.e., no one attempted to lure or trick the professor into making this error).

For this basic type, I will provide a detailed breakdown of sub-categories based on origin and content of the self-claim discredited, in order to illustrate the variety of possibilities within each of the eight main types. I will treat independent, role, and universal self-claims separately, giving examples of discredits of skill, mind, territory, appearance, and biography self-claims for each. The reader will then be able to apply these distinctions to the remaining situation types, for which only certain specific amendments will be made.

2.1.1. *Type I* - Independent Origin

As seen in Chapter Four self-claims of **independent origin** are those which a participant is not bound by rule or expectation to make. The self-attribution of such claims is assumed by the perceiver on the basis of an explicit statement seen to have been made by the claimant. When an independent self-claim of skill, mind, territory, appearance, or biography seen to have been made by a claimant is discredited publicly, bystanders may find the situation hilarious. Let us explore these possibilities in some empirical detail.

During a performance in 1977, Romarck the Hypnotist uttered the following words: "Ladies and gentlemen, I shall now drive this car blindfold through the centre of Ilford" (Nown, 1985: 10). This statement represented a bold self-claim of **skill**, committing Romarck to an unusual competence, successful driving despite wearing a blindfold over the eyes. Approximately two minutes later he collided with a parked police van (ibid.). Though Nown does not report if any bystanders laughed at the accident, or whether the crash was serious enough to have inhibited amusement (See Chapter Six, 3.2), he himself includes it in a book of humorous anecdotes.

Independent self-claims may also be non-verbal. One of the students taking part in Kambouropoulou's study (1930: 23) reported the following as a source of amusement: "A girl who plays bridge well and who often talks about the theory of the game and comments upon other people's poor plays, played a poor hand in which she did just about everything wrong." Here, theorizing about bridge and criticizing others' play seems to have been taken by the diarist (quite reasonably) as an implicit self-claim of skill along the following lines: "I am an excellent bridge player." An extreme episode of poor playing ("she did just about everything wrong") is then taken as a funny discredit of this claim.

Independent self-claims of the **mind** may also be made verbally ("I have an IQ of 149," "I'm an expert on basketball trivia,") or non-verbally. As an example of the latter case, making statements of fact ("Rome is in Italy," "It is impossible to build a perpetual motion machine") commits the speaker to a self-claim of knowledge about the topic. Discovering or knowing the falsehood of such statements may lead to amusement. With

hindsight it is funny to read that Professor Erasmus Wilson, on the first demonstrations of electric light in 1878, confidently sentenced its doom: "With regard to electric light, much has been said for and against it, but I think I may say, without fear of contradiction, that when the Paris exhibition closes, electric light will close with it, and very little more will be heard of it" (Nown, 1985: 75). A similar but more immediate discredit awaited sports commentator Harry Carpenter when, during a boxing match, he declared: "That's it. There's no way Ali can win this one now..." That very moment, Muhammed Ali knocked his opponent out for the count. (Complete, 1989: 100)

Self-claims of **territory**, it has been proposed, may relate to the claimed control of or the claimed respect for a certain territory. An example of an independent self-claim of *control* is provided by the case of Joshua Abraham Norton, a 40 year-old bankrupt man, who declared himself in 1859 his Imperial Highness Norton I, Emperor of the USA, and maintained a kind of court in his small town (Nicholas, 1990: 28-30). The evident falsity of Mr. Norton's claims to power over the United States of America may result in amusement. An independent self-claim of *respect* for the physical integrity of innocent people is implied in the following excerpt from a report by an assault victim delivered in April 1983: "Suddenly I was subjected to a particularly nasty, totally unexpected and unprovoked attack." The aggrieved tone of the speaker could be taken to suggest that violent surprise attacks, especially of an unprovoked nature are morally wrong, or in any case, that he would not engage in such actions. It is thus funny to discover the identity of the speaker --Peter Sutcliffe a British serial killer also known as the 'Yorkshire Ripper,' who spoke these words after being attacked by a fellow inmate (Jones, 1985:188).

When an individual sports a new hairstyle, garment, or 'look,' he thereby makes an independent self-claim of fashionable or stylish **appearance**. In the eyes of some observers, however, the style exhibited may fail to support the self-claim, and thus lead to amusement (personal observation). "I've never felt better" were the last words of Douglas Fairbanks (Nown, 1985: 63), his death immediately discrediting this independent self-claim to a healthy physical **condition**.

Discreditable self-claims of **biography** include those minor falsehoods which participants occasionally include in their reports of past or present events, often to prevent being discredited on other grounds: "That's funny. I posted it over a week ago",

"Yes, I *have* seen Citizen Kane. Rosebud was the sled! Brilliant!", "I've been meaning to phone you...", "I can't make it today; I've come down with the flu", "...but I didn't inhale." The following true story is a typical case.

A group of friends are cleaning up a kitchen after a meal. Linda 'advises' Frank to find a top for a bottle of olive oil "or it will go bad," implying that Frank is the kind of careless housekeeper who leaves bottles of olive oil untopped. Frank, however, finds that a makeshift paper towel 'stopper' has been inserted into the neck of the bottle. Believing it to have been work of his flat-mate Steve, and wishing to avoid Linda's derogatory implication, he bluffs: "I wasn't going to leave the bottle uncovered, you know. Look, we've corked it up with this paper towel until we find a proper top for it." Linda bursts into laughter: "I did that!!". The falsehood of Steve's biographical self-claim to have corked the bottle is the source of amusement here. (personal observation).

2.1.2. *Type I* - Role Origin

As seen in Chapter Four, role self-claims are those made by virtue of membership to a role held by the participant: policemen claim the ability to apprehend criminals, butchers to chop meat skilfully. The accidental discredits of such tacit claims in untransformed reality are no less funny (assuming the identity and involvement conditions hold --see Chapter Six, 2-3) than those which are made explicitly.

For example, a basic **skill** of aeroplane pilots is the ability to guide a plane to its destination by the use of cockpit instruments, flight charts, and an excellent sense of orientation. It must have therefore been quite funny for all those who followed the bizarre flight of an aeroplane pilot since known as "Wrong Way" Corrigan, who took off from a foggy NY airport headed for California, but ended up in Ireland (Complete, 1989: 18-19). A similar example is that of stage actor Robert Coates, who in the seventeenth century became well-known due to his appallingly bad acting. He would forget lines, invent scenes, and even repeat sections, causing "riots, uproars, threats of lynching --and gales of laughter." It is reported that on one occasion his acting was so poor that several people laughed themselves ill. (Nicholas, 1990:115-118)

Turning to role self-claims of the **mind**, certain pools of knowledge are often expected of particular role holders. Those responsible for a patent office, for instance, claim expert knowledge about the scope for technological advance, explaining the inclusion of this statement made in 1899 by the American Patent Office in a book of funny anecdotes: "Everything that can be invented has been invented" (Nown, 1985: 75). An American vice-president claims, among other things, an exceptional knowledge of history, politics, geography, and current events. Dan Quayle was a laughingstock and an embarrassment to President Bush for his whole term in office, seeming to lack very much indeed in terms of required mental contents. His foot-in-mouth quotes became so popular that there continues to exist a Dan Quayle homepage on the Internet, with hundreds of anecdotes and classic quips, such as the following:

"I love California; I practically grew up in Phoenix"

"Mars is essentially in the same orbit... Mars is somewhat the same distance from the sun, which is very important. We have seen pictures where there are canals, we believe, and water. If there is water, that means there is oxygen. If there oxygen, that means we can breathe"

(Walker, 1995)

The roles of criminal and police officer are both associated with important self-claims of **territory** *control*. In the former case, control is generally claimed over the booty, victims, and any obstacles to the completion of a crime. Mason and Burns recount numerous amusing discredits of such claims (1985: 18). In one story, a first-time bank robber was obviously nervous and could hardly see with three stocking masks and a scarf on his head. Pulling out his spectacle case instead of his gun, he provoked a general outburst of laughter by threatening to shoot. The police found him "cowering behind a parked car." In various complementary stories of law-enforcer discredit, Mason and Burns implicitly make reference to the territorial self-claims of police officers, namely of control over the perpetrators of crime (especially once identified and located). For example, a particular task force besieged a house for 2 hours, shooting tear gas into the windows and shouting at the gunman to turn himself in, until an observer pointed out that the gunman had escaped and was standing "just behind the police marksmen begging himself to come out and give himself up" (Complete, 1989: 13). An example of the discredit of a role self-claim of territorial *respect* might be the running over of a pedestrian by an ambulance (medical workers claiming extreme respect for people's bodily health).

Hockey players, due to the nature of their sport, claim a **physical appearance and condition** of physical strength and toughness. Perhaps for this reason, an entry in one of Kambouropoulou's humour diaries records amusement at an "abnormally thin player on Buccaneers [hockey] team" (1930: 30).

2.1.3. *Type I* - Universal Origin

Universal self-claims are those expected by a perceiver to be made by 'everyone,' by mere virtue of being a person. Failures to maintain such self-claims are a common cause of amusement in others. Specific 'universal' claims vary from one society to another (fishing and igloo-building proficiency are basic in Eskimo society, car-driving and home account-keeping in the urban West). However, certain general categories are likely to be found everywhere, such as the ability to walk, talk, control one's body, protect one's things, respect those of others, look 'decent,' and have 'common sense' and 'common knowledge. I will identify many of these categories in the following pages, under the usual content headings of skills, mind, territories, appearance, and biography.

Certain **skills** are taken to be claimed by members in all societies. Proficiency in *language production* is one such skill[1]. Numerous amusing examples may be given of faults at various levels of linguistic ability. Windsor (1979: 35) lists misspellings of English words found on foreign menus: "Wild duck in orang sorts...Biftek Gordon Blue...Chees and biskiss." Rees (1983: 14) quotes the following overheard redundancy from one woman to another: "'Well,' I says to him, I says to him, I says, says I, 'Well, I says,' I says." Hardy (1983: 120) provides this passage from the 1959 National Insurance Bill, an example of risible opacity: "For the purpose of this part of the schedule a person over pensionable age, not being an insured person, shall be treated as an employed person if he would be an insured person were he under pensionable age and would be an employed person were he an insured person." Lack of substance may be another cause for amusing linguistic failure, as in this quote from the Department of Technical Co-operation's "Departmental Fire Precautions and Instructions": "Most fires are caused by some igniting source coming into contact with combustible material." (Hardy, 1983: 127)

Another basic skill demanded in all societies of members can be called acceptable *sensory-motor coordination*, and involves the ability to perform basic bodily tasks of motion along typical terrains, handling of objects, balance, and the like. Awkward movements, falls, collisions, spills, and drops are among the most obvious causes of amusement. Nancy Reagan, during an American political convention, while walking

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[1] For a discussion of the cross-cultural types of universal skill self-claims, see Chapter Four, 2.2.2.1.

across the stage to take her place by her husband Ronald, tripped and fell, disappearing from the view of the television camera that picked up the stumble, and causing the amusement of many viewers (Staveacre, 1987: 9). Kambouropoulou's humour diaries include several cases: "Roommate sitting down hard on chair and hurting the end of her spine. I felt badly, but laughed loudly" (p. 27); " The awkward way B. stumbled over a rut in the road" (p. 29); "One member of the [hockey] team lived up to her reputation of taking innumerable falls" (p. 30).

A separate universal skill is *bodily control*, the ability to keep the body's 'automatic' activities --such as excretions, emotive outbursts, noisy processes, and nervous movements-- in check. Robert Morley has recounted the amusing failures of actor Lloyd Cole to maintain this universal self-claim (Morley, 1978: 47). He was told off by Alistair Sim, his director in a play, for not controlling his own strength. He "broke parts of the set,...broke props, and two of the girls in the play had bruises where [he] had taken them gently by the arm." While trying to defend himself, Cole, who was driving the car in which they were travelling, suddenly found himself with the gear stick in his hand, which came off with a "terrible noise." Another extreme case was Richard Whately, former Protestant archbishop of Dublin, who has been described as "one of the most restless men who ever lived." His limbs were in constant motion. At the home of a certain Lady Anglesey, he "dislocated half a dozen of her most elegant chairs by whizzing them round and round on one leg while he talked, and there were patches of bare carpet in front of the fireplace where he would shuffle to and fro while warming his bottom." (Nicholas, 1990: 167-71). In Hornsby (1989: 72), a more typical spontaneous discredit is reported: The TV presenter Sally Magnusson noticed, a few seconds before the start of a televised live report, that milk was leaking from her breasts and causing plainly visible stains on her dress. She gave the report in this condition.

Finally, there are numerous *culturally-specific skills* which are demanded of all members and may be found funny if discredited. The complex set of abilities (timetable-reading, ticket-buying, train-identifying, stop-checking, information-asking, language-speaking) necessary to travel successfully on a train is one example for Western society, relevant to the following story (in Hardy, 1983). Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Elham went on a day trip to Boulogne, but when they tried to get to Paris on the way to Dover they took

the wrong train --to Luxembourg. Trying to return to Paris, they overslept, missed a connection, and arrived in Basel. They finally reached Paris but then mistakenly took a train to Bonn (pp. 12-13). In 16th century China, such a specific 'universal' skill would not have been applicable.

Universal self-claims of the **mind** can also be subdivided into numerous typical mental attributions, including 'immediate' perception, possession and correct application of natural and social frameworks of interpretation, language interpretation, and appropriate cognitive and emotional involvement[2]. *Immediate perception* refers to the sensory detection of salient events in the surrounding environment and within the body: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling[3]. To a group of students sharing a flat, the frequent complaints of a neighbour about imaginary noises coming from their apartment --'loud stomping,' 'moving of furniture,' and even a 'pendulum clock'-- were often reacted to with amusement (personal observation). A more extreme example appears in Hardy (1983: 34), a woman who did not notice her pregnancy until delivering a healthy 7-pound daughter.

Another universal mental expectation is the *ownership and application of* whatever is considered to be *the 'correct' natural frame of interpretation* --i.e., to interpret events according to prevailing ideas about the natural world and its laws of causality. Children often provoke the amusement of adults with their unscientific ideas. When a child was asked, during a handwriting lesson, "Where's the dot that should be over the 'i' ?", he answered, "Oh, that's still in the pencil" (Muir, 1984: 15). This reply is funny because to us the child misframes events by believing that written words pre-exist within the writing implement, rather than within the writer's mind. A similar natural frame error is reported by Linkletter, occurring during an interview with a small boy:

"I'm going to be a doctor"
"What if I came to you with a broken arm, what would you do?"
"Put it in a cast."

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[2] For a discussion of the cross-cultural types of universal mental self-claims, see Chapter Four, 2.2.2.2.

[3] It is not being proposed that such perception is indeed 'immediate' or 'direct,' as I assume all perception is mediated by cognitive interpretation. Nevertheless, there is a common everyday distinction between 'seeing' and 'interpreting,' loosely based perhaps on more or less abstract/deep levels of cognitive processing, which may lead to apparent differences between amusing stimuli. It is these subjective differences which are being drawn in the discussion.

"What if I had a stomach ache?"
"I'd give you a pill."
"And what if I had a hole in my head?"
"I'd put a cork in it."

(1978: back cover)

Children are not the only targets of amusement of this type. Adults with different or erroneous ideas about the natural world also often provoke the hilarity of others. There exists a wide range of so-called 'crank' books which propose theories or ideas considered ludicrous by scientific standards. One popular science writer, for instance, has derided publications on "how to lose weight without cutting down on calories, on how to talk to plants, on how to cure your ailments by rubbing your feet, on how to apply horoscopes to your pets, on how to use ESP in making business decisions, on how to sharpen razor blades by putting them under little models of the Great Pyramid of Egypt" (Gardner, 1983: xiv). It is also well known that many theories about the natural world now accepted as sound contradicted 'common sense' when initially proposed by scientific pioneers, and were therefore "greeted with howls of laughter" (Koestler, 1964: 95).

Equally funny are the failures *to own and apply the correct social frames of interpretation* held by the perceiver, these relating to the social worlds --history, culture, and behaviour. Everyone is attributed the self-claim to know about basic historical events. For this reason, outrageous mistakes from history exams can be listed in books of humour: "The Great Fire of London was caused by someone dropping a match into a tin of petrol in a garage" (Muir, 1984: 37). Knowledge of important current events is also universally required. Hardy includes among his funny anecdotes a 1969 survey which showed that "over a fifth of the population of Morocco were unaware that man had set foot on the surface of the moon. Over 50% angrily accused their questioners of trying to hoax them" (Hardy, 1983: 100).

Knowledge must also be accompanied by appropriate application of relevant social frames. For example, if one knows a person, one must be able to also recognize them without fail on encountering the person face-to-face. Morley (1978: 67) recounts that Lord Portarlington uttered the following words to a woman he met at a social occasion: "Damn it, Ma'am, I know your face, but I cannot put a name to it." The great fame of this particular individual --she was Queen Victoria-- makes such forgetfulness

funny, as a serious violation of the self-claim to social frame application. A similar blunder was committed by pop singer Dana, during a tour of Europe, who couldn't understand why a hotel receptionist seemed so baffled when he asked about how to get to the gondolas or canals --it turned out he was in Vienna, not Venice (Snelson, 1990: 39).

Applying social frames includes also judging items from a frame according to relevant descriptive terms (i.e., a good-bad/funny-dramatic/cliched-original film). The following conversation was overheard on a bus: "And what are your neighbours like?" "Oh, quite normal. He's a French foot-juggler who's doing a summer season at Scarborough"(Rees, 1983: 94). This item is included in an anthology of funny remarks on the basis of the supposedly evident abnormality of what is described as a 'normal' neighbour. A similar error of judgement is imputed by Morgan and Langford (1981: 72) to Gene Simmons, of the rock group Kiss, regarding this critique of the English language's most renowned playwright:

> I think Shakespeare is shit. Absolute shit! He may have been a genius for his time, but I just can't relate to that stuff. 'Thee' and 'thou' --the guy sounds like a faggot. Captain America is a classic because he's more entertaining. If you counted the number of people who read Shakespeare, you'd be very disappointed.

Mixing social frames incorrectly is another possible violation of this self-claim. Though it may be acceptable to drink tea while shaving, other intersections of these two spheres simply jar, such as the following comment overheard in a North London pub: "An' if there's one fing I can't stand, it's razor blades in me tea" (Rees, 1983: 94). In the same vein is the unusual medical case of a woman who ate a box of tissue paper and a cigarette pack every day for 12 years (Hardy, 1983: 35). Hardy also considers laughable that women's rights groups demonstrated against the road signs along Oxford's new environmentally-conscious cycle-ways because they showed only men's bikes (p.124). According to his interpretation, applying the frame governing sexual egalitarianism to bicycle icons on road signs is excessive and petty. Attila the Hun, Pope Leo VIII, Cardinal Jean Danielou, Monsigneur Roger Tort, and Nelson Rockefeller all died while engaged in sex. (Jones, 1985: 108-11). If this be considered funny, as Jones does, the

humour stems from the clash between the frames relating to death and sexual intercourse, which makes it something of an etiquette breach to die during sex, or to have sex on the deathbed.

Language interpretation, due to its importance in everyday interaction, can be considered a separate universal mental self-claim, though it is in a sense a subset of social frame interpretations. An example of a funny failure to maintain such a claim is this quote from the transcript of a court proceeding:

> Q. And lastly, Gary, all your responses must be oral. OK?
> A. Oral
> Q. How old are you?
> A. Oral   (Lederer, 1989: 26)

Here the witness (a child) has misinterpreted the phrase "all your responses must be oral" as "you must say 'oral' in response to every question," an absurd demand.

Another basic mental self-claim required of all individuals is *an appropriate level of cognitive and emotional involvement* in the current situation as socially defined. Participants of interaction should seem to be sufficiently (but not excessively) engrossed in the activities they purport to undertake. An entry from one of Kambouropoulou's humour diaries reports: "I laughed when I happened to see D.B.'s face in choir rehearsal. The altos were practicing a certain part to the words 'And a fair old man' and as she sang, she had a very sad and rather absent-minded expression as if she were thinking of something entirely different" (1930: 21).

Finally, all individuals claim the ability to *reason logically*, to combine the elements from various natural and social frames according to certain basic rules of coherent thought. This self-claim seems to have been violated by the inventor of US Patent 1,087,186 (1914), "a device, consisting of two intertwined helices or springs, which was supposed to demonstrate the existence of God" (Morgan and Langford, 1981: 112). Though the inventor's reasoning is not provided, any conceivable argument seems ludicrous. A more explicit error is quoted by Lederer (1989: 6) from part of a child's explanation of heredity on an exam read: "if your grandfather didn't have any children, then your father probably wouldn't have any, and neither would you, probably."

Universal self-claims of **territory** can be divided into claims of material, spatial/bodily, interactional, informational, and ego territories[4]. For each of these types of territory, self-claims may be made regarding control of or respect for these preserves. Often, as will be seen in some of the illustrations, incidents involving failures of respect also include complementary failures of control.

Universal self-claims of *material territories* include control over one's own personal possessions, one's 'things' which no one else should handle or take without appropriate permission; and respect for the things of others. Pulling out a wallet and calmly counting out large bills in the middle of an urban centre is a failure of control which visitors from safer quarters of humanity sometimes commit, and one which may inspire amusement as well as crime (personal observation). A funny anecdote illustrating a failure to respect others' material territories is reported in Complete (1989: 21). A woman bought a coffee and a Kit-kat at a cafe. She went off to get some sugar and on her return found an elderly couple had taken her Kit-kat and were eating it. Furious, she took the Kit-kat and snapped a wafer off for herself, called them thieves, and stormed off. Later, she found her own Kit-kat in her handbag (Complete, 1989: 21).

Universal *spatial/bodily territories* include the body of an individual, the space immediately surrounding it, and all spatial preserves which he considers his, such as his living quarters, his fields, and other buildings, vehicles, and spaces of his own. Funny control claim-discredits take place when spaces or bodily parts --especially sensitive ones-- are trespassed by persons or objects, sometimes to the point of damage. Jones recounts the story of how club singer Ian Whittaker, walking around naked in his dressing room, caught "his privates" as he closed the drawer of a sewing machine, looking for a screwdriver (Jones, 1985: 13). A less painful but no less embarrassing discredit befell astronomer Dr. Patrick Moore, who was speaking before the television cameras when a fly flew into his mouth and was swallowed whole (Hornsby, 1989: 73). In the same collection of anecdotes can be found an illustration of a funny bodily territorial invasion (i.e., a failure to respect another's body). Alan Titchmaish, presenting a section on gardening within the *Breakfast Time* television program, was suddenly faced with the Princess of Wales, his hands covered in manure. They shook hands. (Hornsby, 1989: 98)

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[4] For a discussion of the cross-cultural types of universal territorial self-claims, see Chapter Four, 2.2.2.3.

Interactional territories are the rights to engage in joint activity with other individuals, such as the right to speak during a conversation, to attend a funeral, or to participate in the cooking of a meal. Universal self-claims of control include claims over the rights to approach strangers for small requests (the time, cigarettes), to open and maintain more general and prolonged states of conversation with acquaintances and friends, and to be politely disattended (i.e., not stared at) by strangers. Self-claims of respect provide the complement of the former: respect for strangers' small requests, for the moves of acquaintances and friends to open conversation, and for the rights of others to be disattended. An entry in one of Kambouropoulou's (1930) humour diaries provides a twin example of both control and respect failures: "Yelled loudly at a girl out of the window only to find that she wasn't the right one" (p. 15). This event can be found funny both as the victim's failure to protect her right to be left alone by strangers, and as the shouter's failure to leave strangers alone[5].

Universal *informational territories* include the facts, ideas, or feelings which an individual is expected to maintain private, or secret, concealed from others in public situations, such as potentially damaging information, the view of private bodily parts, sexual knowledge and experience, toilet activities, physical blemishes and deformity, immoral or criminal acts and attitudes, and other taboo subjects. A funny incident involving both loss of control and lack of respect for such territories is recounted by Jo Anne Williams Bennett, Canadian author. While spending a weekend in a mountain cabin with her friend Jackie, she began a conversation which treated topics such as pregnancy, periods, internal examinations, suppositories, douches and "other embarrassments of being female." "We started giggling," she writes, "because we had never talked about these things with each other." At one point, in a fit of laughter, Jo Anne shouted out that her worst experience was being told by a doctor that she had "warts on [her] cunt!". At that very moment, a young stranger who had been timidly knocking on the door walked into the kitchen. Jackie went into a hysterical fit, and Jo Anne, at first "dismayed," eventually joined in (Kurc, 1990: 14-18). Here both Jo Anne --by revealing such intimate

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[5] The latter case is actually an example of a self-discredit, rather than an other-discredit (See 2.2). Nevertheless, we can imagine that a friend of the diary writer (for whom this would be an other-discredit) could have also found amusement at the episode.

information-- and the timid stranger --by trespassing on this private talk-- are discredited for their territorial violations and thus become targets of amusement.

Finally, there are universal self-claims to protect one's own and respect others' *ego territory*, the symbol or idea of the very self. Japanese Hitachi executives, when presented with a US flag by the Governor of Kentucky during a meeting "carelessly dragged it along the ground," unaware that this was interpretable as an act of intolerable disrespect by the Americans (Ricks, 1993: 3). This incident, though grave to the participants, can be found funny as a violation of Americans' ego territory (symbolized by their flag) --both as a failure to protect it, and as a failure to respect it.

Universal self-claims of **appearance and condition** include the claims to look 'presentable' in public, wearing attire, carrying belongings, and sporting a hairstyle and cleanliness suitable to the occasion. Failures in this regard can be quite humorous. The actress Maureen Lipman spent 45 minutes trying to get some help to jump start the car, unaware of the novelty reindeer antlers she was wearing on her head, which she had put on to amuse some friends (Snelson, 1990: 62). The amusement of observers can well be imagined. The actor and writer George Baker was forced to travel for 6 months with a toy panda put in his suitcase by his young daughter. Searching his luggage, customs officers found it "to [his] horror and their amusement." (Hornsby, 1989: 3) Attention to appearance can also become ludicrous if excessive. An outstanding case is that of George 'Beau' Brummell, the 'king of the dandies' in Regency Britain, who would daily spend three hours tying his cravatte. (Nicholas, 1990: 135)

2.1.4. Summary of Type I Funny Events

In this section, I have set out and illustrated in detail the first and most simple type of self-claim discredit: the accidental discredit of an other's self-claim in untransformed reality. I have considered self claims of independent, role, and universal origin, and within each of these classes I have illustrated the funny discrediting of self-claims of skill, mind, territory, appearance, and biography. A deathbed claim to feel fine, a police team's inability to find its besieged prey, a pedestrian's clumsy step, the bizarre theories of cranks and crackpots --examples such as these have been integrated into the analysis as Type I claim-discredits of varying self-claim origin and content.

These differences can be transposed to the remaining seven types of claim-discredit situations. An awkward stumble may be accidental (Type I) or caused by an agent's trap, trip, or shove (Type II). Either of these possibilities may be found funny by other observers (Types I and II) or by the pedestrian as an observer of himself (Types III and IV). Finally, any of these four cases may be witnessed directly (Type I-IV) or else as retold stories, video-recorded images, staged fiction, or drawn comic strips (Type V-VIII). What works for awkward stumbles, can work also for universal frame-managements, independent skill claims, or role-related appearance.

2.2. *Type II*. The Agent-Caused Discredit of an Other's Self-Claim

(In Untransformed Reality)

Funny Events																							
Untransformed Reality												Transformed Reality											
Other						Perceiver						Other						Perceiver					
Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent		
I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U
I			II			III			IV			V			VI			VII			V III		

Table 3. *Type II* Funny Events. See Table 1 (p. 200) for full chart.

Self-claims can be discredited not only by accidental or unintended happenings, but also by intentional actions, by discrediting or 'uncovering' moves (see Goffman, 1969: 11-27). I will use the term **agent of discredit**, or merely 'agent' to refer to a person who is seen by the perceiver to have intentionally carried out a course of action with intent to discredit another participant's self-claim, or at least with complacency in the knowledge that it will cause such a discrediting if the action or its consequences are observed. The identification of such an agent by a perceiver introduces a new element of influence on the possibility and degree of amusement which the perceiver may experience. As has been mentioned in Chapter Two (2.1), numerous studies suggest that amusement reactions vary with a perceiver's affective disposition towards the agent of discredit[1], as well as with his disposition towards the victim.

Type II claim-discredits include those where an agent discredits a self-claim made by someone *other than the perceiver*, including such typical cases as practical jokes, hoaxes, creation of obstacles, insults, invasion of privacy, interruptions, and physical aggression. The events which may be classified here are thus identical to those belonging to Type I, except for the perceiver's identification of this agent of discredit. Examples

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[1] Generally, these studies have been phrased in terms of agents of 'disparagement' or 'misfortune'.

will now be provided of amusing Type II discredits, in somewhat less detail than for accidental discredits of others.

2.2.1. *Type II* - Independent Origin

An agent can cause the discrediting of an independent self-claim in one of two ways. The first possibility is for the agent to somehow make a false self-claim for the claimant, or else to force him to make it. Hypnotists are able to make their subjects claim all manner of absurdities, such as speaking foreign tongues or being a four-legged animal, to the great hilarity of audiences (personal observation). Another curious possibility is recounted in Mayo (1993: 43-45). A Royal Marine officer, extremely keen about his job, was forced to leave the corps for medical reasons. On his last night, his fellow officers got him drunk and had his arm tattooed with the words "43rd Commando Royal Marines," finding this very funny. Here we are made aware that a false self-claim tattooed on the flesh is difficult to explain away as the work of unauthorized claim-makers.

A second and more common method of discrediting an independent self-claim is to question or debunk the fulfilment of the claim itself. For instance, James Randi and Martin Gardner are two magicians who have deflated many self-claims of supposed telepathic, telekinetic, and other 'supernatural' powers exhibited by various charlatans (Randi, 1987; Gardner 1983). These debunkings usually involve the provision of alternative 'rational' explanations for the performance, replication of the act by the magician, and the application, where possible, of controls on the faker which would prevent him from carrying out the feat if the magician's explanation were correct (and no supernatural powers were involved). Many readers, at least judging from the critical praise of the books cited on the back covers, have found the reports of such debunkings very funny to read.

For example, in the 1960's a young Russian girl called Rosa became widely famous for her apparent ability to 'read' with her fingers. In *Science, Good, Bad and Bogus*, Martin Gardner (1983: 63-73) describes her amazing feats performed even under strict scientific controls. Then he explains that magicians are familiar with the fact that however tightly one ties a blindfold, there always remain a couple of small holes down each side of the nose. Mentalists use what is called a 'sniff' position to obtain a better view, and various tricks to improve visibility even further. Finally, he describes the photo

shown in *Time* magazine of "Rosa wearing a conventional blindfold...seated, one hand on a newspaper page...comfortably within range of a simple nose peek." (Gardner, 1983: 65) At this point amusement is sought (and I would suppose often achieved) among readers.

2.2.2. *Type II* - Role Origin

Self-claims of role origin may be discredited by agents who put these claims to testing trials, perhaps with previous knowledge of their falsity. The world of hoaxes and forgery provides one domain for research of these kinds of discredit. For example, Hans van Meegeren in the 1930's fooled art experts with lost 'masterpieces' of some of the world's greatest artists (May, 1984: 26), thus discrediting the knowledge self-claims of these supposed experts. Similar must have been the embarrassment of physical anthropologists after Charles Dawson (1864-1916) found a skull of a supposed 'missing link' between man and ape near Piltdown Common in Sussex, leading to the naming of a new species of hominid, *Eoanthropus Dawsoni*. It turned out to be a hoax (May, 1984: 29). In these examples, Meergen and Dawson can be considered agents who carry out their activities in full knowledge of their discrediting potential.

2.2.3. *Type II* - Universal Origin

All of us have more or less serious failings with regard to the universal requirements of our own society, which may be revealed by mere exposure to others or by unintended circumstances. It is also possible, however, that others may seek to expose deficiencies they are aware of, to test our capacities in search for failings, or to subject us to unfair conditions under which success will be practically impossible.

Practical jokes, wind-ups, hoaxes, and various other tricks provide examples of agent-caused discredits of this type, when observed by third parties. Tongue twisters ("She sells sea shells on the sea shore") cause the victim to mispronounce words, discrediting his self-claim of linguistic production skills. Numerous ploys may be used to

spoil a person's sensory-motor coordination: drugging or inebriating the victim, physically tripping or pushing his body, altering his environment (the schoolboy trick of pulling out the chair from behind a person), or merely distracting his attention (i.e., with a loud sound) at a crucial moment of activity requiring concentration.

Self-claims of the mind may also be discredited with more subtle tricks. Professional hypnotists may cause their subjects to see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste imaginary objects and substances, to the great amusement of audiences (personal observation). Charlatans may fool large populations with preposterous crank theories and claims of paranormal ability, discrediting their self-claims of applying the correct natural frameworks of interpretation (Gardner, 1983; Randi, 1987). Most familiar of all are wind-ups and practical jokes, ritualized in the institution of 'April Fool's Day', which cause the victim to believe an outrageous proposition.

In such jokes, the victim's holding of an evidently false frame and the resulting misadjusted words, actions, and emotional expressions are found hilarious by audiences. A laughable fabrication[2] is one which anyone with 'any common sense' should see through ---or at least this is how it should appear to observers. Some April Fools Day news stories should serve to illustrate: "Big Ben is Going Digital," BBC overseas radio claimed one year (Boston, 1982: 134). "Hovercraft services from Heathrow Cancelled Because of Low Tide", announced Capital Radio (ibid.). And then there is the infamous case of Richard Dimbleby's 'Italian spaghetti harvest,' with televised images of field labourers picking pasta directly off the 'spaghetti trees' (ibid.: 125-27). A person who is taken in by any one of these fabrications is exposed as lacking or mismanaging basic social frames. Heathrow has no seaport, pasta does not grow on trees, and the value of Big-Ben is symbolic, architectural, and historical --not related to the accuracy of its timekeeping.

Hoaxes and confidence tricks resulting in similar frame mismanagements, though not intended specifically as jokes, may provoke amusement also. A book of funny

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[2] Goffman distinguishes between a "benign" and an "exploitive" fabrication[2], but this distinction is not useful for discriminating between the types of fabrications which are amusing, and those which are not. There are "exploitive" fabrications which are nevertheless funny to many others (see the following example of Michel Chasles and the document forger). There are also unfunny benign fabrications. For example, a newspaper could run an April Fools Joke claiming that Queen Elizabeth II was to inagurate and unveil a

anecdotes includes the story of Doctor James Barry (1795-1865), a skilled army surgeon who reached the rank of Inspector General. Upon his death, it was discovered that 'he' was a woman. Our amusement here is directed not only at the discredit of Doctor Barry's gender identity, but at the countless others who were taken in by this lifelong deceit (May, 1984: 24). Even more amusing is the case of French mathematician Michel Chasles (1793-1880), who bought thousands of forged manuscripts from a hoaxer, including writings supposedly penned by Isaac Newton, Pascal, Queen Cleopatra, Socrates, Galileo, Shakespeare, and Lazarus. The most astounding detail is that all of these were written in French.

There is a genre of puzzles and 'brain teasers' whose solution is obvious if the question or the elements involved are interpreted in the correct way. For those 'in the know,' the victim will seem lacking in reasoning techniques. For example, **figure 1** includes three cut-out figures[3]. The victim is asked to position them so that each jockey is sitting up on one horse. The solution, shown in **figure 2**, involves placing each rider on a horse formed by the front of one of the cut-out horses and the back of the other. This is an unexpected resolution, but obvious once seen (In fact, the cereal packet from which this example was taken [Kellogg's, 1996] includes the blurb "It's easy when you know how!"). In the meanwhile, a victim may spend many minutes shifting the three figures around in frustration, perhaps in vain, to the amusement of observers aware of the 'obvious' solution. (personal observation).

Territorial self-claims to protect a particular preserve are very often caused by intentional agents who trespass on a claimant's property. Some sleight-of-hand magicians perform acts in which a volunteer is asked to hold a coin, card, or other object, and yet somehow the illusionist is able to make it disappear or to exchange it for a different item. This often results in much laughter from the audience at the expense of the volunteer who has failed to keep control of his universal material territories. The series of tricks sometimes ends with the magician producing the volunteer's wallet or other personal possession from his own pocket, or 'from thin air', as if to demonstrate further the

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monument to world peace, or something of the sort. This lie might deceive many people, but it would hardly be found amusing, as it would be well within the realm of the plausible.

[3] All figures in this chapter can be found on its last page (**Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

volunteer's carelessness. Brandreth (1979: 86) describes such a magic trick as an amusing 'practical joke' to be played on friends.

The classic trick of placing a bucket of water or paint balanced on a semi-open door (Brandreth [1979: 11] suggests a less dangerous 'pillow' version) is aimed at ruining the victim's bodily territory. Spying through private windows or keyholes, reading private mail, intentionally walking into 'backstage' areas (bedrooms, toilets) or forcibly removing clothing from a victim would constitute agent-caused discreditings of informational territories. Malicious interruptions during conversation, and 'gate crashing' a party are examples of interactional territory violations. As for the agent-caused violation of ego territory, this category is perfectly synonymous with the intentional insult.

Agent-caused discredits of territorial self-claims of respect are also possible, though less common and rather more awkward. An agent, through misinformation, may cause his victim to take or damage a third party's material territories. He may cause a violation of spatial/bodily preserves by physically pushing his victim across a boundary. Nown (1989: 83) provides an amusing example relative to informational territories: A Scotsman on a Monarch Airlines flight, having drunk half a litre of scotch whisky, bared his private parts to the whole plane, thereby forcing passengers to intrude on universally forbidden informational territories. It is also possible to engineer situations by which a victim unintentionally insults a third party, causing a violation of his ego territory.

Finally, many practical jokes are designed to ruin the victim's physical appearance. For example, the joker tells the victim that he has a smudge on his nose, pretends to wipe it off, and in so doing puts one on. (Brandreth, 1979: 37).

2.3. *Types III* and *IV*.

The Accidental (*III*) or Agent-Caused (*IV*) Discrediting

of the Perceiver's Own Self-Claims (in Untransformed Reality)

Funny Events																							
Untransformed Reality												Transformed Reality											
Other						Perceiver						Other						Perceiver					
Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent		
I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U
I			II			III			IV			V			VI			VII			V III		

Table 3. *Type III* and *IV* Funny Events. See Table 1 (p. 200) for full chart.

　　　　In this section I will treat funny stimuli sharing the same features as those of Types I and II, except that in this case the self-claim discredited has been made by the perceiver in whose perspective we are interested.

　　　　A self-claim --of whatever origin and content-- may be discredited in the eyes of the person who is (or was) the claimant. Indeed, many of the illustrations provided for Types I and II include specific reference to the fact that the discredited individual also became aware of discredit. As will be seen in Chapter Six (2), perception of one's own claim-discredit frequently leads to embarrassment rather than amusement. However, it is possible for such discredits of the self to be found funny if there is a sufficient perceived distance between the current or permanent self of an individual and the self discredited. For example, with the passing of time, embarrassing situations may be recalled with less embarrassment and greater amusement, as past selves become increasingly remote from who the person is at present. Some of the illustrations for Type I stimuli were drawn from collections of embarrassing moments retold or shared with the editors by the victims of embarrassment themselves (Complete, 1989; Snelson, 1990; Jones, 1985; Kurc, 1990). Presumably, these people are able to share their anecdotes with a humorous spirit due to

their achievement of a distanced perspective from the event. The children quoted as believing that a hole in the head can be cured with a cork, that words flow out from pencils, or that the Great Fire of London began with a tin of petrol, as adults will be able to laugh with genuine amusement at their recorded errors, which do not discredit their present self-claims to knowledge. We know also from experience that victims of practical jokes and hoaxes, such as those listed for Type II, can also be amused at their own other-effected discredit. In fact, such victims are usually expected and even coaxed to 'take' events 'with a sense of humour' and share in the enjoyment at their own expense. In other cases, the discredited individual may perceive his own discredit but be unable to distance himself sufficiently from it to experience amusement, feeling only embarrassment. We might suppose such a reaction of the 'psychic' charlatans unmasked by Randi and Gardener (p. 229) or of the physical anthropologist who, taken in by Charles Dawson's hoax, excitedly announced and catalogued a new species of hominid (p. 230). In both these cases, discredit concerns a strong commitment made by a central part of the individual's self.

I will not give illustrations for all the categories of self-claim origin and content specified in the previous sections. It should be clear, upon reviewing these examples, that many of the discredited claimants could have found their own situation funny, either at the time or at some later period. This might be the case, for instance, of Maureen Lipman upon the discovery of the novelty reindeer antlers on her head (p. 225). In some of these cases, of course, the discredited claimant would never even have reached the stage of detecting the discrediting. Either he would not have noticed it, or he would not have agreed with the interpretation that casts it as an event which has indeed discredited the self. Professor Erasmus Wilson (p. 213) would have to come back from the grave to realize the extent of his folly when predicting that electric light would never catch on. On the other hand, Harry Carpenter (p. 213) would have 'swallowed his words' predicting Muhammed Ali's defeat almost instantaneously. The women's rights activists who protested about the men's bikes on cycle lane signs (p. 221) might continue to assert the importance of banning such chauvinistic iconography. On the other hand, the individual who once believed (as a child) that a cork could cure a hole in a patient's head (p. 220) would now probably be able to appreciate his error.

Instead of a full catalogue of funny accidental self-claim discredits of the self, I will draw attention to a number of possibilities which are specific to this type. An actor has a unique subjective perspective into his actions and states, specifically into their mental, perceptual, and emotional component. Thus, when the circumstances of a discrediting are discernible largely or entirely through this subjectivity, we encounter types of funny events not immediately available to outside observers. Examples include frame-mismanagement errors and bodily control failures which are perceived 'from the inside,' which will be said to include such amusing phenomena as jokes, irony, absurdity, puns, brain teasers, visual illusions, coincidences, astounding events, amusement rides, monster masks and films, 'peek-a-boo,' and tickling. For the rest of cases we can imagine discreditings identical or similar to those listed for Type I, viewed from the hypothetical perspective of the discredited individual.

2.3.1. Bodily Mismanagement: Fear games (i.e., 'peek-a-boo'), horror and 'sob' films, amusement rides, tickling.

Here the self-claim discredited refers to a universally expected skill: appropriate bodily control (See 2.3). Being startled or even terrified by a loud sound, a prickly something that touches the body, or the unexpected sight of a person can result in self-amusement if the source is subsequently interpreted as harmless: the wind slamming a door shut, a brush, a pile of clothes. Amusement rides (i.e., rollercoasters), horror films and a few other devices and events have been designed to provoke strong emotional reactions in perceivers which do not correspond to a real and appropriate stimulus. For instance, a rollercoaster simulates a rapid fall that normally would mean probable death, triggering off intense fear in riders. At the same time, these riders know rationally that the ride is safe. As the cart speeds downhill, horrific screams are common. As it reaches the bottom and curves upwards, the screams fade and laughter takes over (personal observation). Such cultural productions may be considered to produce accidental discreditings. Those responsible for creating and giving access to the productions, however, could be identified as agents of discredit, as could the perceiver himself as a self-deceiving agent who collaborates in the process.

The game of 'peek-a-boo,' in which a parent 'disappears' from his baby's view by covering his face, and similar infant fear-laughter games ("I'm gonna get you!"), produce victim reactions which belong more clearly to the category of agent-caused discredit of the self (Type IV). Related chasing and fighting games of slightly older children, with their continuous accompaniment of shrieking and laughter sounds, often seem to take up much of a playground's physical and aural spaces. Adolescents and even adults may also engage in similar playful fear-provocation, such as stealthily approaching a friend from behind and hugging or shouting at him (personal experience).

These types of stimuli have often been interpreted as evidence for a tension-release mechanism of amusement. It should be noted, however, that it is *not only the subject* of inappropriate fear who experiences amusement. The event may also be found *funny by observers*: parents of the baby who find his innocent shock hilarious, experienced rollercoaster riders in the midst of shrieking companions, horror/'sob' film

audience members who turn around to watch the tears/grimaces in the cinema, with the distance of knowing 'it's just a movie.' In this model, such amusement would be classifiable as belonging to Type I or II: accidental or agent-caused discredits of *others*. Under the tension-release interpretation, the introduction of some notion of sympathy or identification with the aroused individual would need to be introduced --an unlikely description, as other-amusement seems as strong or even stronger in many cases.

In the examples which have been cited, amusement at the self is possible in the perceiver because he is able to attend to his error (as opposed to the fear-provoking elements of the scene, for instance). A novice rollercoaster rider who failed to trust the safety of the ride, or who was unable to overcome the sensation of extreme danger, would not be able to find the event funny --though *others* could laugh at him for this failure (Type I discredit). Moreover, amusement is possible because the error is seen as temporary or not affecting the 'real' self. A terrified rollercoaster rider might further experience embarrassment before his friends and bystanders for his more extended and genuine failure to control himself.

The laughter (exteriorized spontaneous amusement) brought on by the practice of 'tickling' can also be included within Type IV, though this concerns the failure to control gross bodily movement as opposed to mere emotional expression. Tickling-related amusement results from the perceiver noticing a loss of control over his own body when certain areas are physically touched or handled in certain ways, or when he perceives the threat of such contact. These areas of the body are precisely those where protective defense reflexes exist: "the soles of the feet, the arm pits, the ribs, and the solar plexus" (Black, 1984: 3000)[1]. The reflex behaviours, which consist in a forceful withdrawal of the bodily part in question from the offending contact, are only to a very limited extent subject to conscious control.

In many cases --such as when the agent stimulating the reflex is hostile, not completely trusted, or merely unseen-- no laughter follows whatsoever. The reflex performs its biologically foreseen function, and its subject experiences automatic withdrawal with no additional sensation than perhaps pain or fear. Thus, the mechanical

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[1] Koestler (1964: 79-81) has proposed a similar interpretation of tickling which, however, ignores the existence of independent defensive reflex mechanisms. On his account, the amusement emerges from the perception of an incongruity between two cognitive frames, that of an attack, and that of friendship or trust.

actions of 'tickling' are not in themselves a sufficient stimulus for amusement --'tickling' is not a physical production of the laughter reflex, as is often supposed.

When a trusted person threatens or carries out his threat to stimulate these reactions, however, the victim finds that he is helpless to stop his body from responding to an illusory threat. He draws back, writhes, jolts this way and that --even though the 'aggression' is only pretend. It is this loss of the universally attributed ability to control the body which results in amusement and its expression as laughter. Moreover, a vicious circle may be initiated, as the laughter itself may be perceived as a laughable loss of control.

Additional evidence confirming this interpretation can be observed. For example, congruently with the other agent-caused control failures cited above, it happens that the person tickled is not the only amused participant. Both those who carry out the tickling as well as other bystanders tend to display laughter, and to experience corresponding amusement. I would argue that all participants react to the same loss of control by the victim. Also, the subject of a tickling episode often feels embarrassment as well as amusement at his behaviour, a common feature of Type III and Type IV stimuli (See Chapter Six, I). Finally, frequent victims of tickling report that the experience consists of two contradictory sensations --on the one hand the amusement, but on the other a disagreeable and even quite painful physical sensation, which is capable of eliciting in them extreme and atypical aggressive behaviours. Moreover, very similar behaviours can be induced which affect different reflexes, suggesting the non-uniqueness of the tickling phenomenon. For instance, having a very cold but harmless object (such as an ice cube) placed in contact with cold-sensitive areas of the body (i.e., the spine) can provoke a similarly unwarranted or overstated withdrawal reflex and subsequent laughter or contemporaneous giggling.

It is worth noting that self-perceived bodily mismanagements (of both accidental and agent-caused varieties) constitute the very first stimuli of amusement which human neonates experience. Rothbart (1973), summarizing an extensive observational study, provides the following list (p. 247) regarding the first manifestations of amusement at the age of four months:

a baby laughs when he is tickled, during a mock attack from a parent, when thrown in the air or bounced on a bed, at the sight of a dog, or the sound of a sneeze or cough. As might be expected, these situations also sometimes lead to crying rather than laughter.

This fact is unsurprising if we consider that for a neonate (1) the neonate himself is his main social environment and (2) his most important behavioural manifestations are expressions of pleasure and displeasure (calmness/crying). A baby's own misinterpretations of a situation as safe/threatening are the first behavioural errors it may observe as such. Only from the fifth or sixth month do babies begin to display laughter also at the improprieties of parents, such as crawling on the floor or sucking on the baby's bottle (Sroufe and Wunsch, 1972: 1332). Even then however, this type of amusement continues to dominate the life of children throughout the pre-school years:

> Laughter is a highly contagious reaction that may suddenly erupt in the midst of rough and tumble play, running, jumping, chasing, and so forth.... Children are especially likely to laugh following the successful completion of an activity viewed as dangerous, threatening, or 'scary.' For example, exaggerated laughter is likely after jumping off a high platform, going down a big slide, or climbing a 'difficult' tree.
>
> (McGhee 126-27; see also Jones, 1967)

An intriguing link may also be made with animal studies, as an expression which looks very much like laughter has been observed in several species of monkey in response to both tickling and "the boisterous mock-fighting and chasing involved in social play" (Van Hooff, 1972), which Jones describes as "almost identical" to the rough-and-tumble play of human children. Bodily mismanagements of the self provide the only stimulus of amusement in the primate world, and the first of the human being.

2.3.2. Perceptual Mismanagement: Sensory Illusions

Sensory illusions are stimuli which, by exploiting certain vulnerabilities of human perceptual systems, lead to erroneous perception. Such illusions, sometimes designed intentionally for entertainment, educational, artistic, or research purposes, lead to discreditings of the universal self-claim to correct immediate perception (See Section 2.3):

> Illusions are misperceptions. They are interpretations of stimuli that do not follow from the sensations received by the eye. When we witness an illusion, we perceive something that does not correspond to what is actually out there --what exists in the real world. Illusions fool us; they convince us of things that are not true. The interesting thing is we seem to enjoy being fooled in this way.

> (Block and Yuker, 1991: 11-12)

Illusions are not normally cited in works of humour research (Paulos, 1980, is an exception). However, I have noticed in my own reactions and those of other persons who experience such illusions the appearance of amusement at the moment in which the illusion takes effect. For example, at the 1992 World Expo at Seville, the Fujitsu Pavilion included an innovative LCD three-dimensional projection system which produced a thoroughly convincing illusion of witnessing non-existent objects before the eyes. The cinema, throughout the showing and particularly in the first few minutes, was filled with amazed laughter (personal observation). These types of illusions lose their humour with habituation --the mind seems to learn to catalogue the illusion as an exception or trick. However, unfamiliar illusions continue to fool the mind. The cutting-edge of virtual reality research and of motion picture 'special effects' will continue to produce ever more realistic illusory worlds to deceive the senses. Drug-induced or other types of hallucinations and delusions, when noticed as illusory by the subject, can also be found funny.

The reader can test his own reaction with **figure 3** (Richard and Yuker, 1991: 63) which consists of eight black circles with missing areas. Do you see a cube? Or is it just a series of incomplete black disks? Is the cube in front of the disks or behind eight holes? Is

the upper right face of the cube in front, or is it the lower left face? The configuration of the circles and the missing areas creates the illusion of a three dimensional cube floating over the circles (or sometimes behind them). The illusion is complicated by the fact that the three-dimensional figure is an 'unstable figure,' a 'Necker cube' whose 'front' side switches when looked at for a few seconds, flipping the cube inside-out. The failure to achieve a 'real' or 'stable' interpretation of the figure can result in amusement, and perhaps also bewilderment or surprise (See Chapter Six, 4). An example of a non-visual sensory illusion which may be familiar to the reader is nevertheless worth testing consciously: putting your hands in cold water with rubber gloves on makes your hands feel wet even though they are completely dry (Cobb, 1981).

Though the behavioural results of erroneous immediate perception (i.e., Don Quixote charging against a windmill seen as a giant) can sometimes be observed by others (i.e., Types I and II), the subject of the misperception, assuming he does notice his state of error, obtains a view on the event which is unique to himself: the world convincingly appears one way, yet is definitely another. In many cases, in fact, the error is visible exclusively to himself, apart from his own reports of it or his spontaneous reaction to its discovery. Moreover, the possible accompanying subjective experiences of interpretative shift, puzzlement, surprise, wonder, and the like may colour the amusement feeling with hues distinguishing this sort of event from other types of amusement (See Chapter Six, 4). It is for this reason, I would argue, that such amusement has often been seen in humour theory as deriving from incongruity, dissonance, surprise, or delight. It should be kept in mind, however, that to the extent that the cognitive error is observable by others (i.e., the words and actions springing from Don Quixote's hallucinations), they may result in amusement of Types I or II (depending on whether it is seen as accident or agent-caused). Amused delight at a sensory illusion is only different from hilarity at an other's perceptual mistake due to the difference of perspective towards essentially similar events.

It should also be noted that sensory illusions, as extremely unusual exceptions to the norm of perceivable objects, cause errors which normally do not lead to serious discredit or embarrassment of their perceiver. Anyone will recognize that failures to perceive these phenomena are equally exceptional, and not a reflection on a person's

normal ability to see things as they are. Moreover, the fooled subject often actually plays a part in deceiving himself, or in any case anticipates the fooling, which he can classify as an unusual trick or exception. The discredit is thus very short lived, the self discredited easily cast off by the subject of misperception, and thus self-amusement easily possible (See Chapter Six, 2). Embarrassment is possible, however, when a person has committed himself more strongly to an evident misperception.

Visual and other sensory illusions may be seen as accidental (Type III) or as caused by some agent (Type IV), such as the originator or presenter of an ambiguous or deceptive sensory stimulus. A clear example of the latter might be the classic research experiment carried out by Nerhardt (1970) to support the 'incongruity' theory of humour. Three weights were presented to subjects for them to lift, each larger than the previous. When they tried to pull up on the largest, they found it was unexpectedly light. The wider the gap between expected and actual weight, the greater was the laughter recorded. The experimenter here could be regarded as an agent of discredit. Hypnotists who cause sensory illusions in their subjects through suggestion techniques provide a further example.

2.3.3. Natural Frame Mismanagement: Coincidences and 'Unnatural' Events

An event may be witnessed which so strongly calls upon our tendency to associate similar occurrences, or so strongly challenges interpretation by scientific schemes, that we come to conclusions that fly in the face of our rationalistic natural frameworks -- magic or supernatural connections seem to be responsible for the anomaly. In other societies, and even by many individuals in Western society, these events would not be found funny, but rather confirmation of a 'magical' primary framework. To a disbeliever in the supernatural, however, they may provoke a risible acceptance of what is deemed absurd. He witnesses his own self-claim to 'rational' explanation of events temporarily discredited, and experiences amusement at this part of himself.

Astounding coincidences are one example:

As a child in school, French poet Emile Deschamps shared a table with a Monsieur de Fortgibu. The man offered Emile his first taste of a novel dessert, plum pudding, which M. Fortgibu had acquired a taste for in England. 10 years later Deschamps passed a restaurant and saw a plum pudding being prepared inside. He entered and asked for a slice, but the pudding was being saved for someone --who turned out to be M. de Fortgibu. Many years later, at a dinner party where plum pudding was being served, Deschamps, about to have this dessert for the 3rd time, told his amusing story. And lo and behold, Fortgibu arrived at the door! He too had been invited to dinner, to another apartment in the same building, and had lost his way.

(Wallace & Wallechinsky, 1994: 455)

Bizarre or 'unexplainable' happenings also challenge our natural frameworks: A dried fish found inside a tree when the trunk was split open, for instance; or a man who lost his eyesight and hearing after a severe head injury --then recovered it after being struck by lightning (ibid.: 448).

Again, the unique experience of observing one's own mental frame-struggle subjectively differentiates this kind of amusement from the essentially identical funniness of *others'* irrational beliefs (i.e., in the supernatural, in a flat earth, etc.). Amusement is possible here when the erroneous interpretation has not been committed to strongly, as in the case of these astounding phenomena which cause no more than a momentary lapse of reason (See Chapter Six, 2). Embarrassment would be the result of discovering that such an erroneous framework had been held strongly and publicly, as in the case of a believer in a psychic healer or mind-reader who is subsequently revealed as a hoax.

'Magic tricks' may produce agent-caused discredit of self-claims to proper natural frame application (Type IV). These illusions are designed to deceive an audience --by such techniques as sleight-of-hand, mechanical devices, and misdirection of attention-- into apparently witnessing events which defy the known natural laws: an assistant is sawn in half, rabbits appear out of empty hats, a wand is transmuted into a bunch of flowers. One of the emotional reactions experienced during such performances, triggered by

awareness of the mind's acceptance of (or strong mental tendency to embrace) the impossible, is amusement at the self[2]. Interestingly, humour is very often integrated into magic acts.

2.3.4. Social Frame Mismanagement: Intentional and Unintentional Jokes, Puns, Absurdity, Irony, and 'Twist' Endings.

The funniness of verbal humour and the analysis of joke structure have been the focus of a large proportion of humour research, and have provided the starting point for the most popular theories in the field. I will treat such phenomena as elicitory of discredits of the self's universal mental claim to proper (normally social) frame management, either accidental (Type III, 'unintentional' jokes) or agent-caused (Type IV, 'intentional' jokes created or told by comedians, etc.). In other words, it is not a joke itself which is funny, but rather what a joke does to its listener when it 'works' and he 'gets' the joke.

As discussed in Chapter Two, many writers have characterized the source of amusement, or of some cases of amusement, as the mental juxtaposition or 'clash' of two incompatible frames of thought (schemas, scripts, universes, worlds, planes, systems...), or in some cases the mental 'resolution' of the incongruity. Though preceded by a long history, Arthur Koestler's eloquent exposition of this argument in *The Act of Creation* has been largely responsible for its current popularity:

> It is the sudden clash between these two mutually exclusive codes of rules --or associative contexts-- that produces the comic effect. It compels the listener to perceive the situation in two self-consistent but incompatible frames of reference at the same time; his mind has to operate simultaneously on two different wavelengths. While this unusual condition lasts, the event is not only, as is normally the case, associated with a single frame of reference, but 'bisociated' with two. The term bisociation was coined by the present writer to make a distinction between the routines of disciplined thinking within a single universe of

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[2] Magic tricks are not commonly discussed by humour researchers. Morreall (1982: 243) is one exception.

discourse --on a single plane as it were-- and the creative types of mental activity that always operate on more than one plane. In humor, both the creation of a subtle joke, and the re-creative act of perceiving the joke involve the delightful mental jolt of a sudden leap from one plane or associative context to another.

(1964: 5-6)

An unintentional joke which can be used to illustrate this process is the following real answer from a child's exam: "Philatelists were a race of people who lived in Biblical times" (Windsor, 1979: 13). The reader of this phrase receives inputs belonging to separate spheres of thought: stamp collecting on the one hand, biblical history on the other. There are some valid connections which could be made between these two frames, such as runs of postage stamps picturing nativity scenes during Christmas time. The proposed link between these frames, however, is obviously unacceptable. Stamps and mail systems are relatively recent cultural developments, and in any case stamp collectors are not a 'race' of people related by blood but a hobby group related by common interest. The similarity between the word "philatelist" and "philistine," however, provides a link between the two frames, and facilitates the 'clash' of frames in the mind. If this connection is made, amusement may result.

Koestler's explanation, however, overlooks or mischaracterizes a vital part of the joke-processing experience, which has been identified by numerous other authors. What happens in the mind of the amused individual can be described as a 'clash' or a 'bisociation', but also as a 'union' or an 'integration.' For at least a split second, the individual joins or makes an effort to join the two inconsistent frames, which only subsequently does he experience as inconsistent, as a jarring, clashing, incongruent pair. In other words, the joke 'fools' the listener or reader into making a logical error, like a visual illusion 'fools' the observer into making a perceptual error, or a rollercoaster 'fools' a rider into making an emotional error. According to this version of incongruity theory, the mind is actually *deceived into accepting the two incompatible frames as compatible*, the incongruous elements as congruous, the absurd or impossible as

reasonable. It is the perception of this error by the self, this momentary lapse of reason, which leads to amusement.

Let us return to the child's exam answer and its unintentional joke. For the reader of this sentence, stamp collecting and the ancient Middle East are suddenly thrown into the same mental image by the purely visual and aural resemblance of the words 'Philistine' and 'Philatelist.' Following the workings of the automatic and unconscious language-processing faculties of the brain, a blatantly mistaken proposition for a moment seems to 'make sense': stamp collectors play a part in the stories of the Old Testament. When the mind catches itself for having accepted such an absurdity, however, amusement immediately results at the inappropriate mixture of social frameworks. Another example from Windsor (p. 16) is a real warning sign which read: "Beware! To touch these wires is instant death. Anyone found doing so will be prosecuted." Touching a high-voltage live wire might be both deadly and prosecutable, but this does not mean that the dead transgressor can be prosecuted. It is the momentary acceptance of this latter illogical supposition by the reader which causes him to find amusement at his own mental failure. Again, a certain trickery is involved, exploiting in this case the standard format of 'Beware' signs used ("Beware!"/Warning message against doing X/Punishment threat against doing X). A final example is the following newspaper headline: HERSHEY BARS PROTEST (Lederer, 1989). This headline leads the reader to imagine a group of 'Hershey Bars' (chocolate bars produced by an American sweets company) carrying out a political demonstration, an absurd notion. The idea, in fact, is extended and reinforced by a pictorial representation included in Lederer's book (See **Figure 4**). In this case, it is the ambiguity of the phrase (chocolate bars carry out a demonstration / a sweets company prohibits a demonstration) which provokes the error. The acceptable second meaning facilitates assent with the unacceptable former interpretation, which due to typical language-processing preferences is that intuitively favoured by most readers. There exists a whole genre of humour based on collecting these unintentional double-meanings, as exemplified by such books as *Anguished English* (Lederer, 1989) or *Barbara Windsor's Book of Boobs* (Windsor, 1979).

Though commonly subjected to an incongruity-resolution type of analysis in humour research, jokes such as these have not been related to amusement stimuli less

amenable to incongruity ideas. I would argue, however, that such a relationship exists, as perception of such jokes --which provoke social frame mismanagements of the self-- can be linked to the frame mismanagements of *others* (see 2.3), and subsequently to other kinds of self-claim discredits. A person who could actually believe that stamp collectors were an ancient Middle Eastern people, that chocolate bars can carry out a political demonstration, that the dead can be prosecuted in a criminal court, would be discredited as a rational or sane individual, and could well draw the derision of others. Such extremes of unorthodox belief are certainly not unknown in human society, among children and the mentally unhealthy, or in remote societies, rural areas, and pseudoscientific, religious, and supernatural cults and groups within our own. Spotting them in oneself, if only fleetingly, is enough to spark off an episode of amusement at the fool inside.

Canned jokes, puns, wit, plays-on-words, and other forms of intentional joking can be analysed in an identical manner, only the cause of discredit (agent rather than accident) varying. A joke creator or exhibitor can be considered an agent of his audience's discredit, who uses various tricks, lies, and ambiguities to deceive their interpretative mechanisms. A successful joker shows each audience member that a part of himself lacks the universally expected self-claim of appropriate frame management, while allowing him enough distance from this part to achieve amusement (See Chapter Six, 2). Unintentional jokes, such as the philatelist/philistine conjunction, can be considered to result in accidentally caused discredits of the self's mental claims (Type III). Intentional jokes --which may of course be based on unintentional ones-- lead to agent-caused discredit (Type IV).

This version of incongruity theory is hardly new. Aristotle and John Locke are only two of the major thinkers who stressed or implied the deceptive element of jokes, and the subsequent fooling of the listener:

Most smart sayings are derived from metaphor, and also from misleading the hearer beforehand.... The same effect is produced by jokes that turn on a change of letter; for they are deceptive.... For instance, when Theodorus said to Nicon, the

player on the cithara, "you are troubled" ($\theta\rho\alpha\tau\tau\epsilon\iota$)[3]; for while pretending to say "something troubles you," he deceives us; for he means something else.

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.xi. 6-7)

For *wit* lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting these together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; *judgement*, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating them carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another.

(Locke, 1690: II.xi)

It is noteworthy that in all such cases the joke must contain some thing that can deceive us for a moment. That is why, when the illusion vanishes, [transformed] into nothing, the mind looks at the illusion once more in order to give it another try, and so by a rapid succession of tension and relaxation the mind is bounced back and forth and made to sway

(Kant, 1790: I, 334)

Aristotle and Kant's explicit references to deception and interpretative error are clear enough. Locke similarly suggests that wit causes the listener to be "misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another," in other words, to make an intellectual mistake. More recent analyses have also framed the workings of joke material in this way. According to Marvin Minsky for instance, jokes lead to "logical mistakes," "absurd reasoning," "stupid thoughts," "intellectual failures" for which, in his opinion, amusement and subsequent laughter act as "censors" (1985: 274-81).

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[3] A phrase which sounds like "you are no better than a Thracian slave girl" (p. 410, footnote).

No less interesting is the testimony of experienced joke writers and tellers. Stand-up comedians and other performers who employ humour are often well aware of the deceptive skills essential to their work, not to mention the role of the audience as a 'mark':

I call a joke a curve. See, a curve is a ball that starts out to the plate, and then it bends to fool the batter. That's exactly what you do with a comedy line and the audience. You throw what seems to be a perfectly straight line and then curve it.

(Abe Burrows, in Wilde, 1976: 95)

Before you can expect to draw the audience in, you must believe tour own joke -- you will sound much more convincing if you do. You want them to believe that your story actually happened to you. Share something truly personal with the audience and they'll accept you more easily. *Then* you can pull the rug out from under them --and they'll love it.

(Iapoce, 1988: 23)

This interpretation is also consistent with evidence regarding the variation in amusement which results from different levels of 'comprehension difficulty' of jokes (see Wyer and Collins, 1992: 673-676). It is well known from personal experience that these types of humour can be too 'stupid' or conversely 'too obscure' to be funny --ideally, they are 'clever.' Several studies have documented this fact empirically, showing that subjects tend to rate jokes lower if they require either too much or too little 'cognitive processing.' According to the proposed interpretation of jokes as deceptive, these 'comprehension difficulty' effects can be explained differently. In order for a joke to be found funny, it must be (1) elaborate enough for the victim to accept its premises and be deceived by the joke; (2) not so elaborate that the absurdity to be accepted is either not arrived at or not immediately evident to the victim.

The variety of genres and styles of intentional jokes (Type IV) is truly immense. An **intentional joke** can be defined as a verbal, pictorial, or other symbolic production by

an agent which may cause an audience member to momentarily mismanage his social frameworks. A brief example and discussion will be provided for a number of common types: riddles, one-liners, puns, irony, absurd humour, jesting, and twist endings.

• Riddles: "What's orange and sounds like a parrot? A carrot."

A listener of the above riddle knows that a 'trick' ending will follow the initial question. Nevertheless, to properly enjoy the joke he must enter into the spirit of the game and try to imagine a reasonable answer: "Sounds like a parrot? Orange? Some kind of strange tropical bird or animal? Someone repetitive --but orange?...". He thus creates an expectation, an empty conceptual space for a 'something' which will fit both requirements.

The answer, 'carrot' indeed fits both requirements, but on a different reading of 'sounds like.' Once the new interpretation is understood, the solution provided is immediately accepted: 'a carrot' is indeed orange and 'sounds like' [is phonetically similar to] 'a parrot'. This slots 'a carrot' into the conceptual space opened up earlier --a space for 'something' which can make sounds similar to those of a certain species of bird. The perceiver, in this way, accepts the notion that a root vegetable may squawk and imitate sounds.

This mix-up of frames, however, is almost instantly recognized as being incorrect, indeed ludicrous --not merely because its absurdity is evident, but more importantly due to the perceiver's antecedent knowledge that the riddle would end with a 'joke.' In situations of announced humour, the audience collaborates with the performer first by allowing itself to be fooled and abused in various ways, and second by seeking and reflecting upon the resulting discredits.

• One-liners: "Seriously though, there are some great advantages in being sixty-five. One is that you are no longer bothered by insurance agents" (Bob Hope, quoted in Humes, 1975)

Here the perceiver is fooled into temporarily accepting the outrageous notion that the nearing of death, an almost unmentionable disadvantage of old-age, is actually a benefit. Amusement (plus, perhaps, a twinge of fear) follows from awareness of the

mistake. Introductory words such as 'really folks,' 'seriously,' 'no, but actually' and the like are standard devices of such performances, serving to refresh the comedian's image as sincere before each joke in order to deceive the audience once and again.

• <u>Puns</u>: "Eating bear meat is a grisly experience" (Crosbie, 1982)

Puns represent the minimal version of this genre. Here the joke hinges on the identical pronunciation of the words 'grisly' (frightful) and 'grizzly' (a kind of North American bear). In this case, once the secondary meaning of this phonetic string is detected, the mind of the perceiver is deceived into accepting the truth of the initial statement ("Eating bear meat is a frightful experience"), on false grounds --i.e., the fact that a 'grizzly experience' has something to do with bears. The automatic, unreflective nature of the human language-processing faculties can be easily exploited in such ways.

• <u>Irony</u>: "Well, that was entertaining!" (On exiting from a grim, tedious, and incomprehensible 3-hour film projection)

Ironic statements are propositions which are implicitly marked or intended as evidently false, improper, or in any case not to be understood as the real thoughts of the speaker. After watching what is known to have been a tedious film for all, a statement such as "that was entertaining" cannot be accepted as given. Furthermore, ironic words often refer to propositions which for some reason may have been expected in context (Mizzau, 1984). For example, a common view of motion pictures is that they are meant to entertain audiences, making "that was entertaining" an immediately recognizable reference to this expectation. Irony may be funny because participants of conversation, expecting co-participants to follow the rules of bona-fide communication, tend to accept that others will mean what they say, and may even accept as reasonable certain typical or expected phrases even when obviously inappropriate. In fact, irony is usually delivered in a mock honest tone or even with a 'straight' rendering of honest delivery, in order to better fool the listener and even the speaker himself. A pair of film-goers may develop an extended ironic conversation on how 'clever' the film was, what bits were 'particularly interesting,' how much they appreciated the 'subtle humorous undertones,' and so on, following the well-known pattern and jargon of a favourable critical review. Amusement

will depend on continuing serious delivery of such lines (which fool the minds of the two ironists into believing their own silliness), while this may become more and more difficult as amusement grows within.

• 'Absurd' comedy: The classic BBC television programme *Monty Python's Flying Circus* featured such bizarre conjunctions as a cycling race in which cyclists were modern art painters (Picasso, Ernst...) painting on large canvasses as they raced around English roads. The otherwise realistic simulation of the 'live' TV coverage of a sports event was able to deceive the minds of viewers into accepting the absurdity.

• Jesting: The conversational practice of 'kidding,' 'fooling,' 'joking,' or 'jesting' is an attempt to deceive the listener into believing an unreasonable proposition, which lasts only for the duration of the phrase or for a few conversational turns. These are common in conversations among friends, where absurdities are often bandied around and built upon for mere entertainment, as in this excerpt relating to a witnessed insect:

Ned:	I keep hearing people call them things like hornets.
Frank:	Let me tell you. That dude was big enough to take off with a payload of about twenty tons.
Ned:	Well what do you call it?
Frank:	I didn't know what to call it. I had never seen [an insect] that big. Ever.
Ned:	[He he.]
Frank:	The only thing I could think to [call it-]
Ned:	[He he] he he Call it, "get thee hence". Hehheh.
Brandon:	Call it sir.
Ned:	Heh heh *heh* heh hehhehheh.
Frank:	Let me tell you what I call it. "My God look at that big bug." It had a fuselage *that* big. {holds up fingers}
Ned:	Ehhehheh *ha* ha ha.
Frank:	Yeah. Brandon, I'm not exaggerating, am I?
Brandon:	Oh no. No. Easy.
Frank:	It had a fuselage like *that*.
Ned:	Eh huh huh huh.
Frank:	And a wingspan like *that*. Oh man. Never seen [one like that]
Ned:	[So we're talking] primordial here.

Frank: It was just slightly smaller than a hummingbird.

(Norrick, 1994: 17-18)

It may be noted in this exchange that the two witnesses of the event, Frank and Brandon, tell their story in mock seriousness, while it is only their audience, Ned, who laughs out loud. The play earnestness of the storytellers, stressed by exclamations such as "oh man" and "I tell you" and by the appeal for and achievement of confirmation by each other ("I'm not exaggerating, am I?" "Oh no. No. Easy."), is enough to allow for a listening friend who normally trusts the speakers to accept, if only partially or momentarily, the truth of what is spoken. This acceptance, however, contrasts with the simultaneous knowledge or belief that estimates of insect size and situational danger are being grossly exaggerated, and that the attitude (i.e., of Shakespearean defiance --"Call it 'get thee hence'"-- or of humble submission "Call it 'sir'") offered as appropriate, is in fact grossly misplaced.

'Wind ups' (or 'put-ons') as discussed for Type II, are more extended versions of these foolings, in which the victim is actually led to accept blatant falsehoods for a more extended period of time. They often result in the amusement of the victim when he discovers the falsity of the frame he has accepted as real. Smith has conducted a study of the wind-ups carried out over the telephone by Steve Penk, the DJ of a local radio station (in cahoots with the friends of the victim). The following excerpt is from the transcript of such a conversation, in which Penk has made Joanne Crawley believe he is a travel agent demanding the return of a ninety-four-pound compensation she and her friends had obtained after a booking error. The exchange takes place at the end of the wind-up, when Penk reveals his true identity and blows open the deception.

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: /Oohhhahahahahahahahahaha you're joking, you are joking...

(in Smith, 1996: 281)

• 'Twist' endings: Short (and sometimes longer) stories may contain ironic 'twist' or 'trick' endings. The initial framings lead the reader to misinterpret events in a certain way, despite building evidence for the correct interpretation revealed in the final moments. The motion picture *Angelheart* (Parker, 1987) is an example: Harry Angel is a detective hired by Louis Cypher to find the once-famous singer Johnnie Favourite. It turns out, however, that Harry Angel *is* Johnny favourite (who suffers from amnesia), and that Louis Cypher is Lucifer, who at last has found the man who once sold his soul to him for musical fame. The film is riddled with clues that point to these facts --dreams, a recurring musical tune, Angel's emotional involvement, his phobia of chickens, his recurrent habit of looking into mirrors with a puzzled expression, the discovery that Angel and Favourite share a birthday, the words and demeanour of Louis Cypher (not to mention his give-away name). These hints, however, are usually only identified as such once the ending is revealed and the story is re-interpreted by the viewer. (personal observation)

• Play: Make-believe and play, even when involving incongruous or impossible events, can be taken very seriously by children or by adults engaged in their fantasy worlds. However, when the player's focus of attention turns to the impossibility of events itself, the previous acceptance of the absurd becomes funny. McGhee (1979: 63), in a discussion of humour in play, uses as an example the incredible feats performed by a toy car in the play world of a small child:

> Such fantasy play would remain humorless play as long as the child's attention was directed toward what he could do with the car in his make-believe world. The play would not trigger humor *until attention was shifted towards the fact that the child is imagining the car to do something that he knows is nonsense, absurd, or impossible*.

All of these stimuli of amusement --intentional and unintentional jokes, puns, one-liners, riddles, twists, play-- as well as other related varieties, fool the mind and thereby provoke self-amusement. When they work, they cause the mind which interprets them to make a frame management error, discrediting the owner of this mind regarding his

universal mental self-claims. Normally, these varieties of joke are evident enough to allow the person to immediately distance his 'real' self from the part of himself that is momentarily fooled. Thus, embarrassment is not often applicable (See Chapter Six, 2). Ironic statements, however, may sometimes be misinterpreted as honest proposals, and even agreed with in ways which might discredit mental self-claims more seriously. Victims of wind-ups and put-ons may also feel embarrassment if they committed strongly to an implausible fabricated scenario. Even being spied or 'caught' treating the absurd as serious during make-believe play can be found embarrassing by a child. These phenomena are not essentially different from events which result in the more evident self-claim discredits of Types I and II.

3. Funny Events Within Transformed Realities (*Types V-VIII*)

Funny Events																								
Untransformed Reality												Transformed Reality												
Other						Perceiver						Other						Perceiver						
Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent			Accident			Agent		
I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U	I	R	U
I			II			III			IV			V			VI			VII			V III		

Table 3. *Types V-VIII* Funny Events. See Table 1 (p. 200) for full chart.

I will refrain from attempting to present anything like a detailed classification of funny stimuli in transformed reality. In Chapter Four, three basic types of transformation were presented --retelling, play-acting, and imagined sequence-- as well as numerous complicating variables relating to these exhibitions: medium, purpose, complexity, intentionality, and grounding in reality. These variables, in combination, and added to the previously illustrated ones applying to types of self-claim and discredit, would produce a staggering array of diverse categories which indeed conforms to our experience of transformed funny stimuli as hugely varied.

Any instance of amusement by the reader of this chapter which was provoked by one of the anecdotes cited in Section 2, reacted to an event embedded in a transformation. These stories can be considered retellings of actual discredits, in many cases retellings of retellings. Moreover, it would be a simple task to retransform them into comic strips, verbal stories, or filmed scenes. Thus, in a sense, the illustrations already provided for Types I-IV can be re-interpreted as illustrations of Types V-VIII.

I will, however, attempt to give some idea of the range of transformed funny stimuli, which of course go far beyond the rather unusual category of 'illustrations in an academic text.'

3.1. Funny Events Within Retellings

Retellings are probably the most obvious place to look for transformed funny stimuli, as they are often physically available in the form of texts or recordings.

It is worth making a couple of general points about retold elicitors of amusement. Firstly, it has been suggested that the purposes behind the production and exhibition of retellings may vary. Among these may be that of making the audience laugh and/or experience amusement, or of discrediting or mocking a particular character within the retelling. In some retellings (i.e., 'humour'), these may feature among the principal purposes. In others, they might be secondary side-effects. In some, however, they may not be expected at all, or even desired.

Secondly, it should be noted that different media of retellings lend themselves to representing different categories of error. Print lends itself more easily to language and framing errors, but not so easily to problems of physical appearance, emotional or bodily control, or motor skill failures. Silent film, on the other hand, handles the latter topics best, and the former worst[1].

True or allegedly true stories of discreditings that occur in everyday life are commonly sold commercially as 'humour.' In fact, many of the examples cited in Section 2 were taken from written collections of this type. Some offer examples of mainly universal discreditings of well-known or anonymous individuals: "the most embarrassing moments of the famous...an hysterical collection of goofs and gaffs!" (Complete, 1989: back cover), "famous faux pas: embarrassing moments, gaffes, and clangers" (Snelson, 1990: title), "amazing blunders and bungles...the most hilarious mistakes and miscalculations" (Elding, 1987: title;1), "self-inflicted disasters, blunders, and super goofs...actions which rebounded mightily, savagely --but always amusingly-- on their makers" (Jones, 1985: front cover; 11), "the greatest galaxy of mistakes, mishaps, and misfortunes ever assembled...simple, humorous cases of ordinary people whose errors of judgement would otherwise be forgotten," (Blundell, 1980: 7), "the world's greatest cranks and crackpots" (Nicholas, 1990: title).

Others present instances of independent claims that have been discredited: the "world's worst predictions" (Nown, 1985: title), "[colossally mistaken] predictions, generalizations, and categorical statements which people...love to make about past, present and future" (Morgan and Langford, 1981: 9) or "staggering display[s] of egotism from some of the world's most shameless self-proclaimed geniuses" (Cole, 1995: back cover).

Finally, we find books devoted to the discreditings of specific role holders: criminals, policemen, judges and lawyers in *Criminal Blunders* (Mason and Burns, 1985); aeroplane pilots, passengers, and air stewards in *A Wing and a Prayer* (Nown, 1989); film-makers in *The Fifty Worst Movies of All Time* (Dreyfuss, 1978); pop music artists and producers in *Slipped Discs: The Worst Rock 'n Roll Records of All Time*; stage actors, directors, and other artists in *No Turn Unstoned* (Rigg, 1983); scientists in *Science: Good, Bad, and Bogus* (Gardner, 1983); inventors in *Edwardian Inventions: An Extraordinary Extravaganza of Eccentric Ingenuity* (Dale and Gray, 1979); poets in *The Stuffed Owl: An Anthology of Bad Verse* (Wyndham Lewis and Lee, 1930).

In media other than the printed word we find similar humorous compilations of real events. Goffman illustrated his article "Radio Talk," which deals with the mistakes of radio announcers, with "eight of the LP records...produced by Kermit Schafer from his recording (Jubilee Records) of radio bloopers" (Goffman, 1981: 197). On television and on videocassette, I am aware of productions at least in the USA, the UK, Spain, and Japan which have exhibited videorecorded 'home movies' sent to the program's producers by viewers. They feature mainly examples of "accidents, mishaps, and misfortunes" (*You've Been Framed* video, back cover) which occurred unintentionally during the videotaping of everyday scenes. There have also been dozens of programs and video collections centred around filmed or taped errors committed by screen actors/presenters during the preparation of a film, newscast, or other television or film production. *Red Dwarf: The Smeg-Ups* (BBC Enterprises, 1994), for instance, contains the "fluffs, bloopers, hitches, and smeg-ups" from a popular British televised science fiction series: "the crew forget their lines and giggle uncontrollably, ...props fall apart and doors refuse to open, ...model space ships self-destruct when strings break and chamaleonic mutants

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[1] Incidentally, the fact that humour research is published in print form may be partly responsible for a bias

can't get anything right" (back cover). Failures by sportsmen is another popular genre: *Jimmy Tarbuck's Nightmare Holes of Golf* (Transworld, 1995) *Motor Sport Mayhem,* (Astrion, 1995) *Super Duper Baseball Bloopers* (Major League Baseball Properties, 1995), *Sports Funnies* (Wienerworld, 1993), *Danny Baker's Own Goals and [Football] Gaffes* (Vision Video 1992).

Many non-fiction books, articles, and documentaries which are not specifically intended as humour nevertheless include many amusing anecdotes of this type: biographies, ethnographic films, news reports. The book *Blunders in International Business* (Ricks, 1993), part of a series of texts on business management, uses a serious tone throughout, and emphasizes the "valuable lessons" that can be learned through its study (p. vii). However, the blunders recounted are indeed very funny ("wonderful" and "entertaining" are the euphemistic terms employed on the 'back cover' description). Critical review of any nature --sporting, artistic, academic-- will be found particularly promising as a hunting grounds for discredit accounts. A bad film can elicit amusement both in the cinema and in the homes of those who have not even seen it. The following concern *Che!*, (Fleischer, 1969) with Omar Sharif in the role of the South American revolutionary, and are taken from a humorous compilation of true celluloid atrocities, *The Fifty Worst Movies of All Time*:

> "The consistency of strained spinach...actually seems to diminish the sum total of knowledge with which one enters the theater...a timeless, placeless jumble...." -- Vincent Canby, New York Times

> "BOMB: Lowest rating....one of the biggest film jokes of 1960's. However, you haven't lived until you see Palance play Fidel Castro." --Leonard Maltin, TV Movies

> "Frequently becomes ludicrous...laughable. Retakes should have been done on numerous scenes in which the lighting by photographer Charles Wheeler seems more appropriate to a comedy than a political drama...." --Variety

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towards data that is more easily reproducible in this format, and theories which are based on such data.

<div align="center">(Medved and Dreyfuss, 1978: 58)</div>

The present paper, of course, and humour research in general, also present potentially funny material for purposes other than entertainment, in this case academic ones.

Much of everyday talk consists of the recounting of stories about the speaker himself, about people in the speaker's circle of family, friends, and acquaintances, and about others the speaker knows of. Many of these stories will contain events that make one or more of its characters appear as discredited. This is not always the intention of the raconteur, but it often is, as sharing amusement through laughter with other participants is an enjoyable and bond-forming activity, whether the claimant discredited be one of the participants present or an outsider (See Chapter Eight, 4.2.2):

```
Vera:   Were you talking about you having a girl friend when you were little and
        writing her this letter.
Jim:    Yeah. Yeah.
Vera:   Well tell me about it.
Teddy:  Uhhhuh.
Jim:    As I recall, she and I had matching Superman suits
        [and we'd-]
Vera:   [Ahhahahahaha]
Teddy:  [Hhuh huh huh]
Pamela: [Heh heh heh heh heh heh heh]
Jim:    and we'd lie on the back lawn
        [and pretend to be flying and stuff.]
Vera:   [The basis of true love. Yes.]
```

<div align="right">(Norrick, 1994: 424)</div>

In this example, the storyteller and his girlfriend's wearing of "matching Superman suits" is interpreted as a discrediting fact regarding their self-claims of appearance. All share amusement at one of the participants, or rather, at who he was many years before.

When, on the other hand, a story concerns the discredit of someone not present, but who is known to participants, we have the ingredients of what is commonly known as 'gossip.' Jorg Bergman (1987) has argued that gossip is one of the most widespread of social phenomena, as common in remote Polynesian islands as in large industrial centres, and just as universally condemned. According to Bergman, "the gossip information 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." Very often, interaction during which gossip is shared is punctuated with smiles, giggles, and loud laughter[2]:

[11]   [High-Life: GR: 29]

[The transcript begins at the end of a gossiping session between Mrs. R. and Mrs. H. about Mrs. S.]

H: She's a little touched!
R: She's nuts
H: She's totally, completely crazy! <vehemently>
G: <faint laughter>
R: They imagine--
H: <grinning> Well...the dilemma was more or less (---) my fault. I brought it on, even though I didn't want to.
R: Yeah, yeah ( )=
H: yeah
G: =what then? What happened then?
R: the word got round, =got round---
H: I can't possibly repeat what part I played.
G: <laughing faintly>
R: The rumor went around that she---
G: This is getting exciting=
G: =hehehe
R: That she's always got some guy in the sack.
   ?   hah ahaha

                                                   (Bergman, 1987: 95-96)

It should be noted that 'telling a story' often involves more than mere speech. Many theatrical elements, including mime, imitation of tone, accent, and other speech particularities, and production of sound effects, may be employed:

We spend most of our time not giving information but giving shows.

                                                   (Goffman, 1974: 508)

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[2] Another variety of gossip concerns moral sins, which are reacted to with indignation, anger, disapproval, pity, and/or moral outrage. The distinction is between 'substantive' and 'ceremonial' norms (Goffman, 1967: 47-55) or between self-claims the emptiness of which may have serious (ie, harmful, threatening) implications independent of the possible resulting social judgements and sanctions, and those the emptiness of which are merely informative.

A joke should be acted out. When telling a tale about something dreadful that happened to you or to a friend the impact is greatly heightened if the comic appears genuinely appalled or frightened or embarrassed as the case may be.

(Kilgarriff, 1975: 2)

The sharing of travel diaries, photo albums, slide shows, and 'home videos' with friends is another familiar everyday method of retelling past events.

Turning to fictional retellings, we find that many types of comedy consist of invented stories in which the characters' self-claims are continuously discredited by themselves or others, or are exposed to be less than what they claim by the teller.

Some verbal jokes are simply "the bare gag lines lifted from a real humorous situation" (Humes, 1975: 1), or at least of a potentially real one:

A man goes to the psychiatrist to ask for advice about his brother. 'He thinks he's a chicken,' he explains. 'Well, you'd better turn him in,' says the shrink. 'I can't,' says the man, 'I need the eggs.'

(Woody Allen, cited in Staveacre, 1987: 125)

By going to the psychiatrist for advice about his brother, the man in the story claims his own sanity, which both the psychiatrist and the hearer of the tale accept. The punchline discredits his self-claim.

As we have seen, raconteurs may act out the parts of the characters in their stories. Comedians often interpret the roles of individuals who manage to lose their dignity at every step, yet continue to reclaim it after every fall: the drunk, the clown, the Harlequin, the Pantaloon, the bungling criminal. Physical 'slapstick' comedy literally revolves around the slips, falls, drops, crashes, and territorial invasions of the actors in the fictitious world created. Consider the following sequence from a 'Three Stooges' film as an illustration of the failure to protect bodily spaces:

Larry, Curly, Moe are trying to get through a door, simultaneously. Larry gets cross. Larry slaps Moe (SPLAT!)

Curly: Here, don't do that! [*Larry pokes Moe in the eye* (BOING!). *Larry turns to poke Curly, but Curly covers his eyes, so Larry slaps Curly's head* (BAP!). *Curly covers his head. uncovering his eyes, so Larry pokes Curly in the eye* (BOING!). *Curly covers his eyes, so Larry slaps Curly's head, again* (BAP!)]

Moe: Here, don't do that! [*Larry turns to poke Moe, but Moe covers his eyes, so Larry punches Moe in the belly* (BOOF!) *Moe clutches belly with both hands. Larry pokes Moe in the eye* (BOING!). *Moe covers belly with one hand, eyes with the other. Larry slaps Moe on the head* (BAP!).]

(Staveacre, 1987: 48)

Eccentric dress and appearance, extreme emotional expressions, unusual accents and speech faults, strange mannerisms and styles of walking, sexual innuendo, insults, illogical thought, awful singing voices, unintentional revelation of secrets, mistaken identities, misinterpretation of situations, and defeated pretensions generally have been the staple features of comedy since recorded times. In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BC) the claims of power and control of the warring Athenian men are defeated by their wives, who refuse to have sex with them. The sex-starved men spend a good part of the play in a state of continuous erection (discrediting bodily control claims) which is furthermore available to all observers due to the swollen size of the members (an informational territory slip). They are reduced to begging and pleading with the women for pity, and eventually give in to their demands (discrediting their role self-claims as dominant Ancient Greek husbands). In a climactic scene, Cinesias is seduced by his wife Myrrhine, who falsely leads him to believe she will break the 'strike' with him (showing him to be a gullible fool), and instead pours a cold jug of water over his genitals at the last moment (seriously violating his bodily territory).

The unsustainable pretensions of a self-deluded character fuel the humour in many comedies. Cervantes' Don Quijote de La Mancha rides across the Spanish plains in a rusty suit of armour on a scrawny horse under the unshakeable delusion of being a paladin of legendary stature. The earthy common sense of his sidekick Sancho Panza and the disastrous consequences of his every action continually contradict his fantastical self-claims about himself and others, but the man adventures on unabated. In a similar way,

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Peter Seller's cinematographic 'Inspector Clouseau,' an unbelievably clumsy, inept, and clueless sleuth, nevertheless "thinks of himself as one of the world's greatest detectives" (Sellers, cited in Staveacre, 1987: 49). A recurrent theme in British comedy is the snob who claims a higher social class than actually appertains to him: the sitcom characters Mildred of *George and Mildred* (Thames, 1976) and Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced 'Bouquet,' as she insists) of *Keeping up Appearances* (BBC, 1990) are two examples (see Taylor 1994).

　　　　Misunderstandings (misapplications of the correct social frame) must also receive special treatment. In Shakespearean comedy, "spectacular misalignments to the world across the events of many scenes and several acts" take place (Goffman, 1974: 444), and similar misalignments commonly take place in Hollywood comedies. The evidence for the false frame is invariably thin, and fooled characters seem ever on the verge of discovering the truth. They appear as fools for failing to properly interpret a situation which to the audience seems obvious. Furthermore, if the false frame is being consciously sustained by some of the characters (i.e., as a fabrication), the latter will be projecting easily discreditable selves, and will need all their efforts to maintain control of their informational territories. In the classic film *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959), for instance, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon play two musicians who adopt disguises to join an all-female orchestra. The disguises are poor, and constantly falling apart, yet they somehow avoid discovery time after time. To complicate matters, Tony Curtis adopts a second false self, that of a millionaire on a holiday, to woo one of the female musicians. He must consequently carry out the well-known comedic shenanigans of changing from one disguise to the next, and appearing to be in two places at once, without his true identity being revealed.

　　　　Another common humorous technique is adopting the role of an incompetent producer of the type of retelling itself, bringing into relief the rules of the genre in question. Such is the case of *Rasputin Fish, the World's Worst Poet* (Lea, 1989), a book throughout which the narrator, Rasputin Fish, claims to be "the world's greatest poet" (p. 9) while offering ample proof of the contrary:

　　　　Things in London are just fine,

Except when they're just awful.

While looking for a pen today,

I found I'd got a drawerful.

(Excerpt from 'Dear Dacha', p. 64)

It Was a Dark and Stormy Night (Rice, 1986) is composed of entries from the annual Bulwer-Lytton Contest, in which participants attempt to pen the "the opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels," (p. vii) with hilarious results:

The lovely woman-child Kaa was mercilessly chained to the cruel post of the warrior-chief Beast, with his barbarian tribe now stacking wood at her nubile feet, when the strong clear voice of the poetic and heroic Handsomas roared, "Flick your Bic, crisp that chick, and you'll feel my steel through your last meal."

(Steve Carman, winner of the 1984 contest; p. xiii)

Numerous live comedy acts have been based on the premise that the performer is in fact incapable of providing a proper performance:

The printed program announces [George] Carl as a genius of comedy, and the ring master introduces him without comment but in a tone of voice which indicates star status. By contrast, his entrance is undistinguished and unassertive. He wears a drab, not too well-fitted tuxedo and a black, floppy hat. He looks uninterested and slightly worried; he pays little attention to the audience, walking toward the right, then the left, aiming at the exit, coming back toward the centre where the microphone stands; he whistles as when one walks leisurely or is somewhat embarrassed, in order just to do something or break the silence.

He does a few dance steps, nods at the audience informally, walks a bit, nods again twice, comes to the microphone, steps on the tangled wire, pulls the wire, gets his feet caught in a mess of wires, says 'allo' in the microphone, as if he

were testing the sound; he looks pleased, but glances toward the exit as if ready to

leave the ring (...)

(Bouissac, 1990: 417-418)

I have referred in this section mainly to *Type V* funny events, transformed accidental discredits of an other, though some examples of agent-caused *discredits (Type VI)* have also been offered, such as the Three Stooges' slapstick battles or the sexual teasing and abusing of Athenian men by their wives in *Lysistrata*. *Types V* and *VI* are, in fact, the most common types of transformed funny events, as it is relatively rarer that a perceiver observes himself as the laughable character of a story told by others (*Types VII* and *VIII*), especially when considering such media as literature, film, and television.

A note might be added regarding *Type VI*, funny transformations involving an agent of an other's discredit. The prankster is a common figure in comedy, as the agent of many intentionally-caused self-claim discredits. Anthropologists have identified the 'trickster' in the oral literature of many simple societies, especially in North America and Africa (Apte, 1983: 192). Though they also often have their own self-claims discredited, tending to be ineffectual, boastful, and stupid, they are defined by their disposition to break taboos, violate and insult the persons and properties of others, and play cunning tricks, hoaxes, and pranks to achieve their goals (ibid.).

Tricksters can also be observed in our own culture. An example more familiar to Western readers might be the Marx Brothers, a "trinity to whom nothing is sacred" and in whose world "things and people exist solely in order to be subverted, overwhelmed, ridiculed" (Staveacre, 1987: 127). A collage of some classic scenes evokes a pattern which we recognize as widespread in our own experience of humorous retellings more generally:

The unwelcome interior decorators (Harpo and Chico), invading Groucho's midnight tryst with man-trap, Esther Muir, and wallpapering everything in sight, including Miss Muir....A costume ball ('the beer is warm, the women are cold, and I'm hot under the collar'), where somebody is *inside* a detachable bustle, clamping himself to the rear of any passing lady....The captain's table, with three

uninvited guests circling ravenously, filling their pockets with hors d'oeuvers....An operating theatre, where three mad surgeons, endlessly handwashing, rush around not examining Mrs. Upjohn.... A train, feeding on itself as the trio demolish the carriages to fuel the boiler.... An opera sabotaged by piratical invaders from the flies.... A horse-race that must be stopped....

(ibid.: 128)

3.2. Funny Events Within Play Acts

Funny events may occur within the unreal world created by the role-play of all participants in a situation. This is perhaps most common and most intentionally so in the case of 'games,' so I will use this case to illustrate.

The playing of games gives rise to many opportunities for amusement (Of course, it can also lead to anger, fear, dejection, joy, embarrassment, and other emotions). Players of competitive games often make specific claims of superiority ("I'm invincible! No one can defeat me now!") and predictions of future events ("You're dead in three moves...") which may be negated by actual outcomes. By virtue of their role as game players, they also claim a knowledge of at least basic rules and some skill in playing. Finally, games provide players with opportunities to demonstrate sufficiency in universal skills and characteristics: logical thought (strategy), correct interpretations of events (guessing the strategies and conditions of opponents), emotional control (bluffing, keeping poise), territorial protection (defending squares, tokens, cities, properties, men or other game materials). Some games test specific universal self-claims: possession of basic social frames ('question' games such as *Trivial Pursuit*), language production (*Scrabble*), acting ability (Charades), production and interpretation of visual representations (*Pictionary*). Some seem even specifically designed to provoke discreditings: 'truth' games (protection of informational territories), *Twister* (protection of bodily territories; appearance [bodily posture]).

3.3. Funny Events Within Imagined Sequences

There is little need to elaborate on the possibility of memories, fantasies, and speculations being found funny by the perceiver. To the extent that he becomes engrossed in them, they have some sort of 'real' status to him, and can trigger off any number of emotional reactions, including amusement. Joy Fielding, in writing about an embarrassing anecdote, makes reference to this fact: "Over twenty years later, I can't think of that time without laughing" (in Kurc, 1990: 44). One point that will be further developed in Chapter Six (2) is that past embarrassments may for the first time be experienced with amusement as memories.

A less obvious type of imagined sequence is the metaphorical or symbolic transformation of one strip of activity for another. A set of events normally interpretable only under a natural (i.e., deterministic) framework --a sunset, a pride of lions, a seismic movement in the earth's crust-- might be interpreted metaphorically in terms of a social framework: respectively, the quiet death of an old man, a royal court, an untimely bowel movement. Funny events may thus be perceived where they would not normally be found, by merely accepting a set of transformational rules. Children have difficulties in distinguishing between rational and non rational creatures, or even conscious and unconscious objects; often, adults behave towards non-human things in similar ways: pets, cars that won't start, computers, and television sets. Though we may have no rational reason for expecting a duck to walk in the 'elegant' manner we expect of social human beings, its 'waddle' may be found funny because we are able to imagine it as a waddling human.

Comics such as *Garfield*, *Calvin and Hobbes*, or *Peanuts*, animated 'cartoon' shorts such as *Bugs Bunny* or *Tom and Jerry*, and most Disney animated features present non-human characters --animals, dolls, clocks, candlesticks-- who within the frame of the exhibition behave in human-like ways, and are treated by the audience as social beings. Their discreditings (i.e., Jerry causes Tom to fall out of the window) inspire as much amusement as those of human characters in fictional accounts.

A social event may also be reinterpreted as another social event. An argument between two children might be re-imagined as a political debate in parliament, and the irrational stubbornness of the real children be transported to a forum where such absurd behaviour would be laughable. Similarities between the two situations can be focused on

by the perceiver, and differences ignored, so that the politicians imagined appear discredited by the words and actions of these unintentional child 'mimics.' In the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, such transpositions between the world of children and the adult one to which the reader belongs are often intended by the author, who comments on this aspect of his work in his *Tenth Anniversary Book* (1995): "Many of Calvin's struggles are metaphors for my own. I suspect that most of us get old without growing up, and that inside every adult (sometimes not very far inside) is a bratty kid who wants everything his own way. I use Calvin as an outlet for my immaturity, as a way to keep myself curious about the natural world, as a way to ridicule my own obsessions, and as a way to comment on human nature." In the strip pictured on page 279, **figure 5**, (ibid.: 103) many readers may recognize and find amusement in their own ridiculous self-claims to control over things and events. In the *Tenth Anniversary Book*, Watterson added to it the caption "The illusion of control."

Satirists and caricaturists, of course, specialize in making such comparisons. The Lilliput-Blefuscu war over "the Way of breaking Eggs" in *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift, 1726) continues to provoke amusement in the modern reader as a symbol for the absurd wars and other conflicts that various social groups engage in. Political cartoonists (and comic 'imitators' of politicians) similarly distort and exaggerate the physical shortcomings, behavioural inconsistencies, and other embarrassments of political figures and institutions to the delight of readers. Such jokes and their accompanying amusement and laughter are ambiguous, perhaps even deliberately so, as Mulkay (1988) has argued. They are directed in the first instance at a fictional character, as no one will seriously suggest that the presentation is objective and literal. However, the satirist claims a connection between the fictional version of the figure lampooned and the flesh-and-blood person. The strength of the connection may be weaker or stronger; and may be perceived as weaker or stronger by different parties. But to the extent that the connection is accepted, the self of the real person alluded to is damaged[3].

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[3]To complicate matters further, the acceptance of the fictional character as the real target of satire will constitute a frame mismanagement by the perceiver, which could result in (simultaneous?) self-amusement (Type IV). Such 'complex' humour --integrating numerous potentially amusing stimuli-- will be treated further in Chapter Six (5).

A similar analysis can be applied to the 'parody' of film genres, writing styles, art or musical movements. These forms of humour present a certain work as a supposedly genuine example of a particular creative style, and will indeed resemble it in many ways. However, certain conventions of the style will be exaggerated to such an extreme, or made so obvious, that they will constitute failures by the fictitious 'author' of the work to abide by the requirements of his role. Again the fiction will be close enough to real examples of the genre for some of the amusement to be directed at true representatives.

Humorous fictional retellings generally often contain some references to people and institutions which may be recognizable to perceivers, though generally less explicit than in the cases of caricature, satire, and parody. Individual perceivers may also make idiosyncratic connections between a certain character in fiction (or non-fiction) and one known in real life. Common examples of Types VII and VIII funny events (transformed claim-discredits of the self) are those where the audience member sees himself, or a part of himself, in the laughable character. In *The Best Excuse...And How to Make It*, Donald Carroll provides a supposedly serious 'how-to' guide to excuse-making, an essentially amusing topic, as the activity involves the making of false (usually biographical) claims about the self..

THE FAMILIAL EXCUSE

The familial is really an umbrella category, a sort of holding company for other excuses, which can always be depended on to furnish you with a silent partner whenever one is needed to shore up another excuse. For example:

I can't understand why you haven't received it. I gave it to my son to post over a week ago.
...
Sounds like a super evening. You two always bring back such beautiful slides. Let me just check with John to see if he has anything planned.
...
I've been dying to hear all about your operation. Wait, hang on a second. I think I just heard a scream from the kids' room. Let me ring you back.

(Carroll, 1983: 4)

Here, the reader, as the student who must put the teachings of the book into practice, is placed in the position of imagining himself practicing such excuses, and may also be reminded of his own similar everyday falsehoods. Both of these imaginings contain an image of himself providing self-claims which are discredited from the start. In many cases, Carroll goes further and conjures up situations where bad excuses can lead to the reader's public discrediting:

> Beware of killing [family members] off at a pace that exceeds their actual mortality rate.... At some future date you could find yourself in the embarrassing position of being challenged when you claim to have been in the company of a beloved aunt whose funeral you attended several years and many excuses ago.

> (ibid.: 5-6)

4. Conclusions

I have attempted to illustrate the apparent differences and underlying similarity of funny stimuli, on the basis of the proposed claim-discredit account of amusement. The method has consisted in (1) tracing out the possible categories of perceived discrediting events according to types of self-claim and discredit situation; and (2) providing instances of funny stimuli which exemplify the various categories. An extremely wide range of funny stimuli has been represented, from puns to banana-peel slips, from visual illusions to satire. All such stimuli can be described as perceived claim-discredits, whether accidental or agent-caused, affecting another person or the perceiver himself, seen in the 'real here and now' or in some transformed reality, affecting universal, role, or independent self-claims of skill, mind, territory, appearance, or biography.

The links between various examples of funny stimuli can be traced along the various axes of the classification, so that extremes of diversity can be found to share a common base. For example, the experiences of perceiving an astounding coincidence and of being tickled by a group of friends seem far removed. It could be said in both cases, however, that the subject is amused upon noticing the discredit of his own self-claim, moreover a claim he applies universally to all individuals. In the case of the coincidence, he fails to correctly interpret natural events, due to a fortuitous conduction of two percepts which his mind is deceived into linking. In the case of tickling, a group of others intentionally activate defensive bodily reflexes which he is helpless to stop, despite the inappropriateness of fearing such aggression from trusted friends. His self-claim to maintaining his own body under control is discredited, and while he laughs and writhes the discredit worsens, causing a growing spiral of amused laughter and control-loss.

Verbal jokes, like tickling, are the work of others who attempt to discredit the perceiver. In this case, however, the method consists of verbal 'tricks' which, as with coincidences, deceive the listener into mismanaging his interpretative frameworks.

The watching of a slapstick comedy film, again, seems distant from each of these three phenomena, and yet the genre is nothing more than the continuous fictional re-creation of clumsy movements, territorial invasions, illogical reasoning, and other actions which discredit the film characters' self-claims to be as normal, rational, and competent

individuals. Instead of being amused at his own failures, the perceiver reacts to those of others, in one 'gag' after another.

This classification allows for a unitary account of funny stimuli without sacrificing the empirical diversity of such phenomena. Unlike monolithic explanations such as 'incongruity,' 'superiority,' or 'play,' the claim-discredit account can accommodate differences as reflecting the natural diversity of self-claims, claim-discredit situations, and their perception by an observer.

This chapter has illustrated the necessary condition for amusement: the perception of a self-claim's discredit. It has been assumed that the perceiver was amused by this perception, and illustrations have been chosen which fit well with this assumption. However, not all discredits are amusing. Serious territorial violations can be imagined: robbery, knife-attacks, rape. Actions which discredit the actor may often be tragic, or lead to tragedy: poor judicial decisions, incompetent driving, physical deformity, or substance abuse. Embarrassment is often the main emotional reaction associated with discredit, for example as felt by the audience, let alone the speaker, at a conference where the latter stumbles and stutters at the podium. Such non-funny discredits must be accounted for.

Also, the experiential quality of some types of humour may well seem incomparable with that of others. Black humour, sexual innuendo, clever wit, crushing witty retorts, tickling --the appreciation of each seems subjectively unique.

In Chapter Six, I will address each of these questions, which will round out the proposed causal theory of amusement by providing the necessary conditions for this emotional mechanism. I will also consider the possibility of complex funny stimuli, which integrate numerous comic elements within a single given strip of activity.

(Figures 1-5)
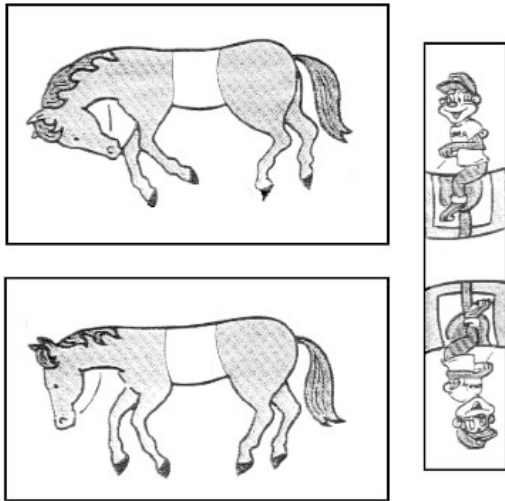
Figure 1: A puzzling "brain teaser"...
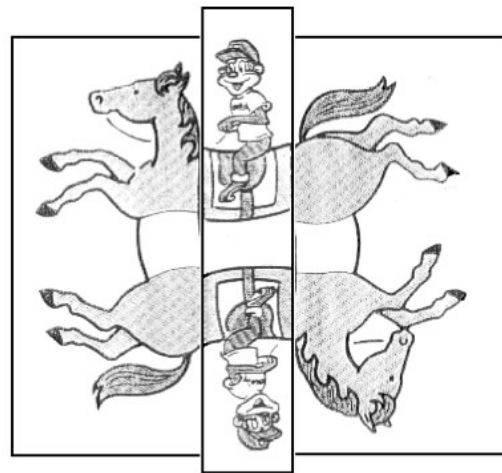
Figure 2: An amusing "trick solution".
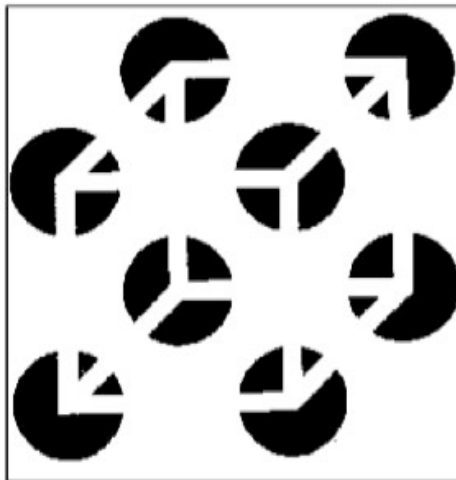
Figure 3: Multiple Visual Illusion

Figure 4: "Hershey Bars Protest"
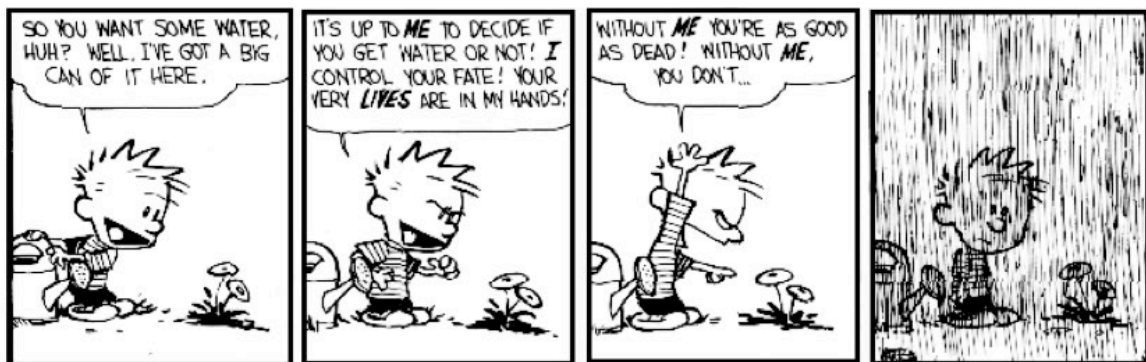
Figure 5: Calvin as a symbol for adult foibles.

Chapter Six: Elaborations of the Model

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 sustained confidence in one another. When these become disturbed and discredited, role performance cannot continue.

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[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.

(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--

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[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.

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 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*. 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.

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

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.
>
> <div align="center">(p. 462)</div>

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).

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

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)

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[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 sometimes". This anonymous officer retold, on Simon Mayo's BBC Radio 1 program

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[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."

'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:

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[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

---

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

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 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?
> 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.

---

[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).

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.

<div align="center">(Will Durst, in Davis 1993: 123)</div>

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

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 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,

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[1] Lynn additionally appears to be aware of its availability, as she later comments "Oh you're putting them

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.

in the dishwasher" rather than "Oh there's a dishwasher".

- (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.

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[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

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

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 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 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

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[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, most of the effective audience will be non-sharing.

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:

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

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8. Roger:      Ehhh//hehh hhh hhh
(...)
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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

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[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

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[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.
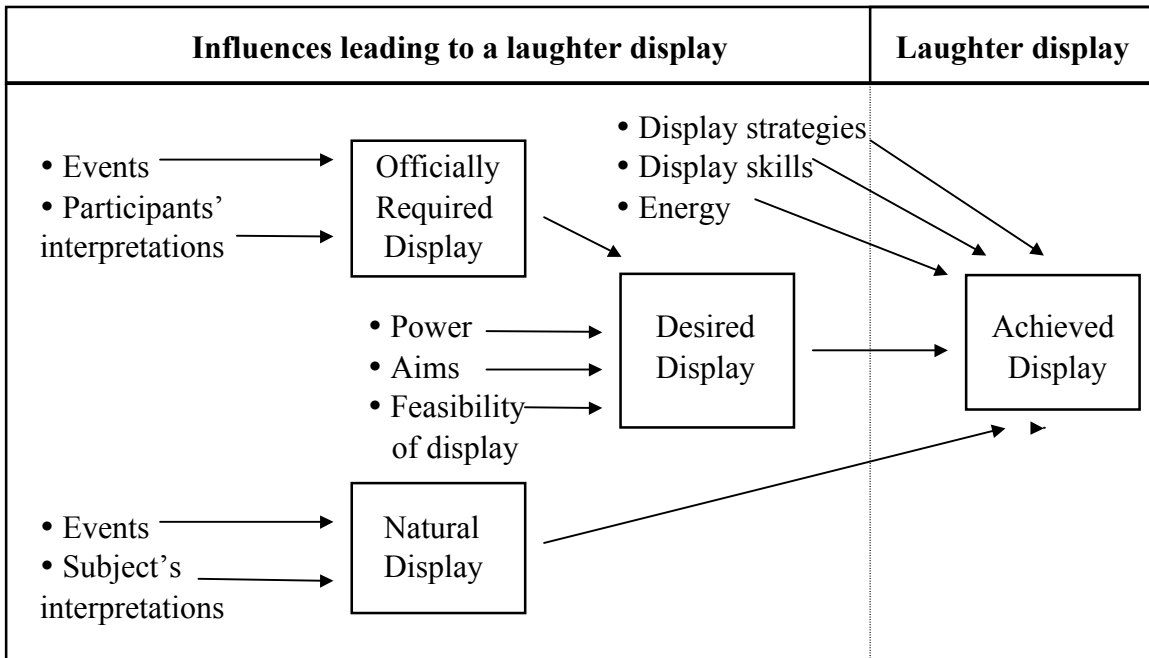
Figure 1. The display of laughter.

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

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[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.

<div align="right">(p. 42)</div>

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.

<div align="center">2.5.2. The Officially Appropriate Display</div>

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)

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[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.

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[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.

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

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.

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[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 343, 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].

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[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.
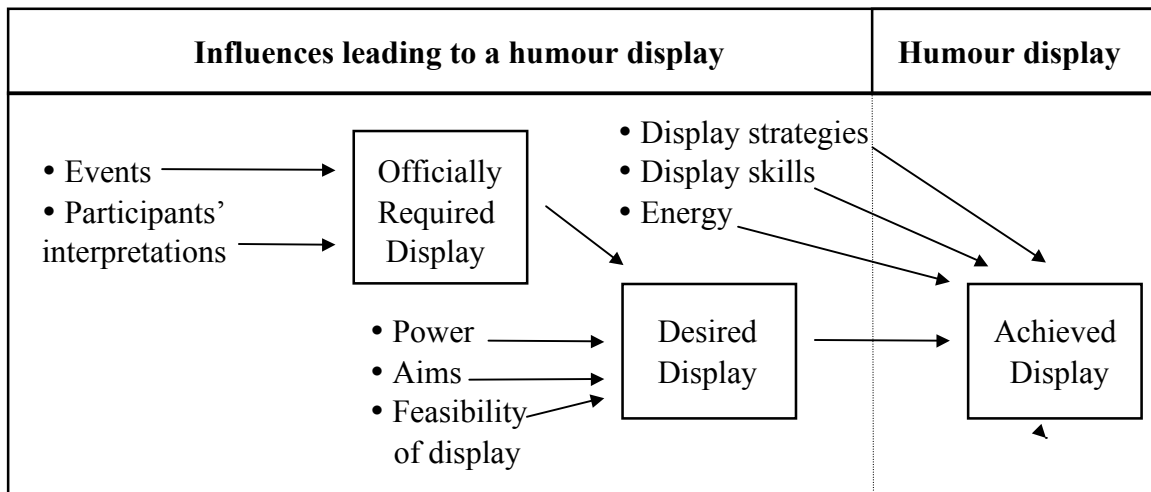
Figure 2. The display of humour.

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

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[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.

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.

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

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

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[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.

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

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[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.

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)

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

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

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).

(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

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

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[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)

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.

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[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

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[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.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

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

---

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

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.

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
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 <u>say</u>'r you a junkie.
           (0.5)

---

[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).

        Dan: hheh heh[
        Dolly: [hh<u>heh</u>-heh-heh

        (2)
        Joyce: Cuz she wz off in the bushes with some
                buddy, tch!
                        (0.7)
        Joyce: ehh[hhhhhh!
        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.

<div align="right">(David, 1988: 5)</div>

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.

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

Conyers [aggrieved]: Here, are you puttin' it about that I'm barmy?

James: Why --are you trying to keep it a secret?

<div align="right">The Crazy Gang (ibid.: 122)</div>

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.

<div align="right">Ken Dodd (ibid.)</div>

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.

<div align="right">(John Cleese, in Staveacre, 1987: 124)</div>

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, 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).

---

[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.

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.
         Then she'll strip for us."
P: <faintly laughing>
R: She was wearing those neat Yokohama-pants, tsk, tsk.
P: <faintly laughing>

---

[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)

R: So there she sat.
        and we, uh, we were fooling around=
        =pretty soon she was lying on the billiard <u>ta--able</u>.
        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 better now.
       Bill: Uh:m mNo:.
       Arthur: Oh you poor cunt, .hh
                    (0.4)
       Bill: ee I think it was food poisoning (last night) 'cause
                    I was
       Arthur: (look   )
       Bill: I'm still gettin:g you know, hh .hh stomach pains I
                    spewed last ni:ght, ...chronic diarrhea as we-e-ll,
                    just before I went to bed and ... this morning
                    (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
       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.
```

---

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

```
        (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-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

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[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).

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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

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[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.

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[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.

<u>Strategic Disaffiliative Avoidance of Humour and Laughter</u>

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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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.

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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.

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

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

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).

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

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[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 strengthened, by such 'play' transgressions, which as 'laughable' are marked as 'improper.'

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. 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 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*

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

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

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[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).

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 d<u>ee</u>ming that a young lady's on the phone wu'we woh' disc<u>u</u>ss nune u'th<u>e</u>t.
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<u>:</u>atchy wo:rd ma:n.
Jeffrey:	[h<u>i</u>h-huh hu <u>AH</u>! huh-hah!]
Rhonda:	hih [heh.
Stanley:	[It don't fit sh<u>i</u>t.
Rhonda:	ihh [h<u>u</u>h huh h:::]h
Jeffrey:	[Wu'I t<u>e</u>ll you wh<u>a</u>t ma][::::n.
Stanley:	[My English teachuh be <u>ex</u>in m<u>y</u> ass on that. Ev'ry time.=
Rhonda:	=Who [d<u>ee</u>ming?
Stanley:	[<u>Deemin</u>',
	(0.2)
Stanley:	Oo<u>ph</u>! It d<u>o</u>n't f<u>i</u>t.
	(0.7)
Stanley:	[<u>Off</u> with it.
Jeffrey:	[(t'sh) <u>mh</u>! hmh<u>u</u>hhmhuh. (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 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

---

[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.

– – – – – – – – – – –

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

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.

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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."

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[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?

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[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 fool the audience, which in relevant cases protects the humourist from charges of impropriety of one type or another.

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[2] The irony that Freudian 'humour as license' ideas most closely relate to social control effects of laughter

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

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and humour has already been noted in Chapter Eight (4.1.4, 4.3.2).

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 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												Transformed Reality											
Claimant Discredited	Other						Perceiver						Other						Perceiver					
Cause of Discredit	Accident			Agent			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	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			VII			V III		

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.

Table 2. Classification of discrediting situations on the basis of the five self-claim and claim-discredit variables identified (See Table 1). *Note: I = self-claims of Independent origin, R = self-claims of Role origin, U = self-claims of Universal origin.*

	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																								

Bibliography

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[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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