

discussion around excellence of universities or restrictions on admissions it is quite clear that researchers have a distinct opinion resulting from their research which might be different from the university's policy. These are discussions around the framework conditions of German society. If the new freedom for universities, as declared by the

proponents of opening education to market standards means that research results have to be coordinated with the corporate identity of the institution where these results are produced this definitely means a restriction of the freedom of research, which is, by the way, granted by the German constitution.

All quiet on the South American front.... Is anybody out there?

---

Finally, Janet Sayers our New Zealand rep brings us an adaptation of a paper presented at our sister conference ACSCOS...beware the contagion!

### ***Emotional contagion and the 'infectious' service smile: A response using parody***

Adapted from paper presented to the Australasian Caucus of the Standing Conference on Organisational Symbolism (ACSCOS), Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand, Nov/Dec 2006.

Other abstracts and some papers are available on-line at <http://mib.massey.ac.nz/MIB/Events/ACSCOS.html>

Janet Sayers<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

This paper is in three parts. The first part of this paper introduces the concepts of social and emotional contagion (Hatfield *et al.*, 1994). The second part of this paper makes a somewhat alarming swerve to a recent article by Martin Lefebvre (2005) in *Theory, Culture & Society* on the topic of conspicuous consumption and cannibalism. In using Lefebvre I introduce the zombie movie to this discussion, which is then used as the basis of the third part of this paper—a parody.

The parody targets the idea of emotional contagion. The idea behind providing a parody is to challenge the basic idea that underlies emotional contagion theory which is that human emotional memory is ape-like, and replicates (like a virus). Instead I use what Lefebvre (2005) has argued actually constitutes human memory—*poetic memory*—which he argues is “an *active process* whereby *relations* are created by way of the imagination” (p. 43). The parody, presented at the end of this paper, uses a recent advertisement's structure that is currently showing on New Zealand television where a 'contagious' smile is passed along from person to person, However, instead of focusing on the good service represented by the contagious smile in the advertisement, the parody focuses on poor service and an ensuing bad mood being passed from person to person. The parody refers to two zombie movies from the oeuvre of Peter Jackson (*Bad Taste* and *Brain Dead*), but any zombie movie would suffice. Writer's Notes are provided which provide a brief discussion of parody and other 'behind the scenes' issues of relevance to this paper.

#### Social and emotional contagion

Ideas about biological contagion have a long history in the medical sciences (the field of epidemiology). Ideas about social contagion have been commonly discussed since at least the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it is only

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the influence of Dr. Nanette Monin on this paper, whose teaching methods and writing practice have influenced my approach to its presentation. However, the interest in zombies is the author's own worrisome issue (especially to herself).

since the 1950s that experimental research has established the existence of the social contagion phenomenon in a number of areas of social life (Hatfield et al., 1994). Examples of social contagion include, for examples: hysterical contagions (burning books); deliberate self-harm contagions (copy-cat suicide); contagions of aggression (riots, copy-cat murders); rule violation contagions (running red lights); consumer behaviour contagions ('viral' behaviour); and financial contagions (share market panics).

Running through the research about behavioural and/or social contagion is a simple thesis: exposure to a behaviour appears to be a sufficient condition for social transmission to occur. Socio-cultural phenomenon can spread through and leap between populations like outbreaks of chicken pox or the measles. Research evidence points to this process of behavioural mimicry being automatic, unconscious and uncontrollable (Howard & Gengler, 2001). Moreover, the evidence suggests this automatic response occurs without thought: "emotions and behavioural patterns spread rapidly and are accepted uncritically by the members of a collective" (Furnham, 1983, emphasis added). Mathematical models can even predict the spread of contagion and ways of curtailing undesirable social contagions have been provided (Patten & Arboleda-Flórez, 2004).

Emotional contagion, usually researched as a dyadic event, has been defined as "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize movements, expressions, postures, and vocalizations with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally". The science of Emotional Contagion is now well advanced, with the 'Emotional Contagion Scale' being developed and validated to assist with further research in this area, which has identified several examples of emotional contagion including mood, anxiety, fear, appreciation and enjoyment (Doherty, 1997).

So far I have introduced the ideas of social and emotional contagion. Hopefully as a reader you are thinking about smiling, viruses, mimicry, and whatever happened to subject agency? If you watch zombie movies, you probably know where I am now going to go with this, but because this article has some pseudo-academic pretensions, I now move on to discuss Lefebvre's recent article on the figure of the cannibalistic serial-killer in conspicuous consumption.

#### Capitalism, cannibalism and zombie movies

Lefebvre's (2005) article concerns memory, the imagination, and the cinema. He argues that human memory "is not simply a passive storehouse of information where items are preserved without alteration in a term-to-term coded relation", but that "Human memory, instead, is a *poetic memory*: it is an *active process* whereby *relations* are created by way of the imagination" (p. 43, emphasis in the original). Using ideas about trope, figure and 'memoria', Lefebvre shows in his paper that the metaphor of 'capitalism as cannibalism' finds its way through this memory-image of the serial-killer and inserts itself in fictional forms like the cinema. His paper traces this image through exploring initial encounters in the New World by Columbus (where cannibalism was inflected with 'colour', and so helped make George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* an allegorical tale about racism), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the impact of Jack the Ripper, as well as critiques of capitalism by Marx, Lukács and Baudrillard, amongst others.

Arriving at the modern figure of the serial killer, he (and the serial-killer is almost always a he), is shown to be obsessed with food. Eating, devouring, food preparation, and biting parts of the human body feature in the ways these fictions are told. By examining the ways that cannibalism features in narratives, Lefebvre shows how the figure expresses a deep anxiety about the 'appetite' of early colonial capitalism, the fear of the 'other', and the will to dominate. Capitalism is savage and violent: "Cannibalism represents the ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end to human relations under capitalism" and "Capitalism's appetite is for labour, its consumption that of worker's time, from which the surplus-value is extracted and accumulated in profit" (p. 48).

Characteristics of serial-killing include seriality, repetition, and the murder of strangers. Serial-killers strip away the individuality and humanity of their victims and consume the victim's life with the utmost violence. Lefebvre argues that serial killer victims are subjects of serial consumption. Mass production, mass consumption and the 'commercialisation of everything' in advanced capitalist society, and the advent of mass technology, moves this seriality memory-image into a new dimension of mass murder. The advent of Fordism means that mass consumption is new economic dimension within which the figure of the serial-killer exists. Mary Kilgour has argued that "cannibalism provides a perfect, if a rather simplistic, image for the nightmare of a consumer society, uneasy about its own appetite", and she goes on to cite Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* as an example as in the film "the refugees from the cannibal zombies hide in a shopping mall, whose walls separate the two mirror forms of conspicuous consumption" (cited on p. 49).

In the original *Dawn of the Dead*, and its recent remake, the inference is that the entire world is consumed by the zombie plague, leaving all humanity dead at its end. Everyone falls and is eaten. The obsession with eating brains is a feature of zombie movies. Generally zombies go straight for the brain, the site of thought, learning and agency. Once bitten, the subject is inevitably turned into a zombie also. Victims die, and are reborn as the walking dead. *28 Days Later* provides some of the most violently savage ravenous zombies pitted to screen. The outbreak of the plague that all but destroys Great Britain starts in an experimental lab, where experiments have been conducted on chimpanzees. The Chimpanzees start the plague by biting the environmental activists that have come to set the chimpanzees free. Monkeys also start the plague in Peter Jackson's zombie comedy *Brain Dead*. Having the plague start with the bite of a monkey starts the pattern of thoughtless mimicked, or 'aped', behaviour that characterises the spread of zombie plagues.

In short cannibalism in the zombie movie, as with the serial-killer in the cinema, is a metaphor for the nightmare of unbridled capitalism, but also hints at deeper fears. This troubled anxiety is imagined in zombie movies: unrestrained appetites, infection, contagion, teeth and biting, ravenous mouths, the distrust of strangers, and the brain-dead walking around, as if alive.

We ourselves consume texts constantly: these texts include advertisements, movies and academic texts. As readers what we do is try to reintegrate these texts into our imaginary worlds through which we give meaning to the work. We use, not a process of mimicry to learn, but a process of *poetic memory*. Part of our role as teachers and academics is to help our students re-imagine and empower themselves within these texts: to help them play (pedagogical issues are discussed in Sayers & Monin, 2007, forthcoming). The following script provides a parody incorporating the ideas described above, with an explanation.

## **Bad Service**

Back-story

An advertisement is currently being played regularly on New Zealand television, advertising a service company. As the action unfolds on screen a poem is read out. The text of the poem is as follows:

### ***Smile Poem***

*A smile is contagious,  
It's passed from me to you.  
As soon as one is witnessed,  
It's so hard not to do.*

*To be party to a smile,  
Is privilege indeed,  
A smile can make things better.  
It's sometimes all you need.*

*So valuable a smile,  
You'll find out that it's true.  
That if you smile at everyone,  
Your smile comes back to you.*

The advertisement runs as follows (the parts of the poem are stated in italics). The action starts by showing a company employee in the doorway of a recently re-branded retail store. The female service representative is shaking hands whilst smiling at a customer (*A smile is contagious*). The man leaves and passes on this smile to another man, in a suit, walking past (*It's passed from me to you*). A bus passes by and a young male passenger smiles in response to the man in the suit (*It's so hard not to do*). The man looks across the bus aisle to a young woman sitting opposite, who smiles shyly in response (*To be party to a smile*). She looks out the window smiling, and a mature woman walking by picks it up (*Is a privilege indeed*). She walks past a café and a man sitting inside starts to smile. He smiles at a child

sitting on her Dad's shoulders who smiles back in response (*A smile can make things better*). The child smiles at a woman walking past in the opposite direction (*It's sometimes all you need*). The woman sits next to an older man sitting on a park bench and smiles at him (*So valuable a smile*). This man smiles back and a woman driving by in a car picks it up (*You'll find out that it's true*). The woman in the car smiles and a man walking past on the pavement and he picks it up (*That if you smile at everyone*). This man enters the same store the advert started with, shakes hands with the same employee and smiles at her. She responds with a smile (*Your smile comes back to you*).

**Précis:** The purpose of the parody is to poke at the concept of emotional contagion, using the advertisement 'contagious smile' advert as a narrative structure. The company is NOT the target of the parody: the idea of emotional contagion is the target. I have conducted NO critique of the service claims of the company in question, and I am sure that their retail service people do smile a great deal, and make other people feel good on many occasions.

**Parody motif:** Spread of infection ala Zombie movie.

### Props

Motor mower  
Alien mask  
Zombie make-up  
Bad teeth

### Characters required:

1. Narrator of 'The Smile' poem
2. Person 1
3. Person 2
4. Person 3
5. Cute puppy (optional)
6. Child and child's friends (optional (Parent's permission required))
7. Crowd of adult zombies

As the action unfolds the Narrator reads out the following poem.

### **'The Smile'**

*There is a Smile of Love  
And there is a Smile of Deceit  
And there is a Smile of Smiles  
In which these two Smiles meet*

*And there is a Frown of Hate  
And there is a Frown of Disdain  
And there is a Frown of Frowns  
Which you strive to forget in vain*

*For it sticks in the Hearts deep Core  
And it sticks in the deep Back bone  
And no Smile that ever was smil'd  
But only one Smile alone*

*That betwixt the Cradle & Grave  
It only once Smil'd can be  
But when it once is Smil'd  
There's an end to all Misery*

*(William Blake, from the Pickering Manuscript, circa 1803)*

### **Scene One:**

1. Person 1 drives into a service petrol station. She is smiling happily to herself.
2. Person 1 looks around anxiously for some help. None arrives. Person 1 looks pissed.
3. Person 1 angrily tries to do it herself and lifts up petrol lever
4. Person 1 spills petrol all over trousers and screams with anger and frustration while looking at a Person 2 exiting service station in car.

*There is a Smile of Love  
And there is a Smile of Deceit  
And there is a Smile of Smiles  
In which these two Smiles meet*

### **Scene Two:**

1. Person 2 gestures back to Person 1 with the middle finger, while yelling "What the f... did I do?".
2. Starts to foam at the mouth. (Note: Can't hear words through window but should be able to guess them)
3. Person 2 turns angrily to Person 3 in passenger seat, "What are you laughing at?". Spittle flies in Person 3's face. (Again, words not to be heard, but should be able to work it out from looking)

*And there is a Frown of Hate  
And there is a Frown of Disdain*

### **Scene Three**

1. Person 1 is at home, looking dishevelled and really ill.
2. Person 1 kicks cute puppy\*.
3. Cute dog zombified.

*And there is a Frown of Frowns  
Which you strive to forget in vain*

### **Scene Four**

1. Person 2 yells at child in back seat of car.
2. Child cowers with fear.

*For it sticks in the Hearts deep Core  
And it sticks in the deep Back bone*

## Scene Five

1. Child advances across open space with large group of zombified children behind him or her.

*And no Smile that ever was smil'd  
But only one Smile alone*

## Scene Six

1. Person 3, looking the worse for wear, grimacing with large bad teeth, partially zombified, enters classroom and sits down.
2. Person 3 shoves person next in class. Person next to Person 3 shoves person next, and whole class erupts into a riot. Motor mower can feature.
3. All become zombies.

*That betwixt the Cradle & Grave  
It only once Smil'd can be  
But when it once is Smil'd  
There's an end to all Misery*

**END**

\* No animals, children or students are to be harmed in this production

Writer's Notes

Parody

A parody is a work that imitates another work in order to ridicule, ironically comment on, or poke affectionate fun at the work itself, the subject of the work, the author or fictional voice of the parody, or another subject. Hutcheon (1985, p. 7) has said, "parody...is imitation with a critical difference, not always at the expense of the parodied text". Dentith (2000, p. 9), defines parody as "any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice".

Bad Service

The script title is a direct reference to Peter Jackson's cult movie, *Bad Taste*. The 'home-movie' made with friends and family is a splatter-fest zombie movie, and a cult classic favourite in NZ. *Bad Taste* offers the following: a home-movie made by film amateurs; a strong sense of humour that doesn't take itself too seriously; and Kiwi cultural in-jokes that 'take-the-piss' out of NZ cultural icons; and an obsession with eating brains. The movies of Peter Jackson often feature New Zealand iconography, and *Bad Taste* and *Brain Dead* feature several scenes that New Zealanders are fond of. One is in *Brain Dead*, when the main hero attacks a crowd of zombies with a motor-mower. Another is in *Bad Taste* when a misfired bazooka explodes a sheep grazing gently in a paddock.

The Poem

The smile poem and William Blake's poem are similar. Both are about smiling and the structure is the same with each verse having four lines, with the rhyming words at the end of the second and fourth line. William Blake's poem is one of his most popular and recognisable.

William Blake was an artist, poet, visionary, and revolutionary who lived from 28 November 1757 until 12 August 1827. He delved deeply and critically into human nature and society, and questioned presuppositions whilst evoking a sense of the uncanny. He drew illustrations to his poetry, often based on his visions, which gives his poetry a vivid, supernatural and evocative presence. The following quote provides an explanation of the poem:

This poem reflects the two-fold nature of human existence, as well as the duality between appearance and reality, by simultaneously revealing and concealing its inner meaning. Behind the finite interpersonal meanings of smiles and frowns, which ought not to mislead us about the totality comprised of positive and negative moments, there is a whole other layer of significance. The smile of smiles, whose inner nature is invisible, can only function in the finite world by means of potentially deceptive appearances, either as love or deceit depending on the character of the recipient. The frown of frowns—bitter experience beyond merely personal discord— induces radical self-doubt, which can only be relieved by an equally cosmic smile which surmounts the traps of the finite and restores the self. Thus Blake, by smiling upon my 'hungry consciousness' with his intelligence as no one else can, fills me up with indescribable joy and helps me to surmount all disappointments.

(Notes at <http://www.autodidactproject.org/my/smile.html> by Ralph Dumain on William Blake's 'The Smile' have helped provide this explanation of the poem)

In terms of the poem in relation to the unfolding action on screen, the poem should provide a soft, civilising and intelligent counterpoint to the ensuing action that takes place on the screen.

Note on adaptations and evolutions

The script can be adapted. All that is really needed is the following: first, a poor service experience that engenders a bad mood; second, several people willing to participate; and third, a sense of fun about zombie movies.

The parody can be filmed out of class, or in the classroom, or both. It could also be adapted to create a short role play, or used as a learning activity (like Chinese Whispers which is often also used to teach the process of emotional contagion and mitigating factors effecting mimicry).

A further adaptation could be to use the horror movie 'The Ring', which provides a further brain-eating spin (this time the virus is spread by the mass media – a tape inserted in a VCR and then watched) as the basis for a parody.

Please feel free to adopt and adapt. Post on You Tube and send me an email with the link so I can watch ;o)

## References

- Dentith, S. (2000). *Parody: The new critical idiom*. London: Routledge.
- Doherty, R. W. (1997). The Emotional Contagion Scale: A measure of individual differences, *Journal of Non-Verbal Behaviour*, 21, 131—154.
- Furnham, A. (1983). Contagion (In R. Harre & R. Lamb (eds.), *The encyclopaedic dictionary of psychology* (pp. 119).
- Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1994). *Emotional contagion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Howard, D., & Gengler, C. (2001). Emotional contagion effects on product attitudes, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(2), 189—201.
- Hutcheon, L. (1985). *A theory of parody: The teachings of twentieth-century art forms*. New York: Methuen.
- Lefebvre, M. (2005). Conspicuous consumption: The figure of the serial killer as cannibal in the age of capitalism, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 22(3), 43 — 62.
- Patten, S. B., & Arboleda-Flórez. (2004). Epidemic theory and group violence, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 39, 853—856.
- Sayers, J., & Monin, N. (2007, forthcoming). Love®: A critical reading of Lovemarks, *Journal of Organisational Change Management*.

# Emotional contagion and the infectious service smile: A response using parody

Sayers, Janet G

2007-01-01

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10179/9664>

20/01/2020 - Downloaded from MASSEY RESEARCH ONLINE