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**A Philosophical Approach to Satire and Humour in Social Context**

**DANIEL ABRAHAMS**

Submitted in fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Philosophy  
School of Humanities  
College of Arts  
University of Glasgow

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**Abstract**

The topic of my dissertation is satire. This seems to excite many people, and over the past four years I have heard many variations of a similar refrain: “Oh, wow. You’re studying satire? That’s very topical. You must have a lot of material to work with.” There is a way in which this is true, though I suspect in a way that diverges from the way that most of my interlocutors believed. I suspect that the material they imagined me to be working with was the output of Donald Trump, first a candidate for and now holder of the office of President of the United States. That is not the material I find interesting. More interesting to me is their statement. It evinces a number of beliefs that I find interesting, chief among them that Trump makes the current period particularly apt for satire, as if a doddering and incompetent ruling class is somehow a recent phenomenon. And I suspect that underneath this belief in the aptness of satire is a belief in the power of satire. Satire is somehow how people are going to strike back at the vice-governed fools who rule us. Those beliefs are the material I want to work with.

This is my interest in satire, then: not so much what it is about satire that makes it powerful, but what is it about satire that makes people think it is powerful? And what is it about satire that makes people think it is powerful when there is pretty powerful evidence that it is not? Unfortunately, here is where I run into the problem that in a very important way I do not have a lot of material to work with. There is not an awful lot on satire within the analytic tradition: outside of a few references to satire, analytic discussions of satire are limited to two short articles. Accordingly, I have taken the task of my dissertation to be to create an account of satire that helps to bring forward why satire is a thing that people can imagine to be powerful, that they can imagine to be politically effective.

My dissertation will effectively have two halves, one where I build my account and one where I begin to apply it. The purpose of applying my account, which will comprise the final two chapters, will not be to show its implications so much as how it can be used. My goal will not so much be to give definitive answers about the nature of satire, but rather to give a demonstration of how my account facilitates engaging questions about the role of satire in social and political context.

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Finally, I must of course thank my parents, Phillip and Elynor. They have supported me through this adventure, with its winding route and seemingly endless setbacks.

**Author's Declaration**

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and that I have: (i) read and understood the University of Glasgow Statement on Plagiarism, (ii) clearly referenced, in both text and the bibliography or references, all sources used in the work; (iii) fully referenced (including page numbers) and used inverted commas for all text quoted from books, journals, web, etc.; (iv) provided the sources for all tables, figures, data, etc. that are not my own work; (v) not made use of the works of any other student(s) past or present without acknowledgement. This includes any of my own works, that has been previously, or concurrently, submitted for assessment, either at this or any other educational institution; (vi) not sought or used the services of any professional agencies to produce this work; (vii) in addition, I understand that any false claim in respect of this work will result in disciplinary action in accordance with University regulations. I declare I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and I certify that this thesis is my own work, except where indicated by referencing, and that I followed the good academic practices noted above.



## **Introduction**

The topic of my dissertation is satire. This seems to excite many people, and over the past four years I have heard many variations of a similar refrain: “Oh, wow. You’re studying satire? That’s very topical. You must have a lot of material to work with.” There is a way in which this is true, though I suspect in a way that diverges from the way that most of my interlocutors believed. I suspect that the material they imagined me to be working with was the output of Donald Trump, first a candidate for and now holder of the office of President of the United States. That is not the material I find interesting, however. More interesting to me is their statement. It evinces a number of beliefs that I find interesting, chief among them that Trump, or Brexit, or Boris Johnson makes the current period particularly apt for satire, as if a doddering, hypocritical, and incompetent ruling class is somehow a phenomenon that emerged in the last five years. And I suspect that underneath this belief in the aptness of satire is a belief in the power of satire. Satire is somehow how we, the people, are going to strike back at the vice-governed fools who rule us. Those beliefs I find interesting, and those beliefs are the material I want to work with.

If those beliefs are indeed the beliefs of my interlocutors, they are not alone. Or, at least, they were not alone. The American election saw a number of high profile celebrations of the power of satire. Both Jon Stewart of *The Daily Show* and John Oliver of *Last Week Tonight* celebrated Trump announcing his candidacy for President, their perfect victim. The press echoed their words, with BuzzFeed, Salon, and Vox running articles about the comedians “destroying” and “annihilating” Trump. To me, the most striking example of this faith in satire is a tweet by former speechwriter for Barack Obama, Jon Favreau: “If Trump is the nominee, I actually think we should fund a SuperPAC that hires professional comedians to take him down with funny ads.”<sup>1</sup> Half a year later, Trump was elected to be the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Favreau, Twitter Post, February 29, 2016, 2:49 AM GMT, <https://twitter.com/jonfavs/status/704136287800807424>.

This is my interest in satire, then: not so much what it is about satire that makes it powerful, but what is it about satire that makes people think it is powerful? And what is it about satire that makes people think it is powerful when there is pretty powerful evidence that it is not? Unfortunately, here is where I run into the problem that in a very important way I do not have a lot of material to work with. There is not an awful lot on satire within the analytic tradition: outside of a few references to satire, analytic discussions of satire are limited to two short articles. Accordingly, I have taken the task of my dissertation to be to create an account of satire that helps to bring forward why satire is a thing that people can imagine to be powerful, that they can imagine to be politically effective.

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The first chapter focuses on the meaning of a work of art and trust. Work meaning is standardly understood in terms of Gricean reflexive intentions, and I will show that this allows for the relation between the artist, art work, and audience to be thought of in terms of trust. Under a reflexive intentions approach, the meaning of a work of art is understood in some way incorporate the work's making intentions. Since the intentions must be apparent to the audience, the work's meaning is in some way delimited by what the audience believes the intentions could be. What the audience believes the intentions could be is determined by, in part, how much and in what way the audience trusts the capability and character of the artist: that the artist is capable enough for some

salient feature to be intentional, or that the artist has the sort of character that they might intend some critical point. Identifying trust as essential to understanding the meaning of a work of art allows the first chapter to form a base of everything that follows. Trust will be used to spell out how satiric misrepresentation works in chapter 2, how satiric humour works in chapter 3, how it is a virtue of satire to be clear in chapter 4, how humour is ethically evaluable in chapter 5, and how satire is understood in political context in chapter 6. The first chapter is also important in a framing way that does not show up directly in the subsequent arguments, which is that I think it also helps with thinking of works of art as existing in a social context, rather than as an object to be appreciated or consumed.

Chapter two provides an account of satiric misrepresentation. The chapter comprises two halves, the first of which is to argue for my account of misrepresentation and the second of which is to use that account to build my account of satire. I argue for misrepresentation in the context of depiction, because I believe the case of depiction to be the most intuitively difficult. (Accounts of depiction standardly require the picture to in some way “look like” that picture’s subject, so pictorial misrepresentation requires that a picture simultaneously look like its subject and pointedly not look like its subject.) I settle on an account of misrepresentation that foregrounds the attribution of properties to a referred-to subject that that subject does not possess. In the second part of the chapter, I give an account of the sort of misrepresentation that is particular to satire. Satiric misrepresentation requires that the misrepresentation be funny, and that the misrepresentative properties either constitute or convey a criticism of the subject.

Humour, the other key component of satire, is the subject of chapter three. As with the previous chapter, this one also has two sections. First I build my account of humour, and then I incorporate it into my account of satire. My account of humour is novel: in contrast to conventional accounts of humour – which I term “internalist,” for their identification of humour with phenomena inside the body – I offer an account of humour as a social practice. This is to say that humour is a

historically-developed activity centred around, but not necessarily limited to, trying to provoke laughter. I support this with historical and anthropological evidence showing that the practice of humour has historically been quite diverse, and diverse in such a way that existing internalist theories cannot readily account for. Importantly, that humour is a social practice allows there to be a heavy social element in understanding how humour works. I give a heavy importance to the ideas of laughing with and laughing at, and show how the social dynamics of a joke (who gets to laugh and who gets laughed at) can be integral to whether a practice is humorous at all. The second half of the chapter examines the essential and non-essential uses of humour in satire. I show that not only is humour essential to satiric misrepresentation, but it can be used to distinguish between Horatian and Juvenalian approaches to satire. Humour is also frequently used in satire to generate a tone switch, which is used to signal to the audience that the work they are engaging with is indeed satirical.

The fourth chapter performs three tasks. First, I collate the first three chapters to offer my full account of satire: A work of art is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it criticizes a target by way of a funny misrepresentation. Second, I compare my account against the existing literature, especially in literary studies. The literary work is invoked not to criticize it, but to perform the important task of showing that how I have approached satire tracks what is commonly understood as satire. I have not accidentally applied the title of “satire” to some genre of my own invention. There are, broadly speaking, three main waves of satiric theory: One in the late-17<sup>th</sup> Century with John Dryden at its centre, one in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century with Northrop Frye at its centre, and one closer to the present that no longer considers satire to be a unified phenomenon. I show that my account of satire fits comfortably with all three generations of theory. I conclude the chapter by using my account of satire to draw out the value of clarity, which I consider to be particularly important to satire.

With the fifth chapter I begin the application of my account of satire. The focus is on satire that fails to be satire because its core humour is unethical. The core of the chapter focuses on the ethical evaluation of humour, and how that

works under the social account of humour. I show that understanding humour as a social phenomenon that can succeed or fail based on social factors allows humour to be analyzed as an exercise of power. If a humour act constitutes an unjust or otherwise immoral exercise of power, the humour may fail because it repels participation. Drawing from my arguments on trust and clarity, I show that one of the central tasks of the satirist is to make their moral position clear. If the moral position of the satirist is dubious, then the humour will suffer because the audience cannot participate wholeheartedly, and if the humour suffers then the satire as a whole suffers. A consequence of my argument is that no topics are ever “out of bounds” for satire, but the more morally complicated an issue is, the more important it is that the satirist is clear about where they morally stand.

In the sixth and final chapter, I put my account of satire in the context of mass media. Works produced in a mass media context, I show, have not only a number of makers but an even larger number of candidate makers. A lot of people can influence the content of a mass media work of satire. That so many people can influence the content of a mass media work of satire creates a significant drag on the value of mass media satire because it undercuts the audience’s trust. Even if only one name is presented as a work’s writer or director, the audience has to consider the possibility that the work was shaped and directed by producers, executives, and other people with intentions that are standardly thought of as orthogonal to artistic achievement. I examine two sorts of mass media satire, mock news and what I call “ensconced” satire. I argue that mock news should not be expected to be very effective at changing people’s beliefs because in most cases, most of the time, the people watching mock news shows are watching what they are because they already agree with what is being said. In the case of ensconced satire, I show that the mass media context invariably undercuts a satire’s clarity because the mass media context makes it difficult for the audience to trust a work’s makers.

I offer a short, mildly optimistic conclusion. I may not think that satire is very powerful, but understanding why people think it is powerful is useful. If contemporary politics is full of people trying to do politics with satire, then an

understanding of satire conveys, at least in part, an understanding of how to do politics.

## **Chapter One: Trust**

This chapter is about trust, specifically the trust of an artwork's author by that work's audience. To illustrate what I mean, here are two reviews of Adam Sandler's movie *Jack and Jill* (2011), where Adam Sandler plays both Jack Sadelstein and his twin sister Jill (in drag). The film was generally panned and TimeOut's Matt Singer offered a typical review:

Adam Sandler's new comedy may be totally mediocre, but that's still a big step up from the intensely unwatchable comedies he produced last year (see - or rather, don't - 'Just Go with It' and 'Zookeeper'). Sandler plays both title characters: Jack, a struggling adman, and Jill, the vulgar, oafish twin sister who becomes his unwanted houseguest. Admittedly, the film is merely a series of random celebrity cameos and shameless product placements (in one case, both - thank you, the guy from the Subway advert!). But there are a few moments of inspired absurdity, mostly provided by a surprisingly energetic Al Pacino, playing himself and channeling the smitten millionaire Joe E Brown from 'Some Like It Hot', as he falls head over heels for Jill.<sup>2</sup>

Against the consensus, Armond White of the New York Film Critics' Circle (since expelled) wrote one of his most famous contrarian reviews:

Adam Sandler's comedies are not "dumb fun," maybe that's why they're not in critics' favor. Sandler's hilarious new film *Jack and Jill* (in which he portrays both male and female fraternal twins), brings to mind the great line that Ernst Lubitsch's classic 1946 female plumber comedy *Cluny Brown* "upset people who didn't like to admit they have plumbing."

In *Jack and Jill*, Sandler looks at sibling rivalry without that acrid love of dysfunction so popular on TV and Broadway. It's obvious that Los

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<sup>2</sup> Matt Singer, "Jack and Jill," *Time Out*, January 14, 2011, <http://www.timeout.com/london/film/jack-and-jill>.

Angeles ad exec Jack and his hefty, homely, still unmarried sister Jill who visits from New York will mend their rift but the fun is in watching the healing process. The film's comedy (as in coach potato behavior) shows the depths of kinship-similarities siblings can't help sharing but learn to accept in themselves. And Sandler's always protective-as when Jack insults Jill but warns "I can say that because I'm her twin."<sup>3</sup>

While critics disagreeing is neither new nor rare, these two reviews contrast specifically not just in what they take Sandler to be doing, but in whether or not they are willing to believe that Sandler is doing much of anything at all. According to White, Sandler is making a statement on the power of family and love. Singer, on the other hand, believes that the film provides nothing more than "a series of random celebrity cameos and product placements." Of particular note is White asserting against the critical consensus that Sandler movies are not "dumb fun." White states that the films are funny, so it's the "dumb" part to which he objects. However a film's intelligence is to be understood – that of the maker, perhaps? – White argues that there is much there while Singer sees none, and this in turn affects how White interprets the film, pulling out the lesson of familial love.

What I would like to do in this chapter is provide a philosophical account of how an audience's judgement of an author should affect their interpretation of the work in turn. My argument will proceed in two stages. In the first section I will use Ted Cohen's account of understanding metaphors to argue that when a listener interprets a speaker, that listener must make a judgement on the character of the speaker. This section will also make use of Donald Davidson's work on malapropisms, and Paul Grice's work on communication. In the second section I will show that this account of judgement fits with every sort of approach to artistic interpretation. To do this, I will section approaches to artistic interpretation into three broad groups – accounts that identify a work's meaning with the real author's intentions (actual intentionalism), accounts that identify a work's meaning with either a fictional author's intentions or the real author's hypothetical

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nyfcc.com/2011/11/jack-and-jill-reviewed-by-armond-white-for-cityarts/>



intentions (hypothetical intentionalism), and anti-intentionalist accounts that hold that a work's meaning is separate from author's intentions, real or hypothetical. I will conclude the chapter by arguing that, as a result of the way that interpreting a work requires an audience to make a judgement about a works' author, there is a way in which the audience is trusting that author.

## 1.1 Meaning and Reflexive Intentions

Paul Grice's work on meaning and communication is the base from which what the rest of what I will write follows. When talking about meaning, I will be talking about what Grice identifies as "non-natural meaning," in opposition to "natural meaning."<sup>4</sup> Instances of natural meaning are simply cases of one thing entailing another, as with the statement "these spots mean measles."<sup>5</sup> (If it turned out that the spots were a result of something other than measles, then it would not have been the case that they meant measles.) Non-natural meaning, on the other hand, is what is meant by some uttered signal, sign, or speech act. For example, the crossing guard holding up his hand means that you should stop and not cross the road, and the chimes on the subway train mean that the doors are about to close.

In his 1957 work "Meaning," Grice sets out to elucidate what is necessary to communicate by way of non-natural meaning. He starts his account negatively, considering possible cases that fall short of communication. His first case is of someone putting on a tailcoat to go to a dance (apparently something people did in 1957).<sup>6</sup> If putting on tailcoats necessarily leads to going to dances, then someone putting on a tailcoat naturally means that they are going to a dance, and this is a case of natural meaning. However, there is nothing in this case to suggest that it is being used for communication. Grice notes that he could stipulate that he has arranged a system where putting on a tailcoat is used to communicate that he is going to a dance, but then this renders the example uninformative since "it is

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Grice, "Meaning," in *Studies in the Way of Words*, ed. Paul Grice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 215.

<sup>5</sup> Grice, 213.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 216.

communicative” is stipulated.<sup>7</sup> What makes this stipulated case communicative is not illuminated.

Next Grice engages cases of deliberately and openly letting someone know. There is a difference, Grice writes, between letting someone know something and telling them that same thing. He gives the following contrasting cases:

- (1) I show Mr. X a photograph of Mr. Y displaying undue familiarity to Mrs. X.
- (2) I draw a picture of Mr. Y behaving in this same manner and show it to Mr. X.<sup>8</sup>

In the first case, the photograph only has meaning in the natural sense. The interaction between Mr. Y and Mrs. X suggests an affair, and the photograph in a sense shows that. The drawn picture shows the same state of affairs. However, Grice writes that in the case of the drawing, the act of drawing the picture may constitute an act of communication only under certain circumstances. If I am idly doodling something I happened to see, the pen and paper just recreate the function of the camera. On the other hand, if Mr. X understands me to be *intending* to show *him* that Mr. X and Mrs. Y are having an affair, then there is a case of communication.

From the above case, Grice draws out two elements that are crucial to communication. The first is that non-natural meaning comes from intentions.<sup>9</sup> The communicative intention of me in drawing the picture creates and communicates meaning in a way that cannot be explained merely in terms of what is depicted in the picture that I draw for Mr. X. The second is that for communication to occur, it must be the case that the audience, in this case Mr. X, understands the non-natural meaning by way of recognizing my intentions to convey that meaning. If I am making the drawing for myself, to make sense of what I have seen, then I am not communicating with Mr. X even if he should look over my shoulder and understand what has happened.<sup>10</sup> Grice draws out this second distinction with another

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Grice, 218.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

example, this one of two cases of someone frowning.<sup>11</sup> I will add a third case, and add the context that this is happening during a game of poker. In the first case there is the case where player A has received bad cards and, unable to control herself, frowns in displeasure. In the second case, player A has received good cards but, wanting to pretend otherwise, affects a frown to show displeasure. In the third case, player A has received bad cards and, wanting to indicate this much to her friend in the crowd, frowns. In the first case, the frown has merely natural meaning. A is displeased, and the frown shows that. In the third case, the frown is a way to communicate that A has received bad cards. She intends to show displeasure to indicate that she has bad cards to her friend, and her friend recognizes this. In the second case, there is non-natural meaning but not communication. Player A intends to pretend that she has bad cards. Furthermore, A intends the other players to understand that she has bad cards. Importantly, however, A does not intend for the other players to recognize that it is her intention for them to understand that she has bad cards. As such, despite intending to generate an understanding in the other players, A is not communicating with them.

The outcome of these investigations is the following formulation: Communication by means of *x* occurred iff A uttered *x* with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention.<sup>12</sup> In the context of the third poker case, the frown is the utterance, that she has bad cards is the belief, and, in contrast with the second example, her friend understands that she has bad cards by way of recognizing that A intends to convey this information.

This is not to say that what Grice put forward is necessarily correct, or universally accepted. There are different approaches, with more or less priority placed upon speaker's meaning or the process of interpretation, as just two possibilities. For example, while Grice presents a model where the listener is merely trying to interpret the utterance, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson present a model called "relevance theory," where the listener is simultaneously interpreting

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 219.

the utterance and deducing what the utterance is.<sup>13</sup> However, that is not an issue here since all that is needed is that this interplay of intentions happens. What I will focus on in the next section is the part of interpretation that focuses on the audience figuring out the speaker's intentions. I believe that nothing that I will either report or put forward is dependent on specifically Grice's account of reflexive intentions, so nothing will depend on the reader committing to Grice at the expense of some other account of interpretation. Furthermore, I believe that Grice's approach is particularly apt for engaging the interpretation of works of art – when the question of interpreting a work is standardly engaged, it is approached by way of asking how the meaning of some work is to be accessed. The work, like the utterance in the Gricean model, is assumed from the start. Nevertheless, Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory will feature in section 2.1 on the question of how an audience knows when it is engaging with a work of art.

## 1.2 Metaphor and Linguistic Competence

In this section I want to engage with Ted Cohen's analysis of understanding metaphor in his book *Thinking of Others*. In it, he argues that the ability to understand metaphors is rooted in the human capacity to imagine things from someone else's perspective. I will then extend his argument in two ways. First, I will argue that essential to understanding metaphor is some judgement of the speaker by the listener – if the listener wants to know what the speaker really means, then the listener will be making assumptions or conclusions as to who and what the speaker is. Second, I will argue that this approach of judging the speaker generalizes from understanding metaphor to all language.

In *Thinking of Others*, Cohen does not seek to define metaphor, choosing instead to direct readers to the works of Joseph Stern and Roger White.<sup>14</sup> Rather, he identifies a number of identifying characteristics of metaphor. Metaphor is,

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<sup>13</sup> Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Outline of Relevance Theory," *HERMES – Journal of Language and Communication in Business* 3, no.5 (2015): 35-56.

<sup>14</sup> Ted Cohen, *Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor*, (Princeton: Princeton university Press, 2012): 1.

primarily, one of a number of ways of thinking of one thing in terms of another.<sup>15</sup> What makes metaphor distinct are two features. The first feature is that in the case of metaphor there is no literal equivalence between the two halves.<sup>16</sup> Consider the metaphor “Juliet is the Sun,” uttered by Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo does not mean to ascribe to Juliet all literal properties of the Sun – he is not calling her a flaming ball of gas millions of miles from the Earth. Moreover, while he may be ascribing some properties of the Sun to Juliet, for example that she is radiant and lifegiving, the import<sup>17</sup> of the metaphor is such that the saying “Juliet is radiant, and lifegiving, and so on” is not equivalent. This leads to Cohen writing that the subject of a metaphor, in this case Juliet, is regarded as a compound entity: Juliet-as-the-Sun.<sup>18</sup> The second feature of metaphors is that the metaphorical identity is not symmetrical.<sup>19</sup> This is to say that while the import of the “Juliet is the Sun” metaphor may be to see Juliet as the Sun, it is not to see the Sun as Juliet. Juliet is to be regarded in the same way that we regard the Sun – grand, life-giving – but the Sun is not to be regarded in the same way that we regard Juliet – young, romantic, prone to rash decisions. It is these two features that guide Cohen’s subsequent investigation.

Cohen roots human capacity to understand metaphor in the capacity for a person to think of himself as someone else. This sort of “interpersonal imagining” is at the base of how we learn to relate to other people.<sup>20</sup> He uses the example where Bart, having done something to Abner, is asked “how would you like that if you were Abner?” Bart is asked to imagine himself as Abner, and how he would react in such a situation. Bart imagines himself not just as Abner, since he can already tell that Abner did not like how he was treated, but specifically as Bart-as-Abner. This is part of empathy, Cohen writes, as the purpose of the Bart-as-Abner identification is for Bart to feel as Abner does.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cohen, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen uses the term “import” instead of “meaning” since he feels like the latter may question-beg in favour certain definitions of metaphor in a way that is unnecessary.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> To be clear, Cohen does not hold that all interpersonal imagination is of this sort, just that these sorts of interpersonal imaginations do exist and are fundamental to the human experience.

The way that Cohen frames understanding metaphor fits comfortably with approaches that adopt Grice's strategy of reflexive intentions. Just as the Gricean model of communication requires a listener to understand the mindset of a speaker, so too is understanding metaphor – on Cohen's model – a subspecies of understanding the minds of other people. To understand what Romeo means when he says that Juliet is the Sun requires understanding Romeo's mind in two stages. First, it is necessary to recognize that Romeo intends to communicate metaphorically, and that he is not earnestly asserting that Juliet actually is the Sun. Second, when Romeo is identified as communicating by way of metaphor, to get the metaphorical import of what Romeo intends to communicate the listener must then take up Romeo's perspective of Juliet. To frame this in Gricean terms, Romeo has uttered "Juliet is the Sun" with the intention of inducing in the listener the perspective of regarding Juliet as the Sun by means of the listener recognizing that that is what Romeo intends to communicate.

If the process of understanding metaphor centrally involves understanding the speaker's perspective, then an important issue comes into focus. Given that metaphors require the listener to take up the perspective of the speaker, the listener must also endeavour to figure out what the speaker's perspective is. Figuring out the speaker's perspective, in turn, requires the listener making some judgement as to the character of the speaker. By the "character" of the speaker, what I mean is that the speaker is not just judging the intentions of the speaker, but the sort of person the speaker is. In the case of Romeo's "Juliet is the Sun," this task is not difficult since the sentence is uttered in the context of a well-known stage play. Romeo is a young man in love with Juliet, so knowledge of that should be used by us in interpreting the metaphor to determine what his perspective is towards both Juliet and the Sun. Furthermore, the listener (and audience) may bring to bear contextual knowledge, such as how the Sun is usually invoked in metaphor. However, as Cohen notes, the character of speakers may be more or less opaque. For fictional characters, such as Romeo, this is less often a problem since they are placed in the context of the work, which contains not just the other content of the work to help frame the character but also general artistic

conventions such as genre that guide audience expectations. When Romeo calls Juliet the Sun, part of how Romeo's character is interpreted is by way of him being the protagonist in a romance. In real life, however, many speakers will be near or total strangers to the listener. For example, were a stranger to pull me aside, gesture to someone across the street, and say "he's a weasel in a cardboard shirt," I would have little to no idea what he actually meant, even though I could speculate as to possible meanings.

Understanding how judgement of Romeo's character influences how his metaphor is to be understood can be better drawn out by imagining the same metaphorical phrase, "Juliet is the Sun," uttered by three different versions of Romeo. The first is the Romeo that exists within Romeo and Juliet, the young lover. The second is Romeo\*, the father of Juliet\*. While the metaphor as uttered by both Romeo and Romeo\* express affection, the sort of the affection understood by the listener would be different in each case. The romantic affection expressed by Romeo is not the same as the paternal affection expressed by Romeo\*, so the import of the metaphor as expressed by each one is different. This difference in import, in turn, is understood by the listener by way of what they believe the character of the Romeo to be. Another case can help draw this example out further. Consider Romeo\*\*, a severely ill but recovering patient referring to his doctor Juliet\*\*. In this case, the import of "Juliet is the Sun" would not concern affection as the first two cases did, but a specifically restorative role for Juliet, as the coming of the Sun signals a new day after the night. A listener could nevertheless understand "Juliet is the Sun" from Romeo\*\* to be the same as uttered by the original Romeo, but then that would depend on a judgement of Romeo\*\* made by the listener – in this case that Romeo\*\* was romantically infatuated with Juliet\*\*.

It is important to note that most speakers, real and fictional, will fall somewhere between the extremes of total transparency and total opacity. Casual acquaintances may have some knowledge of each other's character within a particular environment – such as a workplace – and have some confidence in judging each other's character through that. Some works of art are more heavily

embedded in a context than others, and so the characters may be more distant to audiences from foreign cultures. For example, Shim Sung-Bo's film *Haemoo* (2014) features an archetypical Korean sea captain that North American audiences may have trouble judging and understanding without knowledge of Korean folklore and archetypes.

Another way of understanding what is going on, with noting the importance of a speaker's character to the import of their metaphor, is that metaphor is extremely context sensitive. The metaphor's import relies heavily on the circumstances in which it is uttered. Approached this way, the speaker is one prominent relevant feature of the utterance's context, and judging the speaker's character is part of understanding that context.

This analysis of judging character to understand metaphor can be applied back to language more fully. If communication is understood through a model that uses reflexive intentions – which is to say that in instances of communication the speaker has an intended meaning that she intends for the listener to understand through recognition of this intention, and that the listener understands the speaker by him understanding her intentions – then judging a person's character is necessary to understanding their intentions. Most of the time this is trivial, since the only judgement necessary for most ordinary conversation is that the speaker is a competent speaker of the relevant language. However, there are still cases where such judgements are necessary. For example, a few years ago I stumbled into a clothing store after having been soaked by a bus, and asked for “clean pants.” In Britain, “pants” are often taken to mean underwear. Mercifully, the store clerk identified that I was North American and directed me towards what the British call “trousers,” but in North America are called “pants.” The store clerk made a judgement about me, and used that to determine my intentions.

Judgements of these sort give rise to a kind of trust. More specifically, the way that the listener interprets the speaker will depend on the degree to which the listener trusts the speaker. This trust can take several forms. In most cases, trust will simply take the form of trusting that the speaker is a sufficiently competent



speaker of some language. In the case of metaphor, this means that when Romeo says that “Juliet is the Sun,” the listener trusts Romeo that he has spoken what he means to say, and that he knows that Juliet is not literally the Sun, therefore he is speaking metaphorically. What I write will be brushing by the philosophical field of epistemology of testimony. However, everything I write should be neutral to any commitments within that discourse.

The strength of the language of trust is that it is particularly apt for explaining cases where what is at issue is not simply linguistic competency. A good example to consider here would be Donald Davidson’s use of Mrs. Malaprop in his paper “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs.”<sup>22</sup> The defining trait of Mrs. Malaprop is that she will frequently use the wrong words in conversation. So, following the title of the paper, instead of saying “a nice arrangement of epigraphs,” she will instead utter “a nice derangement of epitaphs.” In this case, her linguistic competence is not in question: Mrs. Malaprop is linguistically incompetent. However, Davidson notes, she is nevertheless reliably understood.<sup>23</sup> It is my contention that the language of trust makes good sense of this in a way that goes beyond the concept of belief, reasonable or unreasonable belief, or knowledge. Even if she is not a competent speaker, the listener may still trust Mrs. Malaprop to be attempting to communicate sensibly – that she is keeping to the topic at hand, that there is a reason that she is addressing the listener, and that, even if she is not succeeding, she is at least trying to say what she means. In Gricean terms, the listener would be trusting that she is abiding by the cooperative principle.<sup>24</sup>

Foreign or classical films are also cases where the language of trust is very helpful. In the case of the Shim Sung-Bo film *Haemoo*, the audience may trust that since he, Shim, has been allowed to direct a major film, and has had a good apprenticeship, that his film will be crafted with care and that the sea captain character is not simply underwritten. However, since Shim is also a first-time

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<sup>22</sup> Donald Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” in *Truth and Interpretation*, ed. Ernest Lepore, 433-446, (London: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Davidson, 440.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation,” in *Studies in the Way of Words*, ed. Paul Grice, 26 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

director, the audience may also have difficulty trusting him fully. As such, the audience may not be completely sure about how to understand the sea captain character. I believe that this is another strength of the language of trust: trust is not necessarily total or totally absent, and in cases where the listener or audience may only trust the speaker to a certain degree, there will be an uncertainty as to the nature of the speaker's actions and utterances.

### 1.3 Trust

I have begun to talk about trust, so it would be helpful at this point to appeal to the existing literature on trust to clarify what I mean. There is a healthy and growing literature on trust, although not that much focuses on just what trust is. When trust is the focus, it is generally thought of in terms of “places.” This is to say that there is one-place trust (where person A is generally trusting), two-place trust (where person A trusts person B), and three-place trust (where person A trusts person B in some domain P). While Paul Faulkner argues that it is the first-two places that are relevant for understanding trust – it is between the two people that trust occurs – most discussions focus on the three-place variant.<sup>25</sup> For this section I will also focus on trust in two-places, although I will not be following Faulkner's lead. Rather I will be focusing on two places because I will show in the section on trust and interpretation that, in cases of engaging, appreciating, and interpreting art, the audience may be trusting a work's author or creator in several different domains.

Two-place trust generally comprises two distinct parts. First there is reliance, where A relies on B.<sup>26</sup> “Reliance” is used in a technical sense here – as Katherine Hawley writes, “to rely on someone to x is to act on the supposition that she will x.”<sup>27</sup> This is somewhat different from the colloquial use of “reliance,” which often has a connotation of some power dynamic, and to say that A relies on B is to say that A is at the mercy of B, and A requires B to perform some task for A that A cannot for herself. Importantly, Hawley notes, under this technical sense of

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Faulkner, “The Attitude of Trust is Basic,” *Analysis* 75, no.3 (2015): 424

<sup>26</sup> Faulker, 426.

<sup>27</sup> Katherine Hawley, “Trust, Distrust, and Commitment,” *Noûs* 48, no.1 (2014): 3.

reliance, relying on someone to x does not mean believing that she will x.<sup>28</sup> Reliance is about acting, not believing; A could act on the supposition that B will do some x that A believes B is very unlikely to do, although that would be either foolish or desperate.

Different philosophers delineate the “reliance” part of trust in different ways. For example, Karen Jones writes that the way A relies on B in trust is that she has an “attitude of optimism” towards the “goodwill and competence” of B.<sup>29</sup> She explains this to mean that A anticipates that B will have and display competence and goodwill in their interactions.<sup>30</sup> Hawley, instead of focusing on goodwill and optimism, writes that reliance resides in A’s belief that B has a commitment to doing something or acting in some way.<sup>31</sup> Commitments, to Hawley, are normative expectations that most often (but not necessarily) arise from a combination of convention and mutual expectation.<sup>32</sup> Zac Cogley provides a different approach to Jones’ understanding of reliance, and writes that in trust A believes that B will act with goodwill and competence.<sup>33</sup> Where Jones stresses optimism, Cogley stresses belief. This means that to Jones, trust is an affective attitude, whereas to Cogley, trust is a sort of belief. This distinction, between affective attitude and belief, is the main point of contention in defining trust, but it is not relevant to what I will propose in this chapter. To the extent that I address it, it will be in section 3 where I argue that the relationship between audience and author is peculiar, since there is some way that the audience must place themselves at the mercy of a work’s author to fully appreciate a work of art.

The second part of trust is largely agreed upon, and it is of the form that however the first piece of trust is understood, that first piece will be a direct and compelling but not indefeasible reason for B acting in accordance with A’s attitude or belief. I will call this part the reflexivity condition. The exact form this part takes will depend on how the first part is formulated. So, to Jones, B is “directly

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<sup>28</sup> Hawley, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Karen Jones, “Trust as an Affective Attitude,” *Ethics* 107, no.1 (1996): 4.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Hawley, 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Zac Cogley, “Trust and the Trickster Problem,” *Analytic Philosophy* 53, no.1 (2012): 35.

and favourably moved by the thought that we are counting on her,” whereas to Hawley, B will take having a relevant commitment to be a reason to fulfill that commitment.<sup>34</sup> The main role of the reflexivity condition is to separate trust from mere reliance, and this is often justified with a comparison to relying on a machine. While one may rely on a machine for many things (for example, I am relying on one right now, to write this chapter), the machine does not respond to this reliance. It is neither motivated, nor affected. The same analysis goes for other things or processes that are not agents – the ebb and flow of the tides, the Sun coming up in the morning, and so on. While we may talk about trusting in a computer, that is considered to be colloquial talk with no relevance to this discussion.

To this point I have provided the following:

- An introduction to the importance of reflexive intentions, using Grice’s account of communication as a base.
- A brief summary of Cohen’s account of how human’s understand metaphor.
- An argument that Cohen’s account of understanding metaphor is consistent with a theory of communication that works via reflexive intentions.
- Making sense of metaphors requires the listener to make some sort of judgement about the speaker, and that this approach is generalizable to language more broadly.
- And, lastly, in light of these judgements, there are many cases where it makes sense to speak of the listener trusting the speaker.

In the next section, I want to take the above and show that they may be applied to interpretation in art. This will take the form of a brief survey of approaches to interpretation in art where I show that each involves a judgement about the person of the author. I will conclude the section and chapter by arguing that interpreting a work of art will often involve the audience trusting a work’s author in the way that a listener may trust the speaker of a metaphor.

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<sup>34</sup> Jones, 8; Hawley, 10.

## 2. Engaging Art

I want to turn now to the philosophy of art, specifically the subsection of philosophy of art that is dedicated to the interpretation of works of art. I stated in the introduction that the analysis of interpretation could be applied to interpretation in art, and the *Haemoo* example in the previous section begins the project of showing how that is done. Since there are different approaches to interpretation in art, this section will be subdivided into four subsections. The first subsection will address how the audience's judgement of a work's author is relevant in figuring out to what extent and in what way an object in question could be a work of art. This is a question of the definition of art and will be resolved in a similar approach to how, in understanding metaphors, there is not just the interpretive project of understanding a metaphor's import but also in identifying that a speaker is speaking metaphorically rather than literally. The second, third, and fourth subsections will each address a different approach to interpreting works of art. The second subsection will address actual intentionalist approaches, where the meaning of a work of art is primarily identified with the real intentions of the actual author of a piece. The third subsection will engage with hypothetical intentionalist approaches. There are a variety of different hypothetical intentionalist approaches, but what they have in common is that the meaning of a work of art is primarily determined by intentions hypothesized by the audience. The fourth subsection will address anti-intentionalist interpretive strategies, and I will show that even without an explicit appeal to intentions, the audience still makes use of judgements that work in fundamentally the same way as judging the character of the author. My goal is not to arbitrate between the three broad schools of interpretive approaches. Rather, I will show that each of the three approaches makes use of intentions, or at least something like them, in some way. I will then conclude this chapter by arguing that the trust analysis given at the end of section 1 applies just the same in cases of artistic interpretation.

### 2.1 The Art Object

Just as a listener must identify that a speaker is speaking in metaphor, so too must an audience identify that the thing with which they are engaging is a work of art. There are two sorts of instances where the audience must identify whether or not they are engaging a work of art. One is where the audience is confronted with something, and must figure out whether or not this thing is an art work. The other is where the audience is engaging with something that they are certain is a work of art, but are not certain what are its limits and contours – whether some parts of the thing that they are seeking to appreciate are or are not part of the artwork. In this subsection I will show that both of these instances are navigated by audiences by, at least in part, making some sort of judgement on the (potential) work's maker. To support this point, I will begin by briefly surveying definitions of art to show that whether or not something is a work of art in some way depends on the intentions behind its creation.

There are currently three main approaches to creating a definition of art, and all require a work to be intentionally made. That the work merely has to be intentionally made, without specifying exactly what art-making intentions are necessary or how they are to be pursued, means that questions of the ontology of art (that is, *how* something is a work of art) do not need to be engaged. It is sufficient for my purposes to just know *that* something is a work of art.

The three main approaches to defining what is a work of art are the institutional account, the historical account, and the cluster or disjunctive account. For the institutional account, something is a work of art if and only if it is produced within the context of an artistic institution. The theory finds its origins with George Dickie in 1969, and finds a recent articulation in Catherine Abell's 2012 article "Art: What it is and Why it matters:" "Something is an artwork iff it is the product of an [artistic] institution, and it directly affects how effectively that institution performs the perceived functions to which its existence is due."<sup>35</sup> The theory is famously strong in accounting for found art, such as Duchamp's *Fountain*, where a urinal was taken, turned upside down, and presented as a work of art

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<sup>35</sup> Catherine Abell, "Art: What It Is and Why It Matters," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, no. 2 (2012): 686.

within the context of an art gallery. Much of Abell's article is focused on articulating what the functions of an artistic institution must be, and doing so in a way that does not leave art as being something only created by European civilizations in the last 400 or so years. What is critical to my project is that it is essential that for a work to have been produced by an institution, it must have been intentionally created. The institution is a network of actors and norms, and something being produced by the institution means that it was created by the actors in keeping with the norms.<sup>36</sup> This is most simply put by Dickie, who writes that it is a necessary condition that any work of art, to be a work of art, must have been put forward as a candidate for appreciation.<sup>37</sup>

Historical accounts of art are close relatives to institutional accounts. The big difference is that in place of artistic institutions, works of art are instead things that are produced within artistic traditions. Historical accounts are perhaps best thought of as anti-theoretical accounts: other theories of art do not succeed, but there is nevertheless this thing called art, and accordingly art is whatever is consistent with this historically emergent practice. The attraction of historical accounts are their strengths in dealing with the fact that there are diverse and independently developed traditions that are intuitively artistic. As Stephen Davies notes, while artistic traditions can develop in ways that are copacetic to an institutional account, they will not necessarily do so, and therefore the institutional account is insufficient.<sup>38</sup> However, even if an institutional account is not available, Davies notes that it is still necessary that a work's creators create that work in accordance with whatever practices and standards are necessary to be part of that tradition.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, the intentions of a product's maker are still relevant to determining whether or not that product rests within an artistic tradition.

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<sup>36</sup> Abell, 683.

<sup>37</sup> George Dickie, "The Institutional Theory of Art," in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noel Carroll, 95 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000)

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Davies, "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition," in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noel Carroll, 199 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000)

<sup>39</sup> Davies, 206.

The third approach to defining art is one where there are a set of possible candidate characteristics that a thing may have – such as being aesthetically pleasing, the product of a high degree of skill, or produced in accordance with an artistic tradition – and that some combinations of these candidate characteristics may identify that thing as art, but no individual candidate characteristic is either necessary or sufficient.<sup>40</sup> This sort of approach may be called either a cluster account or a disjunctive account, depending on how many successful art-making combinations are theorized.<sup>41</sup> However, as Berys Gaut notes in his defence of the cluster account, these are all characteristics that are applied to intentionally created artefacts.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, what is under consideration is always something that was intentionally created, which in turn means that it is only things that are intentionally created that can be art objects. From that, it is necessarily the case that in determining whether or not something is a work of art that part of what will be at issue, by way of the cluster account, is whether or not something was intentionally created.

While all three accounts diverge, what all have in common is that for something to be a work of art it must have been intentionally created. Accordingly, when identifying whether or not something is a work of art, one task the audience must perform is identify whether or not the thing under consideration was intentionally created. This, in turn, will require two different judgements about the character of a potential work's creator – whether this is the sort of thing that a known artist would produce, or whether or not the potential work under consideration is the sort of thing that anyone may produce.

Most of the time, identifying whether or not something is a work of art is not particularly difficult. This is because works are often put in contexts that emphasize that those works are things that ought to be artistically appreciated. Even exceptions, such as professional wrestling or Joaquin Phoenix's bizarre

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<sup>40</sup> Berys Gaut, "Art as a Cluster Concept," in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noel Carroll, 28 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000)

<sup>41</sup> For elaboration on this distinction, see Francis Longworth and Andrea Scarantino, "The Disjunctive Theory of Art: The Cluster Account Reformulated," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no.2 (2010): 151-167.

<sup>42</sup> Gaut, 26.



decision to pretend to be schizophrenic for several years, are eventually presented to some appreciating audience. There are also times when some non-art object is incidentally put in a context that is usually meant to signal that something is a work of art. For example, in early 2015 someone dropped a glove in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.<sup>43</sup> Unsure as to whether or not the dropped glove was a work of art, museum patrons carefully stepped around it. Following from my argument in the first part of this subsection, part of determining whether or not the glove is to determine whether or not it was intentionally presented as a work of art. Cues the audience would look for might be whether something is in a position where a work of art would be positioned (such as on a pedestal in a lighted display), or whether it fits with the sort of thing that an artist might intend to be art. What makes the glove case possible is that a modern art museum is exactly the sort of place where an audience *could* come across a glove positioned as a work of art. Pictures suggest that the audience considered it was unlikely that the glove was a work of art, but they were unwilling to rule it out – despite few people apparently stopping to appreciate it, people did choose to walk around the glove and leave it alone, just in case it was a work. It is important to note that it is specifically art-making intention that the audience is trying to determine. The glove could have been intentionally positioned for other reasons – as a signal of some sort, maybe – which would have no relevance as to the glove being a work of art. While funny, a modern art museum is not the only instance where a person may encounter something that may or may not be a work of art. For example, someone wandering in the Canadian north may encounter a rock structure that could be entirely natural or it could be an Inukshuk. Similarly, archaeologists frequently have to determine between incidental rubble and pieces of sculpture. In each case, part of what the audience or examiner considers to determine whether or not something is a work of art is to try and determine what intentions (if any) were behind something's creation.

Of all of the above cases, it is the case of the glove in the modern art museum that best shows how an audience's judgement of the intentions behind an

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<sup>43</sup> Tennessee Grimes, Twitter post, January 10, 2015, 12:03 a.m., <https://twitter.com/10ehc/status/553703519229071360>

object reflect their judgement of that object's potential maker. They are unaware of the author of the glove – indeed, in actuality there is no “author” as such – but that does not mean that they cannot use judgements of an author's character. In this case, there is the theoretical character of an archetypal modern artist. The museum's patrons are not judging that some known person would create this artwork, but rather they are judging that it is possible that there could be a modern artist who would intend this object as a work. This is, again, why the audience is unsure as to the status of the glove. There is no definite person whose intentions they are judging, so they are instead left with the question of whether or not there is such a person who could have such intentions.

Audiences do not only have to determine whether or not something is a work of art, they are also sometimes confronted with a work of art but have to determine what is and is not part of it. In this case, much more than the other, judgements of the artist's skills come in to play. Consider an extended improvised guitar solo. In judging the solo, the audience must determine whether the notes are intentionally and deliberately struck, or if the guitarist is just flailing without guidance and the resulting sound is incidental. Whether the audience considers the sounds produced to be intentional or random will depend on what they consider to be the level of skill possessed by the guitarist. Similar judgements may be made concerning random idiosyncrasies in film shots. Since filming and editing are parts of the art-making process in film, it is often but not necessarily the case that whatever is in the frame of a shot is there on the intentional decision of someone within the film-making process. However, if, for instance, a boom mic is visible within a shot, then that is considered simply a mistake and the boom mic is not considered to be part of the film as a work of art. In some cases, however, visible pieces of equipment might intentionally be part of the work. This is the case in some of the films produced under Lars von Trier's Dogme95 project, where part of the point of the work is the low standard of production. Accordingly, when an audience judges whether or not visible equipment is properly part of a film and not just a mistake, then part of what they are doing is determining what they believe to be the character of the filmmaker, and whether that filmmaker would intentionally have the equipment visible in the film.

What I have argued in this subsection does not map on to the Gricean formulation very easily. This is because the Gricean approach to communication takes the utterance as given, and then frames communication as merely the understanding of the content of that utterance and the intentions behind it. When determining whether or not something is a work of art, or what the limits are of a work of art, what is in question is not just an utterance's meaning but what that utterance is. Furthermore, art is in general much more ambiguous than everyday language. The frequent use of language results in meanings being largely public and context invariant, and people are adept at navigating linguistic rules. Art, on the other hand, often does not deal in such clear and ready meanings and people do not have the same ready facility in understanding it. Although reflexive intentions are still in use, a more robust approach can be found in the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson. Crucial to relevance theory is that humans pay attention to the features that are most relevant.<sup>44</sup> This is true not just for communication but any situation. In the specific context of communication, this means that in understanding an utterance, the listener is working to identify the relevant features of that utterance.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the listener does not simply accept the utterance then decode it, but that they are also simultaneously figuring out just what that utterance is. This interpretive process can end with the determination that what one is trying to understand is not an utterance at all, like someone realizing that what she thought was a call of her name was just the sound of the wind. With respect to works of art, relevance theory works as follows. In the case of determining whether or not something is a work of art, part of what audiences are attempting to identify are the features which are intended to be the most salient. They are looking to see how their attention is being directed. In the basic case of a painting hung in an art museum, the promoted features are those of the painting's aesthetic content –its colours, its shapes, and so on. In the case of something ambiguous, such as the glove, the opacity of modern art makes it difficult for an audience to identify what the most relevant features of the glove are. It has apparently been left and either lost or forgotten, but that appearance is

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<sup>44</sup> Sperber and Wilson, 41.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

something that could be simulated by a modern artist. In the case of determining whether or not something is part of a greater work, as with the guitar solo or element within a film frame, the question is then whether that prospective content coherent with the rest of the definite content of the work. If the boom mic appears to be relevant, as it does in a Dogme95 film production, then the audience is more likely to identify it as being part of the work.

Following from all of the above, one of the skills that an artist needs to have in constructing a work is that all features of a work can be identified as part of that work, at least by the intended audience. I turn now to the content that is articulated by the work, and how its meaning is deduced. First is the actual intentionalist approach to identifying work meaning, which holds that the work meaning of a work of art depends upon the intentions of a work's author.

## 2.2 Actual Intentionalism

The strongest form of actual intentionalism is the position often derisively called Humpty Dumptyism, which is the position that the work meaning of a work of art is entirely and no more than what the author intended it to be. This position is not defended within the discourse, but is frequently brought up as a position that provides the problems from which valuable solutions can be extracted.<sup>46</sup> The more common current position is called moderate actual intentionalism (MAI), and defended by Noel Carroll and Robert Stecker. In this subsection I will begin by showing how judgements of the author are at play in Humpty Dumptyism – since it is a good starting point – before moving on to MAI.

Since, under Humpty Dumptyism, the work meaning of a work of art is entirely and exclusively that which is intended by that work's author, then the role

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<sup>46</sup> Invocations of Humpty Dumptyism can be found in Davidson, 439, and Noel Carroll, "Interpretation and Intention: The Debate between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism," *Metaphilosophy* 31, no.1-2 (2000): 76. The name derives from a passage in *Alice in Wonderland*, where Humpty Dumpty insists that "glory" means whatever he wants it to mean.

for judgements of the author is immediate and obvious. Since all that matters is what the author intended, then determining an artwork's work meaning is less a process of interpreting the work than it is an empirical investigation into the author himself. This is even more true if it is accepted that the author's intentions do not have to be consciously-held intentions.<sup>47</sup> In that case to determine an artwork's work meaning the audience must psychoanalyze the author. To determine what the author would "really mean," would, in turn, require substantive judgements about the sort of person the author is and what people like him would really intend.

Contrary to Humpty Dumptyism, MAI seeks to make sure that the work of art does not fade out of its own interpretation. The two main proponents of MAI are Robert Stecker and Noel Carroll, and both accept as their starting point Gregory Currie's analysis that works of art are utterances.<sup>48</sup> Stecker continues that not all works are necessarily utterances, but that they may still be understood as being analogous.<sup>49</sup> They hold two points to distinguish MAI from its main rivals. First is that if the author's art-making intentions are successful then it is these intentions that determine what is called the work's "work meaning."<sup>50</sup> This is the "actual intentionalist" part of MAI. The moderacy of MAI is found in an acceptance that the author may fail to actualize their art-making intentions, and in these cases the resultant work (assuming the author was at least successful enough to create a work) has its work meaning fixed by convention and context.<sup>51</sup>

To justify how under MAI author's intentions have primacy over the resultant work in regards to determining work meaning, Stecker invokes the Gricean position that utterer's meaning and utterance meaning may come apart.<sup>52</sup> He gives the example of the sentence "your cat ate my mat." When Stecker utters such a sentence, by "your cat" he is referring to the vacuum cleaner. In this case, Stecker

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<sup>47</sup> For more on unconscious intentions, see Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Currie first defends a version of this claim in *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 31.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Stecker, "Moderate Actual Intentionalism Defended," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no.4 (2006): 430

<sup>50</sup> Carroll, 77.

<sup>51</sup> Stecker, 429.

<sup>52</sup> Stecker, 430.

believes, utterer's meaning – the vacuum cleaner – comes apart from utterance meaning – a cat. With respect to art this means that in a case where the author was successful in acting on her intentions, and her intended meaning – the utterer's meaning – was different than the work's utterance meaning, then the work meaning is determined by the utterer's intentions.

Since MAI is interested in the author's real intentions, as with Humpty Dumptyism, there is still a premium placed on determining the real author's actual intentions and, consequently, MAI demands the same judgements of character about the author that was required by Humpty Dumptyism. MAI diverges from Humpty Dumptyism in that the audience must not only determine the author's intentions, but also whether or not the author was successful in articulating those intentions in the work. In judging the success of the intentions, the audience is looking at the work and judging whether the output is the sort of thing that the author would have intended. This can happen at different points of the interpretive process. For example, the audience may first ask whether or not the work (or some part of the work) matches something that the author would have intended, and if answering in the affirmative can then move on to investigate the author's intentions. Conversely, the audience may start by investigating the author's intentions, and then ask whether the resultant work matches those intentions. In either case, when interrogating the work, the audience is confronted with the question of "is this the sort of thing that the author would have intended?" Answering that question requires a position on what sort of thing would the author intend, which in turn requires a judgement on the character of the author.

### **2.3 The Mid-Point: Hypothetical and Fictional Authors**

Hypothetical intentionalism encompasses a wide array of positions that, on one end, fall short of real intentionalism and, on the other end, are not so extreme as full anti-intentionalism. These positions do not make use of the actual author's actual intentions but they do nevertheless have intentions play some important role in determining work meaning. Paisley Livingston, in *Art and Intention*, identifies two main groups of hypothetical positions. The first group is a set of positions

where a work's author is considered to be known, but her intentions are not. Accordingly, the meaning of a work is determined by the hypothesized intentions of the actual author.<sup>53</sup> For the second group the work's real author is not considered to be known. In turn, a work's meaning is determined by the intentions of a hypothesized – or fictional – author.<sup>54</sup> In this subsection I will engage both forms of hypothetical intentionalism and show that both approaches make use of judgements about the author, whether the author is real or hypothetical.

Jerrold Levinson offers the form of hypothetical intentionalism that is closest to MAI. In fact, he accepts most of the same points that defenders of MAI do.<sup>55</sup> A work of art functions similarly to a Gricean utterance and, within the Gricean formulation, a work's meaning is dependent upon the intentions of its author. Similarly, Levinson holds that if an author successfully realizes her art-making intentions when creating a work then her intentions will then determine the work's meaning.<sup>56</sup> Where he differs, however, is the role those art-making intentions play in the interpretive process. Central to Levinson adopting hypothetical intentionalism is that he believes that in pursuing the real intentions of the author the audience is no longer actually interpreting the work.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, what is appropriate to the interpretive process is only that which may be gleaned from considering the work itself. An important point is that it is a normative audience, not a real existing audience, that is being considered as the interpreter by Levinson.<sup>58</sup> This is an important move to focus on the meaning of the work, rather than the epistemology of a particular audience. To Levinson, the normative audience is an "appropriate" audience, and an appropriate audience for a work is one that knows a work's author and context. This audience is informed but not psychic, so while they know the facts surrounding the work they do not know what actually happened in the author's mind as she was making the work. This means

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<sup>53</sup> Livingston, 143-4

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 140

<sup>55</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Defending Hypothetical Intentionalism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no.2 (2010): 139.

<sup>56</sup> Levinson (2010), 145.

<sup>57</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Hypothetical Intentionalism: Statement, Objections, and Replies," in *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson, 306 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006)

<sup>58</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Who's Afraid of a Paraphrase?" in *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson, 295 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006)

that what the normative audience is doing in interpreting a work is hypothesizing what the author's intentions would have been, and a work's meaning is that which is determined by the best supported hypothesis as to the author's intentions. Accordingly, when Levinson accepts that successfully realized intentions determine a work's meaning, it is only in so far as holding that an author successfully realizing her intentions will create a work which has as its best interpretation one that matches the meaning the author sought to create.<sup>59</sup> So while the real author's intentions determined the work's meaning, they importantly do not serve as a criterion for that work's meaning.

Since Levinson's hypothetical intentionalism allows for the real author to be considered, judgements about the author are just as important to the process of interpretation as they are in real intentionalist approaches. Since what is being sought is what the author would have most likely intended then the audience must consider what the author would intend, and since what the author would intend depends on what sort of person the author is, determining the strongest hypothesis for what the author intended requires the audience to make some sort of judgement of the character of the author. However, in the case of hypothetical intentionalism, judgements of the character of the author work slightly differently than they do in the case of MAI. This is because the judgements are made on the behalf of the normative, appropriate audience. This means that any facets of the author's character that a real audience member may know, but the normative audience would not know, do not factor in a work's best interpretation. In practice, it is difficult to clearly set out what the normative audience does and does not know about an author. For example, while in most cases the private lives of movie makers are largely unknown, Woody Allen's personal history as a sexual predator has achieved a level of public notoriety and seems to be the sort of thing that a normative audience should know about to be appropriately informed. For my purposes, however, it is simply enough to say that it is the case, under hypothetical intentionalism, that judgements of the character of the author are relevant to the interpretive process.

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<sup>59</sup> Levinson (2010), 145.



Another variant of hypothetical intentionalism is the one that holds that in the interpretive process the audience is attributing intentions to a fictional author. For the sake of clarity I will call this version fictional author intentionalism (FAI). FAI can be understood as a slightly stronger version of the hypothetical intentionalism that Levinson proposed. As with hypothetical intentionalism, FAI holds that the interpretive process, to properly be interpreting a work of art, must focus on the work itself. However, FAI goes one step further, holding that even knowledge of the real author is extraneous and takes the audience beyond merely interpreting the work.<sup>60</sup> This means that under FAI the interpretative process requires the audience to construct a fictional author, and this fictional author is then attributed the intentions that created and gave meaning to a work of art. Currie advocates something close to this. For example, in *Narratives and Narrators*, he writes that audience members understand works of art through a process of what he calls “pragmatic inference” – that is, inferring the intentions of a narrative’s creator by combining the linguistic meaning of that narrative with its surroundings and context.<sup>61</sup> Pragmatic inference is not a forensic investigation into the work’s creation but an interpretation of its achieved meaning so the real author does not feature in the interpretive process.<sup>62</sup> Since the interpretive process is one of inferring intentions but does not consider a work’s real author, Currie writes that in the interpretive process the audience constructs a hypothetical author whose intended meaning coincides with the work’s achieved meaning.<sup>63</sup>

Since it does not consider a work’s real author, FAI breaks quite radically from MAI and hypothetical intentionalism in how it judges the character of a work’s author. In the case of the latter two the audience is making definite judgements of real people, but in FAI there is no real person to judge. Effectively, FAI runs in the opposite direction from both MAI and hypothetical intentionalism – where the latter two begin with knowledge of the author and then try to figure out what the author’s intentions would have to be to have created the work, FAI begins with the work and then from that work creates the author. Since the audience operating

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<sup>60</sup> Livingston, 141-2.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory Currie, *Narratives and Narrators*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 25.

<sup>62</sup> Currie, 25.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

under FAI has no real author to which they can appeal, yet they are also engaging in the project of determining which intentions best explain the work under interpretation, they must evaluate the plausibility of hypothesized intentions in some way other than appealing to a real person. Similar to how hypothetical intentionalism appeals to a normative audience, FAI appeals to a normative person in the role of the artist. Just as the normative audience is no real audience, the normative person in the role of the author is no real person or author. Contrary to hypothetical intentionalism, or MAI, the author is not examined or deciphered but rather created. The normative person is also, similar to the normative audience, considered to be appropriate to the work being examined, although there are different ways that can be parsed.

There are different ways that the audience may understand that normative person – the normative person may be thought of as any average person, specifically a trained artist, specifically an artist within a particular cultural context, and so on. However the audience understands the normative person will inform the sorts of judgements they make of the author. For example, if the audience considers the normative person as a trained artist within a particular cultural context – for example, a trained painter within the context of contemporary English society – then the hypothesized intentions behind the painting under evaluation will be those which would be most plausibly ascribed to a trained painter within the context of contemporary English society. Which intentions are most plausibly ascribed to such a person, in turn, depends on what the character of the trained painter within the context of contemporary English society is rightly thought to be.

## 2.4 Anti-Intentionalism

The next step beyond FAI is anti-intentionalism, the position that the way to interpret art makes no appeal to a work's author, be that author real or fictional. In practice, anti-intentionalism may function almost identically to FAI, with the one difference being where a proponent of FAI would appeal to a fictional author whose intentions give the work meaning, the anti-intentionalist simply holds that the work

meaning is determined wholly by convention and context. Central to this position is what Paisley Livingston calls the dilemma argument: “either intentions are successfully realized in the artistic structure or they are not, and so intentions are either unnecessary or insufficient conditions of the work’s meaning.”<sup>64</sup> As David Davies explains the dilemma, in support of his form of anti-intentionalism (Interpretive Intentionalism), the lesson of the dilemma is that no matter the utterer’s intentions, the meaning of the utterance, and thus the work of art, will always be determined by convention and context.<sup>65</sup> Since all the interpreter is doing under interpretive intentionalism is parsing convention and context, Davies holds that it is then the case that the interpretive process is not one of ascribing semantic intentions.<sup>66</sup> This allows Davies to sidestep the need to posit a fictional author whose intentions determine the work’s meaning. Rather, the meaning of a work is what a normatively informed interpreter would come to understand after applying the appropriate interpretive norms and conventions.

Since anti-intentionalism does not make use of a work’s author, either real or fictional, as a criterion for that work’s meaning, it does not make use of any judgements of a work’s author as the other interpretive approaches do. However, I believe that anti-intentionalism has a similar step that serves much the same purpose. The interpretive process of anti-intentionalism calls for the audience to engage with a work’s context, and to the extent that context can determine a work’s meaning, the audience must make judgements about the context from which the work derives. To clarify how judgements of context are relevant, consider the following two scenes. First, the scene from the James Bond film *Dr. No* in 1962, where Bond shoos a female dalliance offscreen so that he and Felix Leiter may talk business. Second, from the Melissa McCarthy film *Spy* in 2015, where Jason Statham’s character Rick Ford tries to shoo McCarthy’s Susan Cooper offscreen, again so the men may talk business. The anti-intentionalist may fairly come to the conclusion that the scene from *Spy* is mocking or condemning sexism, while the Bond scene merely reflects it. Part of the process of coming to this conclusion would be to make judgements of the contexts of 1962 and 2015. In 2015

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<sup>64</sup> Livingston, 171

<sup>65</sup> David Davies, *Art as Performance*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 89.

<sup>66</sup> Davies, 89.

the casual sexism displayed by Bond and Ford is no longer so ubiquitous or accepted, so Ford's attempt to shoo Cooper offscreen is a sign of a sort of weakness, whereas Bond doing the same is a sign of strength. Of course, such judgements of context are merely part of the interpretive process – interpretation does not work on context alone – but so long as context informs interpretation, judgement of that context will play a role. In the following section, I will develop this argument into how judgements of a work's context lead to trusting a work's context in a way analogous to how an audience judges and trusts a speaker or author.

### **3. Integrating Art and Trust**

In the previous section, I argued that the process of interpreting a work of art requires a judgement about the character of a work's author, or some equivalent judgement about a work's context. What I want to argue in this section is that, similar to how I argued in the first section that there is a way in which a listener trusts a speaker, a work's audience similarly and equivalently trusts a work's author. In this section I will expand that argument, and show the ways that that trust may work, and the effects it can have on interpretation.

The way in which trust works will work slightly differently depending on the interpretive approach that the audience takes. Taking the language of three-place trust, different interpretive approaches change what is in the place of the second place, the person or group trusted. Depending on what is being trusted – a real author or a hypothetical author, for example – how that trust works will be different. In the case of interpretive strategies that make use of a work's real author, the audience is trusting those real people. In the case of anti-intentionalism, what is in question is the degree to which society more broadly is trustworthy. Since FAI constructs its fictional author of the work, it is something of a synthesis of real and anti-intentionalist approaches – the character of the fictional author is someone who would be in the position of author, which means that the audience is considering both the general tendencies of social context more broadly as well as the more specific tendencies of the sort of person who would be

in position to be a work's author. In the case of FAI and anti-intentionalism, the audience cannot trust the author to the same degree that the audience can under interpretive strategies that make use of the real author. This is because the audience is considering social tendencies – probabilities – rather than the definiteness of a particular person. In the case of a real author, their opinions, beliefs, and capabilities may be known. The anti-intentionalist, on the other hand, is left trusting society and that which may emerge from a social context, which is much less definite. By the same argument, under FAI and anti-intentionalism the audience cannot have as little trust for the author as they could under approaches that make use of the real author, since social tendencies cannot be so bad as the definite horribleness of particular individuals. For the purposes of this section, I will refer to the audience trusting the work itself, so as to remain neutral between interpretive approaches.

Anti-intentionalism faces a special problem with trust – it is not clear whether society in the second place of two- or three-place trust may meet the reflexivity condition. This is to say that it is not clear that society can be directly and positively moved by the audience's reliance. How well anti-intentionalism can make use of the language of trust depends on how social context is understood. In one sense, society can be understood as people, individually and collectively, who are influenced and directed by various social forces. The *Dr. No* and *Spy* examples from section 2.4, for example, invoke the social force of sexism, which may in turn be placed in the context of broader social structures such as patriarchy. The audience is considering how these forces may have influenced the works' creation. Thought of in this way, society seems very mechanistic, and machines cannot be trusted because they are not affected by the would-be trusters reliance in them. However, the people who make up society, individually and collectively, are still agents that can be and are influenced by the actions of others. While anti-intentionalism does not consider intentions to be criteria of a work's meaning, it still takes works to be intentionally made, and having meaning that derives from that intentional creation. Accordingly, by anti-intentionalism, the audience may still trust the people who contributed to the creation of a work. Importantly, this is not a full solution. The anti-intentionalist audience is only trusting these people as

creators of a work, not as authors. Their impact on a work's meaning is only in as much as they create a work that happens to bear that meaning. Altogether, though, I do not believe that this is much of a problem. While the audience may not be able to trust social context, they may still approach it in a way that is fundamentally similar to trust. They make judgements as to the character of society – its forces and power structures, such as sexism and patriarchy, and the tendencies that those forces and power structures create – and in turn use that judgement to determine how they should engage with society and its outputs.

In art, the domain in which the audience is trusting a work's author may vary. As with language, in most cases, the most common way that the audience will trust a work's author is that they will trust that the author is artistically competent. They will trust that what is presented as a work of art has been intentionally constructed to be as it is, rather than being the product of (ill) fortune. As with language, this trust is not absolute, so audiences may trust an author more or less, without trusting or distrusting completely. Consider the Adam Sandler example, from the beginning of this chapter. White considers *Jack and Jill* to have a purposeful narrative, whereas Singer considers the film to be “merely a series of random celebrity cameos and shameless product placements.” One way to understand why White and Singer differ is that White trusts Sandler's artistic competency but Singer does not, so White considers the film to be a purposeful narrative whereas Singer considers the direction of the film to be largely purposeless. Of course Singer is also reacting to the actual content of the film, but consider whether Singer thought highly of Sandler's artistic ability. If Singer thought that Sandler was a virtuoso, would he would probably not come to the conclusion that *Jack and Jill* was meaningless. Even if he couldn't make heads or tails of the film, he would be more likely to consider the film to be over his head, rather than empty.

The degree to which the audience trusts a work's author will also affect how other aspects of a work are engaged. For example, in the case of improvised works, the audience is trusting that the improviser is creating something purposefully. The audience will be trusting that a jazz guitarist is playing a purposeful melody rather

than randomly playing notes that might happen to fall into something listenable, or that the person on stage is purposefully moving their body in dance rather than haplessly throwing themselves about. In one rather extreme case, Ian Curtis, the lead singer for the band Joy Division, was thought to be dancing on stage when he was actually suffering from an epileptic seizure.

As with language, discussing trust in interpretation is particularly apt for making sense of works that are ambiguous but the artistic competence is not in question. Consider again the examples of *Dr. No* and *Spy*. In the case of *Spy*, its context as a film starring Melissa McCarthy during the year 2015 leads to the sympathetic interpretation of something that would be taken as simple casual sexism in 1962. However, casual sexism is still prevalent and other films (ones that do not star Melissa McCarthy) may not be so easy to trust. Take the example of the James Bond film *Skyfall* (2012). In it, Bond seduces the character Sévérine. The film makes note that Sévérine is a former child sex slave who is now under the exploitative control of the villain Raul Silva. When Bond approaches Sévérine in the shower he makes note that she does not have her gun for protection, and Bond appears quite predatory. In one light, this sequence can be read as a condemnation of Bond. The film forms something of a retrospective of the Bond character, so showing Bond preying on Sévérine could be a way of condemning Bond's masculinity as an artefact of a bygone era (as one supporting example, Bond is repeatedly compared to a porcelain John Bull bulldog from the 1960s). On the other hand, the film is a James Bond film that revels in all the usual trappings of the James Bond franchise – violence, sex, and luxury. Moreover, the film is produced and promoted by a major studio interested in continuing both the myth and the brand of James Bond. These facts cast doubt on whether the film would so unreservedly throw criticism at the iconic character, when he might just be seducing a damaged and defenceless woman like he has in so many previous stories. Altogether, it is difficult for the audience to trust the film, and this leaves the meaning of the scene in question somewhat ambiguous. Importantly, using the language of trust helps make sense of *why* the meaning of the scene is ambiguous. The film contains all the necessary pieces to read the scene as critical of Bond, but because *Skyfall* is

a James Bond movie and is made, distributed, and promoted by a major studio that is invested in the James Bond brand, there is a level of distrust towards the film.

Lastly, there is something that must be said about reliance. In analyses of trust, the reliance condition has to do with how the truster regards the future actions of the trustee. Reliance has to do with an attitude or belief towards what the trustee will do. In engaging works of art, however, the actions of the author are in the past. The work has been created, and there may be nothing more for the author to do. Accordingly, if the audience is to rely on the author, they must be relying for the author to have acted a certain way in the past, yet for those past actions to be what is under consideration at the time of interpretation. I believe, then, that the audience is relying on the author to have acted in accordance with artistic convention. The interpretive process involves attending to intentional actions that make up a work of art – brushstrokes of a painting, movements of a theatre performance, edits and cuts of a film – so the audience relies on the author to have made those actions in accordance with the institutional conventions of the artworld. These conventions can range from making a work that is intelligible to the audience, to just the act itself of participating in the artworld.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have made the argument that interpreting a work of art requires a judgement of a work's author, and that this means that how the interpreter interprets a work will depend on how the interpreter trusts the author. The main virtue of the trust approach, I believe, is that it helps make sense of why the meaning of many works of art is never completely unambiguous. In turn, if works may be more or less ambiguous based on the degree to which the audience trusts the author, then a premium should be placed on the clarity with which a work's creator is able to create that work. If a work, or some part of a work, has a meaning then that meaning should be clear to the audience. If that work, or some part of it, is purposefully ambiguous, then that ambiguity should be finely calibrated. This is not a novel or radical sentiment, but it does lay the foundation for the rest of this dissertation. In chapter 2, I will put forward an understanding of



misrepresentation. That understanding of misrepresentation will make use of a work's creator's intentions, so accordingly it will be important that the creator cultivate the trust of the audience. Chapter 4 will bring together a theory of satire and articulate the value of clarity. Clarity will depend, in part, how well a work's makers are able to have the work clearly convey the meaning-defining intentions. The trustworthiness of a work or its makers may affect how straightforward a work may have to be for its meaning to be clear. For chapter 5, I will give an argument for the ethical evaluation of humour that places a premium on the audience trusting the joke-teller. This argument will turn on arguing that in joking it is important that the audience specifically trusts the ethical character of the joke-teller. Lastly, in chapter 6, I engage satire in a mass media context. Part of that is giving a story about how mass media practices and institutions affect a work's trustworthiness. So, while I may not have argued anything novel in chapter 1, I have at least laid the foundations for what follows.

## **Chapter Two: Misrepresentation**

The goal of this chapter is to give an account of satirical misrepresentation. To pursue this goal, this chapter will be split into two main sections. In the first section, I will seek to give an account of intentional misrepresentation in general. By intentional misrepresentation, I mean when it is someone's intent specifically to misrepresent something. For this section, I will focus on depiction and visual representation, since I believe that of all possible cases of representation the visual case provides the most intuitively stringent challenge. At the end of the section I will show that the account of misrepresentation given in the visual case generalizes easily. In the second section I will give an account of specifically satirical misrepresentation, so as to distinguish it from non-satirical cases of misrepresentation such as allegory.

### **1.1 Setting Up the Problem**

Intentional misrepresentation, on first pass, is a simple affair. It is a case of representation, but with differences so that the representation is different from the thing that is represented. Something is represented as it is not. Such that the misrepresentation is intentional, it is something that someone is doing, as a process. The person making the misrepresentation is meaning to represent something as it is not. However, on closer inspection, it is more complicated. In what follows I will just refer to "misrepresentation." Since intentional misrepresentation is the subject of this chapter, all references to misrepresentation should be understood as being to intentional misrepresentation unless clearly stated otherwise.

Consider two pictures of Barack Obama, one a portrait painting, as will hang in the White House, and one a political cartoon. The political cartoon, implying that Obama is a liar, shows him with a long wooden nose in the style of Pinocchio. The portrait is just a representation, while the cartoon is a misrepresentation. The portrait is meant to look like him, while the cartoon, in certain respects, is meant to not look like him. However, in certain ways, the portrait does not quite look

like Obama either. For one, the portrait of Obama is flat, whereas the real Obama is not. There are also smaller, more subtle differences. The pictured Obama is somewhat larger than the real person and, despite the skill of the artist, the colour of his skin, eyes, and hair do not quite match. This is all to say that the portrait painting, despite the best efforts of the painting, still shows Obama as he is not.

This problem, of representations also not simply looking like their subjects, can be brought into further relief by considering pictures made in accordance with certain styles. For example, a cubist portrait of Obama would differ from the real person in colour, in shape, and present him as a collection of mismatched pieces like a jigsaw puzzle. But, within the style of cubism, it would be a representation – and not a misrepresentation – of Obama. If regular representation can allow for a picture to depict its subject while intentionally departing from what its subject looks like, then misrepresentation needs to be better articulated than just “representing something as it is not.”

The first task for a theory of misrepresentation, then, is to give it an articulation in such a way that it can be separated from normal representation; in the case of visual representation, depiction. Depiction itself is contested terrain, but I do not need a full theory, just enough to be able to give a clear account of misrepresentation. I will argue that once style is accounted for, it is possible to distinguish depiction as showing something as it is *in accordance with a stylistic convention or strategy*, whereas misrepresentation is understood as showing something as it is not *in accordance with a stylistic convention or strategy*. To make this argument I will focus on three areas of the debate surrounding depiction. First I will briefly discuss “seeing-in,” and the requirement that visual representation be properly visual. Second I will discuss the role of reflexive intentions in depiction. Third, following from the discussion of reflexive intentions, I will focus on pictorial style and convention. The outcome of this argument will be a two point understanding of misrepresentation. In focusing on depiction, I will draw out the condition of mode sensitivity. This is to say that misrepresentation happens within a mode of presentation – depiction, music, language – and

misrepresentation must misrepresent within that mode. After having established how misrepresentation must be mode-sensitive to depiction, I will give the following four point account of basic misrepresentation:

1. There is some subject to which an utterer is referring.
2. The utterer is representing this subject as having certain properties.
3. The utterer intends that some of these properties are not actually possessed by the subject.
4. None of the previous steps are taken by mistake.

With this account of misrepresentation established, I will transition to the second section, where I will give an account of how misrepresentation is essential to satire, and what makes satiric misrepresentation distinctively satirical.

## 1.2 The Visual Part of Visual Representation

Since this argument is focusing visual representation, it is necessary to start with a brief discussion about just what it is that is visual about visual representation. There are two parts to this discussion: the experience, and what makes the experience appropriate. The visual experience of a visual representation is often referred to as “seeing-in,”<sup>67</sup> as in some object is seen in the marks on a flat surface, so in this subsection I will give a brief account and discussion of “seeing-in,” and then an account of what makes for an appropriate seeing-in response, which will lead to the next subsection, on reflexive intentions.

The defining characteristic of the experience of seeing-in is “twofoldness.”<sup>68</sup> Richard Wollheim, the primary theoretician of seeing-in and proponent of twofoldness, is notoriously vague about just what twofoldness is. As he explains it, it is roughly that seeing-in is twofold such that the viewer simultaneously has an experience of both the representing surface and the thing

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<sup>67</sup> One very prominent detractor of this approach is Dominic Lopes, who argues that seeing-in is insufficiently developed to explain all visual experience of representations, and also that it is quite bad at explaining demotic (as opposed to art) visual representations. Since I will not commit to any one theory of depiction, I do not believe that this criticism will affect anything that follows.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Wollheim, “What Makes Representational Painting Truly Visual? (I),” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 77 (2003): 131.

depicted by the representing surface.<sup>69</sup> Bence Nanay has helpfully disambiguated this into two distinct senses of twofoldness, each suited for a different task. First there is twofoldness such that it is necessary for aesthetic appreciation of a visual representation: “twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one is visually aware of the represented object and the way it is represented simultaneously.”<sup>70</sup> Opposite this is the sense of twofoldness such that it is necessary for understanding visual representations: “twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one is visually aware of the (two-dimensional) surface and the (three-dimensional) represented object simultaneously.”<sup>71</sup> Nanay then further separates the two senses by making his own contribution to twofoldness as necessary for aesthetic appreciation: it is not enough to just be aware of the way that the represented object is represented, but the audience must specifically *attend to* the way it is represented.<sup>72</sup> So the appreciating audience must specifically attend to the way that the brushstrokes and colour of a painting create the experience of seeing some object. To be merely aware of the surface, as is the requirement for understanding visual representation, just requires that the audience be aware that the represented object is being represented on that surface, and not that they are viewing the object itself. Nanay clarifies awareness of the surface by way of the following example: if a person were shown a picture of an urban landscape and asked to indicate a house, they would indicate the house as marked on the surface of the picture, rather than trying to reach through the picture (as if it were a portal) and point to an actually present house in the distance.<sup>73</sup>

This account of seeing-in and twofoldness does not give an account of misrepresentation directly, but it does help clarify what an account of misrepresentation must do. Such that there are modes of representation that must be experienced in a certain way, misrepresentations by those modes must be able to be experienced by the appropriate sort of experience. In the case of visual

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<sup>69</sup> Wollheim, 131.

<sup>70</sup> Bence Nanay, “Is Twofoldness Necessary for Representational Seeing?” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no.3 (2005): 250.

<sup>71</sup> Nanay, 251.

<sup>72</sup> Nanay, 255.

<sup>73</sup> Nanay, 254.

misrepresentation, this means that since visual representations must be experienced by the process of seeing-in, visual misrepresentations must also be able to be experienced through seeing-in. So, for example, when Robert Hopkins provides the case of Tony Blair being depicted with enormous ears and wild, staring eyes, he, Hopkins, notes that what matters is not that Blair is experienced as the actual, existing Blair, but that he is experienced as he is misrepresented.<sup>74</sup> The misrepresented Blair is seen-in the marks on the two-dimensional surface.

While the Hopkins example helps show that misrepresentations must be experienced, it also highlights some work that seeing-in cannot do. He has stipulated that there is a picture of Blair with large ears and wild, staring eyes that is a misrepresentation, but he has not offered an explanation of why this is different from a mere representation of Blair as having large ears and wild, staring eyes. While the experience must be appropriate to the marks on the surface, Hopkins has provided no story about just what it is that makes some experience appropriate to those marks. This is a lacuna that he notes, but does not attempt to explain: “for if we ask the view to explain *why* we see one thing rather than another in the surface... I do not attempt to answer that question.”<sup>75</sup> A theory of seeing-in, then, can only be one component in a theory of visual misrepresentation.

Even if seeing-in does not provide a theory of visual misrepresentation itself, it draws attention to what must be explained: why some marks make some experiences appropriate. This, in turn, makes clear that those marks need to be investigated. Accordingly, I now turn my attention to what makes some sets of marks on a flat surface have an appropriate experience.

### 1.3 Appropriate Experience

Wollheim has already shown the path to appropriate experience in his initial characteristics of seeing-in. Specifically, he notes that the appropriate seeing-in

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<sup>74</sup> Robert Hopkins, “What Makes Representational Painting Truly Visual? (II),” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 77 (2003): 159.

<sup>75</sup> Hopkins, 160.

for what is depicted is determined by, among other criteria, the picture-maker's intentions.<sup>76</sup> Given the constraint of twofoldness, this means not just that the audience will have a desired experience by looking at the picture, but that they will specifically have a desired experience by way of being visually aware of the marks on the two-dimensional surface that make up the picture. This means that the experience of Barack Obama by way of being visually aware of a certain set of marks on a two-dimensional surface is appropriate if such an experience was intended by the picture-maker. An experience being appropriate to a picture depending on the picture-maker's intentions is another way of saying that what a picture is of depends partly on its maker's intentions, and through this appeal it is possible to make use of the Gricean process of reflexive intentions.

In adopting the process of reflexive intentions, a picture is of something if it is intended by its maker to be of that thing, and the maker intends the audience to recognize that the picture is of that thing by way of recognizing the picture-maker's picture-making intentions. This is only a partial solution, however. If the approach of Gricean reflexive intentions is adopted, then it is natural to think of a picture as a sort of utterance, and if the picture is the utterance, then there must be some way that the picture-maker articulates that utterance's content. This is the question of how the picture-maker makes their intentions manifest, and how the audience accesses those intentions.

When the picture-maker makes a picture, they are making marks on a two-dimensional surface so that the resulting picture references some subject. Since the picture-maker is engaging in pictorial reference, and not merely visual reference, the marks must give rise to a twofold experience of both the marked surface and the picture's subject. There are a number of theories as to just what the picture-maker is creating with these marks, such that these marks can be said to "look like" the picture's subject. For the purposes of my dissertation I do not

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<sup>76</sup> Wollheim offers the following criteria: "it must not only be of the picture, but it must be had in front of the picture, and it must come about as a result of looking at the picture; it must be available to any spectator who is adequately sensitive and adequately informed; it must match, or tally with, the intentions of the artist in so far as these have been fulfilled; and the nature of the experience will be that of seeing something in the surface of the picture." Wollheim, 131.

believe that I have to choose between theories of depiction, so I will simply articulate some of the candidates. John Hyman, a resemblance theorist, puts forward the subject's occlusion shape (that is, its outline shape) as the property that makes a picture resemble its subject.<sup>77</sup> Another resemblance theorist, Catherine Abell, simply works with the nonspecific term "the respects of resemblance."<sup>78</sup> Dominic Lopes, who does not identify as a resemblance theorist but I suspect may be conscriptable, argues that what pictures present are "aspects," where an aspect is understood as a visual pattern of salience, and a picture is of a subject if it presents an aspect of that subject that brings to the fore whatever information was important in the development of the style in which the picture was created.<sup>79</sup> Whichever approach is adopted, it is the things that this approach stipulates – occlusion shape, respects of resemblance, aspects – that the picture-maker is using to articulate the appropriate twofold experience.

From here on I will use Abell's term, "respects of resemblance," because it is suitably vague and non-committal. Any feature may be a respect of resemblance, and no feature necessarily is. This means that in one picture, resemblance may be governed by shape, whereas in another it might be governed by colour.

While a picture's respects of resemblance determine of what it is a picture, it does not follow that every part of a picture is a respect of resemblance. While it is true that pictures are considered to be "replete," which is to say that any feature of a picture *could* radically alter what it is depicting, that does not mean that every feature does so.<sup>80</sup> This means that the marks that make up a picture play two separate roles: they are the basis of the twofold experience, and they make pictorial reference to the picture's subject. While it is the case that for a picture's subject to be properly pictorially referenced it must be accessed by way of twofold experience of the picture, it does not in turn follow that everything

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<sup>77</sup> John Hyman, "Depiction," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 71 (2012): 142.

<sup>78</sup> Catherine Abell, "Canny Resemblance," *The Philosophical Review* 118, no.2 (2004): 185.

<sup>79</sup> Dominic Lopes, *Understanding Pictures*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004):107

<sup>80</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968): 229-230.



experienced by way of the twofold experience of a picture must be pictorially referenced by the picture. Altogether, this means that there may be features of a picture which are not respects of resemblance, and do not pictorially reference the picture's subject. It is these features that are needed to articulate how misrepresentation in pictorial representation may work.

Recall Robert Hopkins' example of Tony Blair misrepresented as having large ears and wild, staring eyes. By Hopkins, this misrepresentation of Blair is not twofoldly experienced simply as Blair, but as Blair misrepresented.<sup>81</sup> I can now give the story that Hopkins did not, about why this is still a picture of Tony Blair; about why these marks still pictorially reference Tony Blair. And that story is this: the two-dimensional marks on the flat surface that give rise to the intended twofold experience of misrepresented Blair still sufficiently resemble Blair in terms of the respects of resemblance. The picture-maker also includes more detail in the picture than just those respects of resemblance: in this case the large ears and wild, staring eyes. These features are, importantly, not included as respects of resemblance. These are features over and above those respects. To meet the constraints of reflexive intentions, I must add that the normative audience understands that these additional features are not respects of resemblance but specifically additional, non-resembling features and also that they understand this by way of recognizing the picture-maker's picture-making intentions.

#### 1.4 Addressing Style

There is another hurdle that must be cleared, and it is one that I set up in the introduction. Misrepresentation is not the only way that a picture-maker may distort how a picture's subject looks – there is also style. Styles may be broad, artistic movements like impressionism or cubism, or they may be smaller, personal styles that just consist in the way that one particular artist tends to depict things. I argue that misrepresentation is style-relative, which is to say that misrepresentation is something that occurs within a particular style. To hold that,

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<sup>81</sup> Hopkins, 159.

however, I first need to give a short account of style, and how pictorial style should be understood (at least as is relevant to depiction and misrepresentation).

Just what style denotes is unclear. As Raymond A. MacDonald notes, style originated as a way to describe the arrangement of the “small elements” of a work, such as the arrangement of letters and syllables.<sup>82</sup> Up through the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, style was considered to be something akin to the way that the elements of a work were arranged – MacDonald cites Nicolas Poussin placing style alongside “theme, thought,” and “structure” as the four parts of the “grand manner” of a work of art.<sup>83</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the meaning of style changed, and came to denote something like a set of concrete “common denominators,” and properties of a work by which different works can be identified as belonging to the same group.<sup>84</sup> This is the sense of style that is used when discussing the Baroque style, or impressionism, although as MacDonald notes, the fuzziness surrounding style means that it is difficult to fully identify just what those styles are, and what it is for works to belong to them.<sup>85</sup>

For what follows, I will adhere to how Catherine Abell uses style in understanding pictures, which is as a sort of convention.<sup>86</sup> Similar to linguistic conventions, pictorial conventions are regularities of articulation and interpretation that emerge to solve the problem of getting meaning from the intentions of the utterer (or picture-maker) to be understood by the audience.<sup>87</sup> Artists may consciously adhere to a stylistic convention, although they do not have to – since conventions may (and frequently do) emerge from practice, a picture-maker may adhere to convention simply by working in the manner that they always do. This approach fits snugly with both senses of style articulated by MacDonald – such that a stylistic convention is a way that the picture-maker articulates her intentions, it is consistent with the historical, process-focussed understanding of

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<sup>82</sup> Raymond A MacDonald, “The Styles of Art History: Entities or Processes?” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 7, no.1 (1993): 49.

<sup>83</sup> MacDonald, 50.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> MacDonald, 51.

<sup>86</sup> Abell, 203.

<sup>87</sup> Abell, 203.

style. Historical styles such as baroque and impressionism can in turn be thought of as conventions such that they are processes of picture-making that picture-makers use to guide their making of a picture and audiences use to understand that picture.

Pictorial conventions, such that they are particularly pictorial, are ways of arranging marks on a two-dimensional surface such that those marks depict that picture's subject. This should be distinguished from conventions where a picture is used to visually reference something other than the picture's subject. Consider yet another political cartoon, this time one of Steve Bell's cartoons of David Cameron where Cameron is depicted as being an inflated condom. Bell's pictorial style, here, has to do with his use of colour, texture, and shape. It has to do with how he makes and shapes the pictures. The condom-head is what is depicted, a visual reference to what Bell thinks the character of Cameron to be. This visual reference may be made in accordance with some other conventions to which Bell adheres – for example, he may just regularly draw people as condoms – but these are not specifically pictorial conventions. The pictorial conventions are just to do with how pictures are created, and pictorial content is articulated.

To be clear, style does not necessarily exhaust the ways a picture-maker makes a picture. Picture-makers may deviate from both general and personal style in how they construct a picture. This will happen with some frequency in the creation of art pictures, where artists may seek novelty or expression, and rarely in the creation of demotic pictures, where simplicity in communication is often paramount.

The Bell cartoon helps make clear how style and pictorial misrepresentation are to be reconciled. The colour, texture, and shape that Bell uses are part of his style, and his style is *how* he articulates the picture. David Cameron, and David Cameron's condom head are *what* he is articulating. In drawing David Cameron, Bell depicts Cameron according to Bell's conventional use of colour, texture, and shape. In giving David Cameron a condom head, Bell is adding a feature to the picture that is not just a depiction of David Cameron, but rather something that is

specifically not part of David Cameron. This condom head is in turn depicted using the same stylistic approach to colour, texture, and shape as the rest of the picture. This story matches up with the one that Robert Hopkins gave about seeing-in and misrepresentation, that I relayed earlier in this talk: just as we see Blair with large ears and wild, staring eyes in Hopkins' picture, we see Cameron with a condom head in Bell's picture.

### 1.5 Residual Problems

Appealing to the idea that style is a convention solves the initial problem to do with pictorial misrepresentation. Pictorial representation is relative to a style, and considering all pictures as being made within a style obviates the problem that picture-makers deviate from realism in depicting objects. Admitting that all pictures are within a style, pictorial misrepresentation may be considered to just be cases where a picture-maker depicts a subject but intentionally adds further detail that is not part of the actually existing subject. The cubist Obama is not a misrepresentation of Barack Obama since it is just a depiction of Barack Obama within the convention of cubist depiction – no additional details are (intentionally) added. Condom-head Cameron is a misrepresentation of David Cameron since Steve Bell adds the details of the condom-head to how Cameron would normally be depicted within Bell's personal style.

I believe that appealing to conventions as I do prompts two sorts of objections, which can be thought of as being that the appeal to convention is either too strong, or too weak. I will start with the former. Giving such a strong role to convention can seem at odds with the apparent simplicity of understanding pictures. As Lopes notes, the threshold for pictorial comprehension seems very low and very general, so that someone who has never been outside of a small village in Polynesia can readily understand pictures from either the present day or pre-historic Americas so long as they are familiar with the picture's subjects.<sup>88</sup> Even with pictures where they are not acquainted with the subjects – for example, the

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<sup>88</sup> Lopes, 73.

picture may depict some animal or piece of technology with which they are unfamiliar – the pictures are still generally comprehensible. They may not know Nanabozho, but they can identify a humanoid figure with large, rabbit-like ears.<sup>89</sup>

The role of conventions can go from problem to solution in this case if stylistic conventions are thought of as things that developed in a context, either out of or in reaction to previously existing conventions. If conventions are thought of as developing in such a way – as opposed to being stipulated out of thin air – then there should be a considerable level of continuity between styles. This is not that a style will necessarily keep all the features of its precursor styles on its own, but that the people creating pictures within these styles, and pioneering new styles, would have learned from and been influenced by precursor styles. For example, one of the main precursors of the French impressionists were the French landscapists, and one of the main theoretical impetuses behind impressionism was the desire to find new ways to represent natural, three-dimensional space.<sup>90</sup> Even if the impressionists deviated significantly from the landscapists in terms of colour, shape, and brushstroke, they nevertheless held the landscapists as a point of departure.<sup>91</sup> Since the style of the impressionists developed from the style of the landscapists, and they used roughly similar subjects for their depictions, there is a high level of continuity between the two groups' styles.

This does not mean that all styles have the same origin. Depiction originated independently in any number of contexts. However, the evidence for these different geneses – figurative rock paintings – suggests that they were reasonably similar.<sup>92</sup> Colours and particular shapes may vary, but shapes are still roughly

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<sup>89</sup> Evidence for this may be found in a study run by Alan and Barnaby Dixon, which asked laypeople to interpret venus figurines taken from various eras and locations. While the meaning of the figures remained ambiguous, test subjects were reliably able to identify the figurines as representing middle-aged women with large breasts and thighs. Alan F. Dixon and Barnaby J. Dixon, "Venus Figurines of the European Paleolithic: Symbols of Fertility or Attractiveness?" *Journal of Anthropology* (2011), Article ID 569120.

<sup>90</sup> John House, "Introduction," in *Impressionism: Its Masters, its Precursors, and its Influence in Britain*, ed. Royal Academy of Arts (Uxbridge: Hillingdon Press, 1974): 7-8.

<sup>91</sup> House, 11.

<sup>92</sup> J.D. Lewis-Williams and T.A. Dowson, "The Signs of All Times: Entoptic Phenomena in Upper Paleolithic Art" *Current Anthropology* 29, no.2 (1988): 201.

similar.<sup>93</sup> In every case it also seems that roughly the same things were depicted, specifically people and animals.<sup>94</sup> This means that even if different stylistic traditions don't have the exact same distant base, they at least have a similar one. Altogether, given that depictive traditions have similar bases, and that present-day styles have developed over time, stylistic conventions should be expected to have the effect that pictures are readily understandable across contexts.

Another objection may be that the appeal to convention is still too weak to distinguish misrepresentation from stylized depiction. Consider Hopkins' example of Tony Blair, misrepresented by wild eyes and large ears – it might be argued that in a concrete case (for example, a Steve Bell cartoon, which I suspect was Hopkins' point of reference for his example) there may be little or nothing visually apparent to distinguish misrepresentation from depiction within style. If, in the case of pictures, misrepresentation has to be visually apparent, this could lead to a possibly large number of cases where it is unclear whether or not something is a misrepresentation or just a depiction within style.

To precede my answer, I want to again stress that all pictures are to be understood from the perspective of a normative audience, where part of what makes a normative audience a normative audience is that they are stipulated to be appropriate as an audience to that picture. An important part of this is that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to understand the picture in front of them, and that will include at least a basic understanding of style and depictive practices. Just how normalized this audience is may be further questioned – how expert should the audience be? Is the audience supposed to be experts in understanding this particular artist, or just broad style in general? – but for current purposes it is enough to note that the audience has at least a broad

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<sup>93</sup> Compare, for instance, the rock art of Altamira, in Spain, with that of Wuikinuxv Territory, Canada. "The Art of Altamira," Museo de Altamira, <http://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/mnaltamira/en/cueva-altamira/arte.html>; "Rock Art of Wuikinuxv Territory, Central Coast, British Columbia, Canada," Bradshaw Foundation, accessed January 4, 2017, [http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/canada/wuikinuxv\\_territory/index.php](http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/canada/wuikinuxv_territory/index.php).

<sup>94</sup> Lewis-Williams and Dowson push this further, and show that even abstract symbols such as lattices and nested curves come from entoptic phenomena. While the meaning of these symbols is unclear, they appear across contexts (Lewis-Williams and Dowson use the Shoshone, San, and Upper Paleolithic peoples as examples) and are even reliably integrated into representative figures.

understanding of style and context-appropriate picturing practices. However, this is still not a full answer to the challenge.

Even if the normative audience is accounted for, it may be argued that there will still be pictures where it is unclear whether they are misrepresentations or merely stylized depictions. In this case, the supposed challenge is actually identifying a strength of the account, since the existence of many pictures that are difficult to distinguish is something that a good account should predict. This is because an account of misrepresentation in depiction should have space for and be able to explain bad pictures. A bad picture in this sense is one where the picture-maker has failed to make clear her picture-making intentions. Since her intentions are unclear, it is unclear to the audience whether the marks on the two-dimensional surface that make up the picture are meant to bear the depictive relationship to the picture's subject (resemble it, by the resemblance theory), or if they are meant to depart from the picture's subject and thus misrepresent that subject. That style departs from realism gives a reason why it is unclear whether or not some pictures are misrepresentative – that a picture is not realistic does not necessarily mean that the picture-maker was not still attempting to depict the picture's subject as it is.

Considering pictures as created within styles also allows for the identification of two separate ways that a picture may be unclear, and this is also a strength of the account.<sup>95</sup> It may be the case that the picture-maker failed to make a misrepresentation that sufficiently departed from their personal style. The Hopkins-Bell Blair example may be imagined to fall into this pile. While Blair looks manic, it is not clear that his depiction departs from the way that Blair would standardly be depicted within Bell's style. Another way unclarity may arise is if the style lends itself to depictions where it is not clear where depiction ends and misrepresentation begins. A famous example of this is Luz's depiction of Mohammed for Charlie Hebdo. Hebdo's caricatures, Luz's in particular, make use

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<sup>95</sup> I will present a fuller account of "clarity" at the end of the fourth chapter.

of a particular basic style of cartooning with exaggerated, unflattering features.<sup>96</sup> The Mohammed caricature in particular is defined by a long, thin nose and a scraggly beard. Whether this is merely within Hebdo's style, or if it is misrepresenting Mohammed using the "dirty Arab" stereotype, is unclear. And this sort of unclarity is predicted by the role style is given within depiction.

## 1.6 Generalizing the Account

I have so far given an account of misrepresentation in depiction. Since my goal is to give an account of misrepresentation more broadly, I must now give an account of how the depiction case generalizes. This requires schematizing the account of misrepresentation in depiction, to show that the sort of account given for misrepresentation in depiction is not limited to depiction. To this end, I believe that my account comprises two fundamental components: a general account of misrepresentation, and a condition of mode sensitivity. The former is basic to misrepresentation, while the latter is necessary to make sense of misrepresentation in particular contexts.

My focus on misrepresentation is such that misrepresentation is something that is intentionally done. It is an intentional act by a person who is intentionally misrepresenting some subject. This means that the following is necessary for misrepresentation, such that I am discussing it:

1. There is some subject to which an utterer is referring.
2. The utterer is representing this subject as having certain properties.
3. The utterer intends that some of these properties are not actually possessed by the subject.
4. None of the previous steps are taken by mistake.

The misrepresenting utterance may be made with either communicative or expressive intention. This means that the utterer may be either communicating to

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<sup>96</sup> For further discussion of the aesthetic style of Charlie Hebdo see Jeet Heer, "The Aesthetic Failure of Charlie Hebdo," *New Republic*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/121748/arrested-development-and-aesthetic-failure-charlie-hebdo> (Accessed January 4, 2017).



a particular audience, or to no audience in particular.<sup>97</sup> The fourth step is, again, to focus this analysis on misrepresentation as something that is intentionally done. It is possible to misrepresent something by mistake, but that is not the sense in which I am investigating misrepresentation.

The condition of mode sensitivity is to recognize that misrepresentations take place within particular modes and different modes, in turn, communicate information in different ways. Accordingly, to misrepresent within some particular mode, the subject must be misrepresented according to how that mode embodies and communicates information. In the context of the mode of depiction, this means that misrepresentations must be sensitive to how pictures refer and hold pictorial content. To use the four point scheme above, pictorial misrepresentation requires:

1. There is some subject to which an utterer is referring by way of pictorial reference (there is a picture of a subject).
2. This picture represents its subject as having certain properties.
3. The utterer intends that some of these properties are not actually possessed by the subject.
4. None of the previous steps are taken by mistake.

The discussions about seeing-in, pictorial reference, and style are all part of the story about how pictures refer and have content.

Requirements for adhering to different modes may be more or less stringent. Pictures are the most stringent mode, since a pictorial misrepresentation must be not just understood visually, but in the way that pictures must be engaged by an audience, while also referring to its subject in a particular, pictorial way. Other modes are much less stringent. Languages, for instance, are not stringent at all. Speaking English, I may intentionally misrepresent the six-foot-tall John just by saying or writing “John is ten feet tall.”

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<sup>97</sup> Importantly, this requirement rules out duplicity by way of misrepresentation. Duplicity is a separate phenomenon, where the utterer disguises the sort of utterance they are making.

Some modes allow for different approaches to misrepresentation. In misrepresentation by performance, for example, a subject may be misrepresented in their appearance, their affect and mannerisms, or their behaviour. I may misrepresent myself as someone else by dressing up as that person. Or, in performing a stage play, I may misrepresent the character I am portraying by changing their voice – for example, I may misrepresent Winston Churchill as having a chicken voice. Similar to depiction, in the case of stage performances, what is misrepresentation and what is merely representation within the style of performance will depend in part on conventions to do with how characters are performed in the context of stage performances.

Musical misrepresentations are another sort of misrepresentation where particular instances may be very hard to decipher. For a misrepresentation to be musical, that means what is being misrepresented must be a musical feature, such as tone, rhythm, or instrumentation. However, these are elements that musicians frequently play around with, even (or especially) when performing known pieces. This means that making a musical misrepresentation clear to an audience can be quite difficult. The comedy music group Axis of Awesome accomplishes this in some performances of their song “Four Chord Song.”<sup>98</sup> The song consists of band members Jordan, Benny, and Lee signing short refrains of other popular songs. These are for the most part just performances. However, when Lee sings the hook from “Not Pretty Enough” by Kasey Chambers, the other band members pause, drawing focus to the fact that Lee is not singing properly in tune. All songs performed within the larger song are changed from their original performances such that they are now being performed by Axis of Awesome. However, through their performance, the band is able to make clear that it is only one these songs, “Not Pretty Enough,” that is specifically being misrepresented. It is only for this song that the focus is on the musical properties that *do not* match the original song. For the others, the focus is that the original song is just being represented (especially when Benny manages the high note for “Take On Me” by A-Ha).

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<sup>98</sup> The particulars of this song change with every performance. I have in mind the performance from the 2009 Melbourne Comedy Festival.

In this section, I have given an account of misrepresentation as something that is done intentionally. I started by focusing on the paradigm case of misrepresentation in depiction, where I showed that there are features of depiction that are particular to depiction, which must in turn guide an account of misrepresentation. This account has two components – a basic account of misrepresentation, and a condition of mode sensitivity. The basic account of misrepresentation is just what it is to intentionally misrepresent something. It may be presented as the following four steps:

1. There is some subject to which an utterer is referring.
2. The utterer is representing this subject as having certain properties.
3. The utterer intends that some of these properties are not actually possessed by the subject.
4. None of the previous steps are taken by mistake.

The condition of mode sensitivity, in turn, is just that to misrepresent a subject by a certain mode of presentation, the misrepresentation must be presented as representations are made within that mode. I would like to now turn my attention to satiric misrepresentation, and how the account of misrepresentation I have given can clarify how satire works.

## 2. Satiric Misrepresentation

It is a feature of my account that misrepresentation plays a central role within satire. This section will elaborate the role of misrepresentation in satire in two ways. Firstly, and briefly, I will show how my account of misrepresentation maps on to satire. Secondly, and more thoroughly, I will give an account of just what satiric misrepresentation is, such that misrepresentation may be used to distinguish satire from its close relatives (on either side) comedy and invective.

For satire to be satire, there must be something being satirized. Berys Gaut refers to this target of satire as its “double object,” and I will adopt his terminology.<sup>99</sup> The double object is the target of satirical criticism, and its double

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<sup>99</sup> Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 248.

nature is that it is both the thing that is the target of criticism within the satirical work – the “intentional object” – and the target of criticism outwith the satirical work – the “model.”<sup>100</sup> The satirical work of art criticizes the intentional object, and by criticizing the intentional object levels the same criticism against the model. It is the model, then, which is the thing that is being satirized.

It is necessary for the relationship between the intentional object and model to be one of misrepresentation, and not of mere representation. This is because for the double object to be a double object, there must be some difference between the intentional object and model. If there is no difference, then there is no double nature to the object – the model is just represented within the work as itself. How the model is misrepresented is also critical to satirical misrepresentation. In the previous section, I argued that part of misrepresentation is the intentional attribution of properties to the representation that the represented subject does not possess. In the case of satire, it is by the attribution of these properties to the intentional object that the model is criticized. This may be either by way of the attributed properties themselves constituting the criticism, or by way of the criticism of the model operating through the way that it is misrepresented.

## **2.1 Criticism Through Misrepresentation**

In the previous subsection I gave an account of how misrepresentation maps on to satire. In this subsection, I will defend that account by way of giving an account of satiric misrepresentation. There will be three steps to the articulation. First, I will show how satiric misrepresentation criticizes the model by way of misrepresenting it. Second, I will defend the claim that the intentional object must be a misrepresentation of the model. Third, and last, I will argue that it is a requirement for satire that the misrepresentation must be humorous.

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<sup>100</sup> Gaut, 248.

The essential role of the double object in satire is that it separates satire from what Northrop Frye refers to as mere invective.<sup>101</sup> Invective, as the name suggests, is nothing more than an attack or expression of ill will towards a target. Satire, such that it satirizes its target, does not just express ill will towards a target, but articulates a particular criticism. For an example, consider two different ways in which Michael Moore has been presented in film. He is satirized in *Team America: World Police* (2004) by being misrepresented in two ways. The first is that he is always shown as having fast food in hand, suggesting that he is a glutton and thus, in contradiction of his words about helping the less fortunate, a hypocrite. The second is that he is exaggerated into being a literal suicide-bombing terrorist, with the point being that he has an irrational, extreme hatred of the virtues of America. In contrast to Moore as he is presented in *Team America*, there is Moore as he is presented in *An American Carol* (2008). The movie takes the form of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), where Moore is visited by three ghosts who teach him the value of America by what may fairly be described as subjecting him to 90 minutes of abuse without rhyme or reason. Since the film merely presents Moore being subject to abuse, no criticism becomes manifest. Consequently, the film is merely invective.

The role of misrepresentation in satirical criticism can be clarified by appealing to the four point account of misrepresentation articulated in the first section. Specifically, it is the third point – the intentional attribution of properties that the subject does not possess – that is important. In the case of *Team America*, the intentional object Moore is attributed two properties that he does not possess – the eternal food-in-hand and the derangement. The inclusion of these properties is identified, interpreted, and understood by the audience as being intended (following whatever theory of interpretation one wishes to use) to convey certain criticisms. In this case, the criticisms are that Moore is a glutton – and thus a hypocrite – and that he is deranged. In contrast, the *American Carol* Moore has no additional, misrepresentative properties. No misrepresentative properties means that there are no misrepresentative properties to be identified,

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<sup>101</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 222-3.

interpreted, and understood by the audience as being intended to convey any criticisms.

It is important to note that misrepresentation is not sufficient for satire. This can be illuminated by Michael Crichton's book *Next* (2006). Previous to *Next*, literary critic Michael Crowley had criticized Crichton's global warming denialism.<sup>102</sup> As an act of revenge, Crichton inserted into *Next* the character of Mick Crowley. The character Crowley was mentioned only in passing, and as a pedophile with a small penis. In this case, the real life Michael Crowley is misrepresented as the fictional Mick Crowley, and he is misrepresented by being characterized as a pedophile, but it is not clear that he is being criticized. Rather, the misrepresenting characteristics – being a pedophile with a small penis – are added merely as insult. Consequently, the misrepresentation of Crowley is merely invective, and not satirical.

My characterizations of *Next*, *An American Carol*, and *Team America* may be challenged, but I believe doing so underlines a strength of my account. Specifically, I believe that arguments over whether or not any of these three works are properly satirical will turn on the question of whether or not they may be rightly considered to be misrepresenting and criticizing their subjects. So, for example, a challenge that *An American Carol* was actually satirical could take the form that Moore in fact is misrepresented, maybe as an Ebenezer Scrooge type figure by way of being placed in a Christmas-Carol-type story. Or perhaps Crichton really is criticizing Crowley by accusing him of not being a “real man” in some light. What both of these challenges have in common, however, is that they take misrepresentation and criticism to be essential to satire. Whether or not they are successful, they accept the account of satire I have given so far.

The case of the two Moores gives an insight into why the relationship between the intentional object and model needs to be one of misrepresentation. Recall that it is the properties attributed to the intentional object that are the

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<sup>102</sup> Felicia R. Lee, “Columnist Accuses Crichton of Literary ‘Hit-and-Run,’” *New York Times*, December 14, 2006, <https://nyti.ms/2p8Kshs>.

basis of the satirical criticism. These properties are not just how the work levies criticism against both the intentional object and model, but specifically against the model by way of the intentional object. “By way of the intentional object” can work one of two ways. One way is that the misrepresentation itself constitutes the criticism, as is the case with the *Team America* Moore being misrepresented as having a deranged hatred of America. Many political cartoons fit this model, where some political figure is saddled with some feature – like Pinocchio’s long nose – that identifies them as lying or corrupt. The other way that the model may be criticized by way of the intentional object is that the way the model is misrepresented may determine and direct the criticism without constituting the criticism itself. This is often the case in dystopian satires. For example, in the film *Brazil* (1985), the world is in a constant state of Christmastime. The associated criticism is nothing to do with the real world’s ability to understand calendars or schedule celebrations, but rather something to the effect that late capitalism has devalued historical rituals.

If misrepresentation is essential to satirical criticism, and the satirical double object is the target of satirical criticism, then misrepresentation is essential to the double object. More specifically, if satirical criticism is found in how the model is misrepresented, then if the model is not misrepresented then there can be no satirical criticism. This does not mean that there can be no criticism of any sort but rather, as in the case of the *American Carol* Michael Moore, criticism will not be satirical but merely invective.

The last criterion for satirical misrepresentation is that the misrepresentation must be humorous, or amusing. For this section I want to adopt the disposition theory of humour, which may be thought of as an anti-theoretical approach to humour that holds that whatever is amusing is whatever reliably brings about the humour-related reaction in the audience, and that there is no way that this disposition may be systematized.<sup>103</sup> Despite this anti-theoretical approach, some account may still be given as to the role of humour in satire.

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<sup>103</sup> By these terms, other candidate theories of humour, such as incongruity, superiority, and psychoanalytic theories, may be thought of as theories which seek to define and systematize the

An important distinction for understanding humour in satirical misrepresentation is that between prescribed and merited responses.<sup>104</sup> The prescribed response to a work of art is the response that the work attempts to bring about in its audience. The merited response is the response that the audience ought to have. These two responses are most easily separated in bad genre fiction, especially horror and comedy films, which are found to be either not scary or not funny, respectively. A good example is the 2014 horror film *Annabelle*, about a doll possessed by the ghost of a murderous cultist. In one scene in particular, the protagonist is attacked by the cultist's ghost. Between the fact that *Annabelle* is a conventional horror film, and the musical sting in the scene, it is fair to conclude that this scene prescribes a reaction of fear. However, when rushing the protagonist, the ghost bumps into the room door, and then the door frame. It also runs with uneven stutter steps, as if it is afraid to reach the protagonist too quickly. The ghost appears incompetent and unthreatening, so a response of fear would be unmerited.

When holding that satirical misrepresentation must be humorous, what I mean is that a humour response is merited.<sup>105</sup> While a humour response may, and often will be, prescribed, it is not necessary that it must be. Cases of satire where something is humorous despite no humour being prescribed will often be found in works where the satire resides in the premise. Consider the 2015 film *CHAPPIE*, by Neill Blomkamp. It is the story about how a software designer, played by Dev Patel, creates an artificial intelligence that is kidnapped by two gangsters and taught to commit crimes. Central to the story, and fundamental to it being a satire, is that both Patel and his boss are, despite all their aspirations about innovations and future-mindedness, dull and without imagination. The characters and their company are misrepresentations of the technology industry where, despite all their noble proclamations about the possibilities of technology,

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humour-causing disposition. The disposition theory serves as a placeholder here, and I will present my account of humour in the next chapter.

<sup>104</sup> Gaut, 231.

<sup>105</sup> I use the term "humour response" to sidestep the question of whether or not humour is an emotion.



they are not capable of conceiving of much more than a better gun, or a slightly better servant. At no point in the film is this facet brought to focus in such a way that might prescribe a humour response, despite it being an inescapable feature of the premise. However, that the self-styled geniuses of the technology industry are satirized as sightless dullards is nevertheless amusing, and were an audience member to find this funny then their reaction would not be unmerited.

Another way that a work may merit a humour response without prescribing one is that, for a response in question, the work may prescribe some reaction more strongly than one of humour. Accordingly, while a humour response may be merited – what is occurring in the work is funny – what the work prescribes is being frightened, or thrilled. The climactic action scene in *CHAPPIE* provides a good example. Throughout the film the antagonist is an engineer played by Hugh Jackman, whose driving motivation is that human beings' emotions are necessary for making sound judgements, and artificial intelligences lack this human emotionality. In the climax, he pilots an assault robot in an attack on the protagonists. As Jackman's acting makes clear, his character is motivated by a mix of paranoia and bloodlust. This is funny: after a film of pontificating about the importance of human emotions, his character is shown to be a bloodthirsty, slaving idiot. However, during the action scene, the focus on the character's reactions do not prescribe a humour response. They prescribe discomfort and fear for the protagonists, but not humour.

The two examples from *CHAPPIE* help show the role of humour in satirical misrepresentation. Specifically, humour acts as a guarantor of the criticism that inheres in the way that the model is misrepresented in the intentional object. In each case, it is essential to the humour of the misrepresentation that the criticism is applicable to the model. The technology industry being misrepresented in the unimaginative Dev Patel and his boss would not be funny if not for the fact that the technology industry specifically espouses utopian ideals of progress, and Hugh Jackman's murderous bloodlust would not be funny were his character not the misrepresentation of a humanist ideology. In each case, the humour is the product of the accuracy of the criticism in the misrepresentation, and if there was no

criticism then the misrepresentation would not be amusing. This helps distinguish the satirical from the non-satirical in two ways. The first way is where there is no criticism in the misrepresentation, as is the case in many allegories, where archetypal humans are misrepresented as animals. The second way is where the attempt at criticism is sufficiently cruel that all humour is squashed. This point requires further argumentation, as I must establish that it is possible for humour to be squashed by cruelty, and I will provide this argument in chapter 5 where I focus on the ethical evaluability of humour. For the purposes of this chapter, it is enough to say that the example of Michael Crowley being misrepresented as a pedophile in Michael Crichton's *Next* may be taken as an example of such a phenomenon. If it were taken to be the case that in being misrepresented as a pedophile, Crowley were being criticized for being exploitative or unmanly, then this misrepresentation would be cruel to the point that it would not be humorous, and, accordingly, the misrepresentation would be mere invective. Misrepresenting Crowley as being a pedophile is cruel because it is beyond all reasonable scope – for the moral crime of criticizing Crichton he is misrepresented as a sexual predator and one of the most reviled sorts of people in Western society.

Humour in satirical misrepresentation does not only help distinguish the satirical from the non-satirical, but it also helps distinguish between sorts of satire. Satires are often considered to belong to one of two categories: either they are Juvenalian, or Horatian.<sup>106</sup> Juvenalian satires are the sorts of satires that put a significant emphasis on the criticism, and really put an effort into tearing down the work's target.<sup>107</sup> Famous examples of Juvenalian satire would be Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, or George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, while modern examples would include the comic series *2000 A.D.* or the film *Sucker Punch*. In contrast to Juvenalian satire is Horatian satire, which is satire that shows the foibles of its target in a friendlier, or more sympathetic light.<sup>108</sup> While

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<sup>106</sup> Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994): 24. In practice, of course, a particular work may draw from both Juvenalian and Horatian traditions without belonging exclusively to one or the other.

<sup>107</sup> Ronald Paulson, *The Fictions of Satire*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967): 21

<sup>108</sup> Paulson, 21.

the model is shown critically, and is the object of ridicule, it is not the target of vicious attack as it would be in Juvenalian satire. The most prominent current Horatian satire is probably found in the long-running television show *The Simpsons*. In it, the stereotypical American family is satirized in its titular Simpson family, especially the incompetent drunk of a patriarch, Homer. Homer is the most regular object of ridicule throughout the series, as he attempts to navigate the demands of fatherhood both at home, where he offers his children advice like “trying is the first step towards failure,” and the workplace, where he is incompetent but somehow keeps his job. At the end of most episodes<sup>109</sup>, however, the Simpson family comes to some amicable and mutually supportive conclusion. Altogether, even if the Simpsons are the object of ridicule, the attitude taken towards them is ultimately a sympathetic one. Their failures are the ones of the audience, or at least people like the audience. The American family may be satirized in the Simpson family, but they are not condemned.

The key difference between Juvenalian and Horatian satire is the attitude that each takes towards its target. Horatian satire is ultimately sympathetic with its subjects, whereas Juvenalian satire seeks to destroy them. Humour facilitates this division. Such that humour may manage group membership, it may be affiliative or disaffiliative.<sup>110</sup> This distinction will be explored more fully in the next chapter, but for the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to invoke the familiar distinction between “laughing with” and “laughing at.” The humour of Juvenalian satire encourages “laughing at,” where the humour places the audience opposite the model upon which the intentional object is based. In Horatian satire, even if it does not strictly encourage “laughing with” the model upon which the intentional object is based (although it may), the humour places the audience alongside the humour’s targets. In each case, the sort of satire the work is is determined by the attitude displayed towards the double object, and it is by way of the humour that that attitude is expressed.

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<sup>109</sup> At least for the first several seasons. I do not make this claim over the last 15-20 years of mediocrity.

<sup>110</sup> Philip Glenn, *Laughter in Interaction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 29-30.

It is worth underlining that this account is just of the role of humour in satiric misrepresentation, and not exhaustive of the role of humour in satire more generally. While I afford a very prominent role to misrepresentation in satire, there are still important and conventional roles for humour beyond its mediation of misrepresentation. For example, there is the role of humour in creating tonal shifts within satire (that is, from the humourous to the non-humourous or vice versa) as a way of clarifying to the audience that a work is satirical, as well as the role of humour in making satirical works generally more palatable and consumable. I will engage these topics in future chapters: the role of tonal shifts in chapter 3, which is on humour; and the role of humour as rendering satire consumable in chapter 6, which is on satirical works of art as commercially created and distributed products.

### **3. Conclusion**

In this section I have given an account of satirical misrepresentation. Central to this account is the satirical double object, which is the target of satirical criticism both within and outwith the satirical work. The double object is composed of two halves: there is the intentional object, which is the target of the criticism within the work, and the model, which is the thing outwith the work which form the basis of the intentional object. The relation between the intentional object and the model is one of misrepresentation, where the model is misrepresented as the intentional object. The relation must be one of misrepresentation otherwise there is no double object – the model is simply represented within the work.

Such that misrepresentation is essential to the operation of satire, I have given the following account. First, satiric criticism is specifically that criticism which depends upon how the model is misrepresented as the intentional object. This may be either through the misrepresenting properties, as attributed to the intentional object, themselves constituting the criticism of the model, or through the misrepresentation determining and directing (but not constituting) the criticism. Second, the requirement that satire must work through misrepresentation polices the boundaries between satire, mere invective, and

mere comedy. Without misrepresentation the work is just attacking its target, and is thus merely invective. Where there is misrepresentation but not criticism by way of that misrepresentation, the work is merely comedy (perhaps parody, or pastiche). Third, humour acts as a guarantor of satiric criticism. For potential satiric criticism – which is, again, criticism through misrepresentation – to be funny, it must be applicable to the model, and if the potential satiric criticism is not applicable to the model, then it is not funny. Fourth, and last, the nature of the satiric humour determines whether the satire in question is Juvenalian or Horatian. If the humour is oppositional, and expresses a strongly negative attitude towards its targets, then it is Juvenalian satire. If the humour is more sympathetic and forgiving, and encourages the audience to identify with the targets (in part or in whole), then it is Horatian.

In this first section of this chapter, I offered a four point account of intentional misrepresentation. It can be expanded so as to be made specific for the account of satiric misrepresentation given in the second section:

1. There is some subject to which an utterer is referring.
2. The utterer is representing this subject as having certain properties.
3. The utterer intends that some of these properties are not actually possessed by the subject.
4. These added properties either constitute a criticism of the subject, or will be used to make a criticism of the subject.
5. Within the context of the work, it is right to find these added properties funny.
6. None of the previous steps are taken by mistake.

The qualification of “within the context of the work” is added to make clear that what is funny is some feature of the work to which the audience reacts when appreciating that work, rather than some fact about the work. For example, in Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer’s *Meet the Spartans* (2008), the titular Spartans are the Spartans from the film *300*, but misrepresented as being effete and coded as gay. That the Spartans were represented in this way may be funny such that it shows the

complete moral and intellectual wretchedness that manages to float to the top in the creatively dead industry of Hollywood film (or something like that). But the work itself, however, is not funny.

Aptly, I turn now to the question of how best to understand humour, and the roles it may play in satire.

### **Chapter 3: Humour**

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the role of humour in satire. This will be done to two ends. The first end is to further the definition of satire. I have argued that it is essential that satirical misrepresentation is funny, or amusing. In this chapter I will give an account of what it is for a satirical misrepresentation to be funny. The second end is to give a more general discussion of the role of humour in satire. There are uses of humour that are characteristic either of satire generally or of specific types of satire, but are not definitional to satire. These uses of humour deserve discussion, and I will address them in this chapter.

To support my argument about satire, I will have to give an account of humour and what it means for something to be funny. The account of humour that I give will cut against contemporary philosophical accounts of humour and will take up the majority of this chapter. The current triad of dominant philosophical theories – Noel Carroll’s account of comic amusement as a cognitive emotion, John Morreall’s account of humour as deriving from a ‘cognitive shift’, and Matthew Hurley et al’s account of mirth as an epistemic emotion – are what I will term “internalist” theories. This is to say that they primarily identify humour with a process or experience that happens inside the person. The essence of humour, by their theories, is in a person’s reaction to some stimulus, and an account of humour in turn must focus on the nature of the individual’s reaction. In contrast to these internalist accounts, I will give an account of humour as a social practice. This will take the focus of the account outside of the individual’s reaction and instead focus on the relationship between the humourist, the audience, and anybody caught in the crossfire. The psychologist and neuroscientist will be deprioritized (although not ignored) while greater importance will be given to the historian and sociologist.

Central to motivating the social account of humour will be an analogy between humour and art. The two are relevantly similar in that they have a very similar heritage. Both terms, as commonly understood in the present day, originated in similar circumstances. Specifically, they came about as

industrialization and colonialism allowed for the creation of a new bourgeoisie, and this brought about a new way of seeing and understanding the world. Both art and humour inherited some distinctions that have shaped theory in ways that present day theorists would not accept. In the case of art, these distinctions lead back to gendered differences between arts and crafts, and the effects of these differences are increasingly being removed from art theory.<sup>111</sup> Humour has inherited some classed distinctions, and importantly, these distinctions are not acknowledged in contemporary theories, and their effects have not been removed. Altogether, I believe that the analogy between art and humour can be used to shed light on where contemporary humour theory is failing and what must be done to correct it.

The three sections of this chapter, then, will be divided into a total of seven subsections. The first section will develop the account of humour as a social practice and be divided into five subsections: (1) A survey of contemporary philosophical theories of humour and a defence of the claim that these should be understood as internalist theories; (2) an appeal to the work of Stephen Davies on the development of art out of aesthetics, where he argues that any theorizing about art must prioritize the actual practice of art, and a defence that Davies' argument analogizes to the case of humour; (3) a historical look at actually existing humour practices and an argument that humour-as-practiced puts a much greater focus on laughter than current theories allow; (4) a delineation of two standards of humour that emerge from approaching humour as a social practice and (5) a small section on how a social account of humour can account for naturally occurring funniness. The second section will articulate, in light of the first section, just what it means that a satirical misrepresentation must be funny. The third section will contain two subsections: (1) The role of humour in determining Horatian and Juvenalian satire; and (2) the importance of humour in making satire identifiable as satire.

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<sup>111</sup> For an example of such an excavation, see the chapter "Beauty Resurrected" in Matthew Kieran, *Revealing Art*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2005).



There are two main motivations for suggesting accounting for humour as a practice rather than an experience. The first is that the internalist theories have inherited historical baggage that I do not believe they recognize, and that this unwarrantedly directs the sorts of explanations they give. Accordingly, by focusing on the social practice of humour, I may help reorient the internalist theories. However, I believe that I am providing more than a correction or augmentation to the internalist approach. Rather, I believe that accounting for humour as a social practice not only strengthens the philosophical discussion of humour, but is considerably better at interrogating certain phenomena. It is much better able to answer questions about how humour works, what it can accomplish, and how it ought to be used. These virtues of the social account will be evident in this chapter in discussions not only about how humorous misrepresentations work, but also about the role of humour in satire more generally. I believe that the discussion I will provide will be of the sort that internalist accounts are ill-equipped to provide, since I will discuss satire in a way that involves relationships between author, audience, and target. The virtues of the social account will be most prominent in later chapters when I discuss the ethics of humour and the social and political roles satire may play.

There are two clarifications that I would like to include in this introduction. The first clarification is about the distinction between humour, what is funny, and (comic) amusement. Alan Roberts has recently published an argument for the principled distinction between the three.<sup>112</sup> I would like to adopt a close version of his distinction, but as a stipulation and without committing to the argument behind it. It is as follows:

- Humour is the practice of creating things that are funny.
- Funniness is the evaluation of a humour-appropriate reaction.
- (Comic) amusement is the humour-specific response.

I can only adopt a close version of it, and not the exact thing, because Roberts implicitly adopts an internalist account of humour by giving priority to

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<sup>112</sup> Alan Roberts, "Humour is a Funny Thing," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 56, no.4 (2016): 366.

amusement.<sup>113</sup> Since I am giving an account in contrast to internalist accounts, Roberts' distinction does not map well on to what I will propose in this chapter. I am accepting the distinction between humour, funniness, and amusement just as a stipulation because the language surrounding the practice of humour is both relatively new and highly informal. Because of the newness of the language – the term “humour” as presently used only started to emerge in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century – and how informal discussion surrounding humour is, there is good reason to expect that the terms ‘humour’, ‘funny’, and ‘amusing’ are generally applied loosely and should not be expected to each track distinct phenomena.<sup>114</sup> The stipulated distinction is useful for making philosophical writing clear, but I do not want to commit any further than that.

The second clarification is about the extent of my argument. While the social practice account of humour I am giving is in opposition to internalist accounts of humour, it does not negate them. This is to say that even if the account I propose is wholly and unambiguously correct, there is no part of it that renders an internalist account impossible. I will argue that the present accounts are not correct, and I believe that my social practice account makes it very unlikely that a unified internalist account will be possible, but it is nevertheless impossible for me to completely rule out that there is some underlying, unifying internal phenomenon.

## 1.1 Internalist Accounts

There are currently three dominant philosophical theories of humour.<sup>115</sup> There is Noel Carroll's theory that the essence of humour is comic amusement, which is a cognitive emotion that is directed at incongruity. There is John Morreall's theory,

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<sup>113</sup> Specifically, amusement is essential to appreciating humour, and funniness is defined as meriting amusement. Roberts, 366.

<sup>114</sup> Jan Bremmer and Herman Rodenburg, “Introduction,” in *A Cultural History of Humour*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Rodenburg, 1-3 (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1997).

<sup>115</sup> I should note that in engaging philosophical theories of humour, not all theories of humour. In *The Psychology of Humour*, Rod Martin and Thomas Ford list three main psychological theories of humour: Reversal Theory, Comprehension-Elaboration Theory, and Benign Violation Theory. I do not engage them here but, as they are psychological theories of humour, it is not a stretch to accept them as internalist theories. Thomas Ford and Rod Martin, *The Psychology of Humour: An Integrative Approach* (London: Academic Press, 2018): 72.

which holds that humour is a sort of aesthetic experience that a subject experiences when one undergoes a certain type of cognitive shift. Lastly, there is Matthew Hurley et al's theory that the essence of humour is the epistemic emotion of mirth, which originated as a motivation for an informational filter in the brain but has since developed to be readily triggered by a wider range of stimuli. These three theories are quite diverse, with each locating humour in a different type of reaction – a cognitive emotion, an epistemic emotion, or not an emotional reaction at all. However, what they all have in common is that they explicate humour primarily in terms of something that happens within the person. The essence of humour, by these theories, is an internal reaction and experience. Accordingly, I term them internalist theories. In this subsection I will give a brief summary of each account and show just how each one is internalist. To start, however, I will begin with a summary of current theory on laughter and evolution which is common to all three accounts.

### 1.1.1 Laughter and Play

The role of laughter in humour has come under reevaluation recently, but is still generally seen to be nonessential.<sup>116</sup> The conventional position is that not all laughter is as a result of humour, and not all humour leads to laughter, therefore laughter does not have a necessary relationship to humour. Laughter is acknowledged as a “typical” humour reaction, but no stronger.<sup>117</sup> This is because laughter is a social signal and, even if it is deeply connected with humour in practice, it serves other purposes.<sup>118</sup> Research by Robert Provine has shown that the main use of laughter in social settings is to signal recognition or familiarity.<sup>119</sup> Further research by Provine, as well as sociologists like Philip Glenn, has shown laughter to be mostly used for purposes of navigating interpersonal relationships: recognition, affiliation, disaffiliation, and directing conversation.<sup>120</sup> Altogether, in

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<sup>116</sup> For a look at the re-evaluation of the role of laughter in humour, see Joshua Shaw, “Philosophy of Humor,” *Philosophy Compass* 5, no.2 (2010): 112-126.

<sup>117</sup> For instance, see Matthew Hurley, Daniel Dennett, and Reginald Adams, Jr. *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011): 23-4.

<sup>118</sup> Philip Glenn, *Laughter in Interaction*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 29.

<sup>119</sup> Robert Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, (New York, NY: Viking, 2000): 40.

<sup>120</sup> Glenn, 29.

a collection of his research published in 2000, Provine reckons that less than a quarter of all laughter is in what would be considered humorous contexts.<sup>121</sup>

Since laughter is a social signal, it is pointedly absent in non-social situations. A 1989 study by Provine and Kenneth Fischer showed that people laughed 30 times more frequently in social settings than outside of them, and that this includes humorous laughter.<sup>122</sup> A person by themselves reading a humorous story or joke is far less likely to laugh in response to the humour than if they had read that same story or joke in a group. To further the separation between humour and laughter, Hurley et al cite a neuropsychological study showing that the neural networks in the brain relating to humour and laughter are completely separate and that laughter may be neurologically triggered (by disease or chemical stimulant) without any self-reported feelings relating to humour in the subject.<sup>123</sup>

Philosophical accounts of humour may also make use of the idea of Duchenne laughter. While only Hurley et al explicitly reference Duchenne laughter, if I am going to argue against the existing theories and in favour of a larger role for laughter then it is an important distinction to manage.<sup>124</sup> Duchenne laughter is a particular sort of laughter that is defined by being stimulus-driven, showing upturned corners of the laugher's mouth indicating an emotional reaction, and being particularly difficult to fake.<sup>125</sup> It is put in contrast with laughter that is considered the opposite: affected rather than stimulus driven, and not indicating any emotional state as such. As Matthew Gervais and David Sloan Wilson note, while this is often discussed as if it is a dichotomy that accounts for all laughter, there is also the existence of stimulus-driven non-Duchenne laughter.<sup>126</sup> I will make use of stimulus-driven non-Duchenne laughter later; what is important at this stage of the argument is that there is this distinction between Duchenne and non-Duchenne laughter. This distinction is put to use by Hurley et al to navigate the

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<sup>121</sup> Provine, 40.

<sup>122</sup> Robert Provine and Kenneth Fischer, "Laughing, Smiling, and Talking: Relation to Sleeping and Social Context in Humans," *Ethology* 83, no.4 (1989): 301.

<sup>123</sup> Hurley et al, 21-22.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>126</sup> Matthew Gervais and David Sloan Wilson, "The Evolution and Functions of Laughter and Humor: A Synthetic Approach," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 80, no.4 (2005): 401.

situations in which people laugh as set out by Provine and Glenn. Amused laughter, write Hurley et al, is Duchenne laughter while mere conversational laughter of the sort that Provine and Glenn identify is non-Duchenne laughter.<sup>127</sup>

Philosophical accounts of humour integrate laughter into humour by way of the play theory.<sup>128</sup> In its most basic form, play theory holds that humour developed from play practices in early hominids. It takes its evidence from signs of proto-laughter in chimpanzees: when playing, chimpanzees will let their jaw hang loosely while panting to make a staccato sound.<sup>129</sup> The panting and loose jaw prevent the chimpanzee from biting hard, and so this serves as a signal to other chimpanzees that its behaviour is mock aggression and not genuinely threatening.<sup>130</sup> These observations about chimpanzees are extrapolated to have applied to early hominids as well, and then an evolutionary story is theorized to explain how this behaviour developed into human humour practice. Morreall posits the following story: laughter was at some point used as a signal that some threat was no longer present, which he calls “false alarm” laughter.<sup>131</sup> Since this laughter was to return the group to normal from a state of high alert, it had an enjoyable, relaxing (or untensing) effect on the group.<sup>132</sup> Since this effect was enjoyable, early hominids developed practices to trigger this effect – an example he uses is a member of the group pretending to be a large predator lurking in the grass and then announcing themselves and using laughter to indicate that there was no real threat.<sup>133</sup> Over time this behaviour attached itself to linguistic communication, where it was useful for a speaker identifying that what they meant was a joke and meant to bring pleasure, as opposed to a deception or mistake. No two play accounts give exactly the same story but Morreall’s is typical: there is some pleasurable function of laughter, early hominids come to exploit this function, and

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<sup>127</sup> Hurley et al, 2003.

<sup>128</sup> While Carroll explicitly rejects the play theory as a theory of humour in itself, he still offers criteria that make use of it in a similar manner to Morreall.

<sup>129</sup> John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 37-38.

<sup>130</sup> Morreall, 37-38.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 45.

over time linguistic communication comes to make use of this function for one reason or another.

It is worth noting that the play theory, by giving an evolutionary story, lends itself to an internalist theory of humour. Even when detailing social practices, as could be argued Morreall is doing when he invokes the development of linguistic humour, what the play theory is seeking to explain is how two internal processes – laughter and amusement – became related. To the extent that social phenomena feature in the explanation, it is to the extent that they can be used to explain internal phenomena. The use of evolutionary stories in this manner will be brought to the fore by Davies in his exploration of how aesthetic sensibilities developed into art practice, and I will argue that it constitutes a serious weakness in internalist philosophical accounts of humour. For this section, though, it is enough to note that the play theory makes use of evolutionary explanations to give a story about how some laughter became tied to amusement.

### 1.1.2 Noel Carroll and Humour as a Cognitive Emotion

According to Carroll, the proper *analysandum* of humour is the cognitive emotion of comic amusement.<sup>134</sup> There are two parts to his argument: first, arguing that the object of comic amusement is incongruity, and then that comic amusement is indeed a cognitive emotion. Since all I am seeking to establish here is that Carroll's theory is internalist, I will focus on his argument that comic amusement is a cognitive emotion.

Carroll advances his argument by way of analogy in four points. Each point is a characteristic typical of paradigmatic emotional reactions, and in each case he argues that the reaction of comic amusement works in the same way as other emotional reactions. The four characteristics are as follows: Comic amusement (1) is directed; (2) has a formal object, or criterion of appropriateness; (3) generates a mood, which affects how other things are perceived; and (4) is contagious.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Noel Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014): 4.

<sup>135</sup> Carroll, 55-7.

That comic amusement is directed is to say that there is something in particular that is found comically amusing.<sup>136</sup> A person is not just in a state of comic amusement, but they are in such a state because there is something to which they are reacting. The formal object, or criterion of appropriateness, is what determines whether or not some stimulus ought to comically amuse a subject.<sup>137</sup> To Carroll, this formal object is incongruity.<sup>138</sup> The third characteristic, to generate a mood, means that once a person has found one thing funny, they are more likely to find others things funny.<sup>139</sup> That amusement is contagious means that emotional reactions are stronger or more likely in a group of people experiencing the same emotion.<sup>140</sup> As an example he appeals to the practice of laugh tracks on sitcoms, which are meant to facilitate the audience's amusement. To these four points of analogy, Carroll adds a fifth characteristic of amusement which is an experience of levity.<sup>141</sup> When one is amused one has an experience of "pleasant lightness," and if one does not experience levity then one is not in a state of comic amusement.<sup>142</sup>

Since I am merely trying to establish that Carroll's theory is an internalist theory, I will not evaluate it for correctness. Instead, I will just argue that he defines humour by what happens within the person. There are some ways that this is easy: just that humour is analyzed by way of comic amusement, for one, as well as the fact that a particular experiential state – levity – is a necessary condition for being amused. The third and fourth characteristics, of mood and contagion, are also straightforwardly internalist since their primary focus is on the experiential state of the amused subject. The first and second characteristics, of directedness and of having a formal object, are internalist inasmuch as they concern what a subject is perceiving. Even though the thing the subject is perceiving is outside of the subject, the thing being perceived is still being understood as it effects the

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<sup>136</sup> Carroll, 55.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>138</sup> While Carroll offers examples of what are supposed to be amusing things that make use of incongruity, just what it means to call something incongruous is never substantially explored or defined. Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 56-57.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

subject's experience. For the characteristic of directedness, it is that the object is perceived to have the qualities that generate the state of comic amusement. Similarly, for the characteristic of formal object, what is at issue is that there is an object that ought to effect an experience in the subject. Even if both characteristics look to objects outside the subject, these objects are important inasmuch as they can be related to experiences within the subject.

I do not believe that casting Carroll's theory as internalist is controversial or will make anybody unhappy. After all, the first move he makes is to locate the object of inquiry for humour in an emotional reaction. However, this does not mean that Carroll excludes the actual practice of humour. He invokes many examples in his argument for incongruity as the formal object of comic amusement. I will return address these examples in the section on the historical practice of humour.

### 1.1.3 John Morreall and the Cognitive Shift

Of the three major philosophical accounts of humour, John Morreall's is the only one that does not hold the humour-reaction of amusement to be an emotional reaction. Rather, he holds amusement to be having one's attention agreeably occupied in a particular sort of way.<sup>143</sup> Since humour is not an emotion, he cannot provide the sort of analysis that Carroll does. Instead, Morreall argues that humour inheres in what he calls a "cognitive shift" – a rapid transition from one cognitive state to another.<sup>144</sup> He develops this account to have four characteristics of the humorous cognitive shift:

1. We experience a cognitive shift – a rapid change in our perceptions or thoughts.
2. We are in play mode rather than serious mode, disengaged from conceptual and practical concerns.

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<sup>143</sup> It is worth noting that this is what Morreall considers amusement in the narrow sense. The wide sense of amusement is just to have one's attention agreeably occupied in any way. The narrow sense is meant to capture that when talking about amusement in relation to humour, both philosophers and people more generally are after something more specific than the way one might be amused when playing a game. Morreall, 63.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 44.



3. Instead of responding to the cognitive shift with shock, confusion, puzzlement, fear, anger, or other negative emotions, we enjoy it.
4. Our pleasure in the cognitive shift is expressed in laughter, which signals to others that they can relax and play too.<sup>145</sup>

As the four criteria suggest, Morreall gives a large role to play theory in his account of humour. And, indeed, his account is deeply based in an evolutionary story. As I detailed in section 1.1.1 of this chapter, Morreall roots the origins of humour in human or proto-human “false alarm” laughter – to signal that a threat has passed – and the subsequent development of techniques to exploit false alarm laughter and the pleasant feeling that accompanies it.<sup>146</sup> This story is present in each of the four characteristics that Morreall presents. The first characteristic, for instance, derives from the hypothesis that false alarm laughter brought about a shift from a state of tension to a state of relaxation. The second characteristic straightforwardly shows humour’s history in play – specifically that humour has developed out of play practice. The third characteristic shows that humour inherited the enjoyable affective feeling of play. Lastly, the fourth characteristic, that pleasure in the cognitive shift is expressed in laughter, is the end point of the development from false alarm laughter through play signal laughter.

Since Morreall foregrounds the cognitive shift in defining humour – he describes his own theory as the cognitive shift theory – it should be, as with Carroll, uncontroversial to describe his theory as an internalist theory. Despite invoking play practice, everything that Morreall uses to define humour is something that happens within the body. The first characteristic, the cognitive shift, concerns a process that happens within the body. The second and third characteristics concern attitude and affect; they are about the mental states of the subject. Lastly, while the fourth characteristic concerns the social signal of laughter, it engages it from the perspective of the motivation of the subject. The laughter is specifically an expression, which is to say Morreall is concerned not with the social signal but what underlies it.

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<sup>145</sup> Morreall, 63.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 45-46.

### 1.1.4 Matthew Hurley and Mirth

In *Inside Jokes*, the primary goal of Matthew Hurley, Daniel Dennett, and Reginald Adams<sup>147</sup> is to explore the impact of humour on the philosophy of mind. The theory of humour they initially offer up is just a basic dispositional theory – humour is whatever reliably triggers the humour-appropriate neurological process under normalized conditions.<sup>148</sup> The bulk of the book is exploring what this humour-appropriate neurological process might be. While they acknowledge that whatever humour is now has been greatly shaped by biological and cultural evolution, they do start their investigation by attempting to articulate a core mechanism of humour.<sup>149</sup> This is the original mechanism and purpose of humour from which current practice evolved.

At the centre of Hurley et al's account of humour is the epistemic emotion of mirth.<sup>150</sup> By epistemic emotion, they mean an emotion that encourages “the mental behaviours that constitute a certain form of reasoning and epistemic assurance.”<sup>151</sup> The mental behaviour that mirth encourages is the sorting through beliefs for the purpose of identifying incompatible committed beliefs.<sup>152</sup> The reason that the mirth reaction associated with humour is so powerful, and the desire towards humorous stimuli is so strong, is that this process was essential to the survival and success of some early sort of hominid.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> As the foreword to *Inside Jokes* explains, the basis of the book is student work done by Matthew Hurley, so he will be credited as the main author of the theory.

<sup>148</sup> Hurley et al, 17.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>150</sup> While in this chapter I will speak just of mirth, it is worth acknowledging that towards the end of their book, Hurley et al allow for different sorts of specialized mirth. The one example they invoke is the possibility that mirth is the main emotional reaction to certain types of musical engagement. To the extent that there is a meaningful distinction to be had, all mentions of mirth in this chapter should be considered to refer to humour-specific mirth. Hurley et al, 240.

<sup>151</sup> Hurley et al note that this is very close to what many philosophers mean by “cognitive emotion,” they wish to eschew that term since they believe that invoking cognition as such brings with it unnecessary and unhelpful baggage. Ibid, 66.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 1.

This sort of incompatible belief detection process may be the core mechanism of humour, from which present humour developed, but it is not necessary for humour. While Hurley et al write that humour has since developed through cultural and biological evolution, they do not articulate exactly what these developments are. Nevertheless, they do provide for two ways that forms of humour may deviate from simple incompatible belief detection. The first way is that humour may be made to “run backwards.” Hurley et al invoke research that shows affecting the outward behaviours of Duchenne laughter – smiling and laughing in a particular way with upturned corners of the mouth – can reliably trigger the emotional reaction of mirth.<sup>154</sup> Accordingly, instead of humour seeking to provoke a mirth reaction and in turn generate laughter, it may instead seek to provoke a Duchenne laughter reaction and in turn generate mirth. This bypasses the incompatible belief detection system. The second way is that there may be transference from “one emotional modality to another,” which is to say that the arousal of one emotional reaction may be transferred to another.<sup>155</sup> These result from shortcuts the brain creates when dealing with stimuli that reliably trigger together.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Hurley et al, 20.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>156</sup> This transference is possible because of what Hurley et al call a “credit-assignment problem”: the difficulty that the brain faces in properly attributing a reward in response to a complex set of events. The brain has two solutions available to it:

The first is Hebbian: Reward everything “in sight” but don’t look too widely, and then leave it up to statistical regularities over time to sort out proper accreditation for patterns of events. The second solution involves metacognition: If a causal “hypothesis” (right or wrong) can be temporally associated with an emotion and this association is (rightly or wrongly) rewarded with that emotion or also with the *Aha!* emotion of discovery or insight, this labels the thought that preceded the emotion as credit-worthy. Unlike the first solution, the second solution can also be used to accredit memory after the fact – either in imagination or in attentive repetition of the event.

In simplified terms, the first solution functions by the brain creating a permanent association between two emotions that reliably respond to the same stimulus. For an example, a gross out joke presents a certain stimulus that the brain is not sure how to precisely process, so it triggers both disgust and humour emotional responses. Over time, if gross out humour triggers both disgust and humour with statistical regularity, then the brain creates a system where the two become related. For the second solution, emotional responses can become connected by reliably triggering in proximity. This creates a practice in the brain where one emotion (disgust in the case of gross out humour) may reliably be taken as an indicator of humour. In either circumstance, the effect is that of the brain tying the triggering of the humour emotion of mirth to other emotional reactions. Ibid.

As with Carroll and Morreall, identifying the theory of Hurley et al as internalist should not be controversial. Humour is primarily associated with an emotional response – mirth – and is further articulated in terms of a cognitive task that it either serves or served in an evolutionary predecessor. While Hurley et al accept the development of humour beyond this original mechanism, extensions are still explicated in terms of internal process. Laughter-first humour and transferred humour are both humour because they trigger the emotional reaction of mirth, and how this happens is explicated in biological and psychological terms.

## 1.2 Moving Beyond the Internal

I would like to seize on Hurley et al's appeal to evolution and use it as a basis to start to move beyond the internalist approach to humour. After all, the internalist approach to humour is as much as anything an artifact of the times in which the analyses are conducted. As Jan Bremmer and Herman Rodenburg note in their introduction to *A Cultural History of Humour*, it is only recently that humour has primarily become the domain of psychologists and sociologists.<sup>157</sup> In previous eras it has belonged to philosophers and rhetoricians, monks and theologians, and essayists.<sup>158</sup> The internalist approach fits snugly with the psychological approach and may be spurred on in general scientific advances facilitating the study of the brain, but it is not the only possible approach. The purpose of this section, then, is to evaluate the general strategy of using an internalist approach to humour and argue that the proper focus of a theory of humour is on its practice. To make this argument, I would like to argue by an analogy to the practice of art. Art, like humour, is a pan-human practice with its origins in some deep but ambiguous and largely unknown evolutionary history. Recently, Stephen Davies released the book *The Artful Species*, which looks at art through the lens of evolution and argues for the foregrounding of practice. I will marshal that argument to my own ends so that, as with art, the proper focus for the philosophy of humour is the practice of humour. Accordingly, this section will present two things: I must not just present Davies's argument, but also argue for an analogy between humour and art in this

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<sup>157</sup> Bremmer and Rodenburg, 6.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

case. I will begin by establishing a baseline for the analogy between humour and art, so that appealing to Davies's work in the general sense will be justified. After presenting Davies's argument, I will justify the analogy to the details of his argument, so as to establish that what he concludes for art applies as much for humour.

### 1.2.1 Similarities in the Historical Development of Art and Humour Discourses

The best motivation for the analogy between art and humour is that both terms emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under similar circumstances. This is not to say that the words "art" and "humour" did not exist before then, but this is when they emerged in something resembling their current sense. As the historian Constance Classen notes, the development of "art" in the current sense came about through a bifurcation between arts and crafts.<sup>159</sup> This bifurcation was not just one that tracked practice, but also a number of gendered and classed divisions. For example, art was a men's activity and was thus considered to display excellence.<sup>160</sup> Crafts, on the other hand, were considered the domain of women and consigned to the beautification of functional objects.<sup>161</sup> The detachedness of art reflected the bourgeois ideal that art was a sign of a sophisticated intellect and separate from the concerns of everyday life.<sup>162</sup> The current understanding of art no longer appeals to these classed or gendered justifications, but their effects lingered for quite some time and in some cases linger still. For example, it was a frequent component of theories of art that artistic appreciation must be "disinterested," which is to say detached from any other concern or cognitive activity. As Davies notes, some vestiges of the 18<sup>th</sup> century European bourgeois approach still remain, such as the belief that it is distinctive of art that it is associated with virtuosic skill.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Constance Classen, "Feminine Tactics: Crafting an Alternative Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Book of Touch*, ed. Constance Classen, 228 (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2005).

<sup>160</sup> Classen, 229.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012): 26.

<sup>163</sup> In his discussion on characteristics of art, Davies notes that in some cultures art-making is defined by its inclusivity and unskilled nature. Virtuosic skill, in these cases, would be antithetical to art. Davies, 27-8.

That the term “art” developed in such a limited historical context does not mean that it is limited to refer to what it originally referred. After all, as Davies notes, that would exclude more or less everything that was not developed within the Western European art tradition from the Enlightenment onwards.<sup>164</sup> Rather, art must be understood as something with a multitude of practices across a multitude of contexts, and any proposed definitions or ways of understanding art must be evaluated in that light. It is at this point that Davies invokes biological and evolutionary accounts for the development of art. It is these accounts that correspond to the internalist accounts of humour which I detailed in the previous section. Importantly, with humour as with art, the term “humour” developed in the Enlightenment context to refer to phenomena far more limited than the term is taken to refer to today.

Both Carroll and Morreall recognize that “humour” as it is currently used, is a historical development of the Enlightenment period.<sup>165</sup> However, since both of them offer internalist theories, neither of them interrogate the context of the development of the language of humour and what baggage the context could have placed upon the language. As Michael Billig details in *Laughter and Ridicule*, this is a relevant omission. Billig situates the development of humour discourse, alongside the development of the incongruity theory of humour, in the early colonial era, which brought about the advent of coffee-houses and cocoa-houses.<sup>166</sup> These were a new class of social space, public but definitely bourgeois and male.<sup>167</sup> Accordingly it was these values which influenced the original articulations of humour, values which, argues Billig, positioned humour as the proper laughter of the bourgeois and against the uncouth laughter of the lower classes.<sup>168</sup> The effect of the division was to identify proper laughter as being an appreciation of wit and other intellectual virtue as opposed to the uncouth laughter of ridicule and domination. The laughter of humour was quieter and more restrained than the

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<sup>164</sup> Davies, 26.

<sup>165</sup> Carroll, 5; Morreall, 58.

<sup>166</sup> It is worth noting that Billig focuses specifically on the British context. Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, Ltd, 2005), 59.

<sup>167</sup> Billig, 59.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

raucous laughter of lower-class bawdiness.<sup>169</sup> As Billig identifies in the writing of early humour theorists like Francis Hutcheson and Lord Shaftesbury, the laughter of humour was identified as being “relaxing” and “innocent.”<sup>170</sup> While there is positional jockeying in humour, it is important that one is “quick, clever and cheerful, not a point-scoring bully.”<sup>171</sup>

Another insight into the role of laughter can be gleaned from the work of Quentin Skinner. In his 2001 Henry Tudor memorial lecture he identifies two important points in the historical development of theorizing over laughter. Interest in theories of laughter (and later humour) began in the Renaissance with doctors and other medicalists engaging classical texts on laughter.<sup>172</sup> Where the classical texts presented certain laughing behaviour as unethical, the Renaissance medicalists sought to pathologize that behaviour.<sup>173</sup> The result was that open, raucous laughter came to be understood as symptomatic of some physical or spiritual illness.<sup>174</sup> Skinner also places this in the context of the modern conception of “civilization,” which put an emphasis on the control of bodily reactions.<sup>175</sup> Since ideas like “civilization” and “civility” began by tracking the behavior of the court and aristocracy, the association of controlled laughter with civility also indicates an association of uncontrolled laughter with the lower classes.<sup>176</sup> These two points together, of medicalization and civilization, suggest that theories of laughter were developed in a way that they were laden with political judgements. Laughter was unclean, and unworthy. The period that Skinner is writing about is slightly anterior to the period that Billig discusses, so medicalization and civilization are best understood as precursors to the classed dynamics that Billig discusses. They are the theories of laughter that informed the later theories of humour.

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<sup>169</sup> A frequent target of the Enlightenment Humour Theorists was a book titled *Joe Miller's Jests*, a compendium of jokes and witticisms centred around the basic humour elements of sex and shit. The *Jests* were uncouth and therefore not humour. Billig, 67.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>172</sup> Skinner identifies the first publication as *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione, published 1528. Quentin Skinner, “Why Laughing Mattered in the Renaissance: The Second Henry Tudor Memorial Lecture,” *History of Political Thought* 22, no.3 (2001): 418.

<sup>173</sup> Skinner, 423.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 424.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 445.

<sup>176</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000): 54-5.

The importance of this history of the development of the term humour is to identify that “humour,” as it originated in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, did not track the same sort of thing that contemporary humour theorists attempt to track. Hutcheson and Shaftesbury were not identifying a basic phenomenon common to all humans, but were rather rendering what was fundamentally a moral evaluation of a human practice. In this sense, I believe that the analogy to the history of art, and the history of the language of art, holds. Both arose around the same historical period to create a moral, evaluative divide in an already existing practice. The philosophy of both art and humour has proceeded in such a way that no longer recognizes this divide, instead focusing on something basic and pan-human. Both have taken a turn to the internal, defining art and humour as based in aesthetic sensibility and some basic emotional or aesthetic reaction, respectively. Accordingly, I now turn to Stephen Davies’ evaluation of biological and evolutionary appeals in defining art, which I will then analogize to the philosophy of humour.

### **1.2.2 Continuing the Analogy: The Role of Evolutionary History**

The practice of art stands in one of four possible relations to evolution.<sup>177</sup> The first possibility is that art-behaviour (which consists of both art-making and art-appreciating) is a direct evolutionary adaptation, which is to say that art-behaviour is genetically transmitted and provides benefits that let people who possessed art-behaviour genes outcompete those without. The second possibility is that art-behaviour is a spandrel. A spandrel is a feature that is genetically transmitted like an adaptation, but instead of providing a benefit it simply does not provide so much of a hindrance that it prevents its carriers from reproducing. The third possibility is that art is a technology. Technologies have no genetic basis and propagate entirely through cultural transmission.<sup>178</sup> Technologies may still be evolutionarily selected for, but only on the cultural level. Lastly, there is the possibility that there is no significant relation between art-behaviour and

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<sup>177</sup> Davies, 45.

<sup>178</sup> Fire-making is a paradigmatic technology.



evolution. To evaluate these four options, one of the tasks that Davies must complete is to determine just how evolutionary data is to be employed.

In considering the role of appeals to evolution in the development of art, Davies refers to the claw of the archaeopteryx.<sup>179</sup> The archaeopteryx, a particularly bird-like dinosaur, had a claw that was perfectly shaped for perching on tree branches. However, this claw was also the same as that many other dinosaurs, which did not perch in trees and just used their claws for snatching prey. The significance of this is that even though the claw was perfect for the archaeopteryx to perch in trees, this does not mean that the claw developed for the purpose of perching in trees. By analogy, some human behaviour being perfectly suited to art-making or art-appreciation does not mean that that behaviour was selected for its benefit towards art-behaviour. Davies writes:

[S]tories of a trait's or behaviour's evolutionary origin can be irrelevant to its current function, whether that function is adaptive or not. With this in mind, we might question the interest of demonstrating that some forms of aesthetic reaction or art making were ancestral responses to ancient environments or circumstances. We are physically removed from the environments in which our forebears lived and culturally removed from their ways of thinking. By studying the past, we might learn about the origins of some of our behaviours, but it might be doubted that this is relevant to explaining their current relevance or justification.<sup>180</sup>

Davies notes that there are cases where this argument may be qualified with respect to aesthetic sensibilities, but it is harder to do so with respect to art-behaviour.<sup>181</sup> In the case of aesthetic preferences, evolutionary reasons may be given as to, for example, why certain things came to be considered beautiful or aesthetically pleasing. Davies uses the example of a landscape view – it could be the case that such a vista came to be aesthetically pleasing since wide views improved the survival of ancestors who occupied such vantage points, and

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<sup>179</sup> Davies, 58-9.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 60.

accordingly a preference for such views came to be selected for evolutionarily.<sup>182</sup> Art-behaviour, however, is far more varied. Using the example of cave paintings, Davies writes that the paintings on the wall of the caves at Chauvet and Lascaux are too isolated and difficult to access for them to be thought of as primarily created for the purpose of impressing potential mates.<sup>183</sup> Accordingly, it is more difficult to attribute this behavior to something directly related to evolutionary benefit like reproduction or survival.

I argue that a consequence of Davies' argument is that when considering the contribution of evolution to art-behaviour, actual artistic practice needs to be given precedence. As the case of the archaeopteryx claw shows, the reason for some feature's development does not necessarily explain why that feature is used as it is. Similarly, even if aesthetic sensibilities developed for purposes of improving survival, that does not mean that they were incorporated into art-behaviour for those reasons. And even if impressing potential mates was a driving force in developing art, the actual practice of art includes instances of art where that is not the goal of the practice. What all of these cases show is a potential discontinuity between the evolutionary story and the practice being explained. It is not that the posited evolutionary past did not happen, but rather that it is not necessarily relevant to explaining the phenomenon in question. There is an evolutionary history to the archaeopteryx claw, but it does not have to do with perching on branches. There may have been some point where the development of art-practice involved impressing potential mates, but that does not help explain the actual art-practice that involved painting the insides of the Chauvet and Lascaux caves. If an evolutionary story is going to be given about a practice, it has to first be shown to apply to that practice. Art is not art because it is the end process of some evolutionary process, but rather some evolutionary story is relevant insofar as it is relevant to the development of art. This story cannot be given without a prior account of what art is. The practice of art must come first.

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<sup>182</sup> Davies, 60.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 62.

Just as the practice of art must come first when tying an evolutionary story to a theory of art, so to must the practice of humour come first in giving an account of humour. Any internalist story has to be shown to apply to humour, and for that to be done there has to be some clarity as to what humour is. Or, put another way, the internalist story has to be shown to explain the phenomena in question. This is an issue in the case of humour because, as I showed in section 1.2.1, “humour” as distinguished by theorists like Hutcheson and Shaftesbury was a very classed phenomenon, different from the pan-human phenomenon that Carroll, Morreall, and Hurley et al try to get at. Billig argues that the effect of the class distinction of humour is what he calls an “ideological positivism.”<sup>184</sup> As is relevant to internalist explanations, this means that the phenomena that the internalist theories are seeking to explain – the evolutionary genealogies that they are giving – are far too narrow, and do not cover the full human practice of humour.

### 1.2.3 Historical Humour Practices

In this section, I give a brief overview of different humour practices from antiquity to the present day. I do not mean to contend that each and all of these detailed practices are paradigmatic accounts of humour. Rather, I just wish to put forward that these are ways that humour has been practiced and, consequently, they are data points for which a theory of humour must account. Accordingly, my goal is to show the breadth of humour practice across time. The historic-mindedness of my approach is to try to avoid the trap of presentism. As Billig notes, philosophical and psychological studies of humour and amusement unquestioningly take current-day instances of humour, usually jokes,<sup>185</sup> to be the paradigmatic examples of humour that must be explained.<sup>186</sup> However, that these

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<sup>184</sup> The class distinction is not the only reason for ideological positivism, but it is the one I feel I can discuss. Billig also attributes positivism to personalities and positional jockeying within the academy, where authors and researchers wish to show that they are funny and, therefore, superior. While he may identify something genuine, I do not believe myself to be in a position to discuss such dynamics with any authority.

<sup>185</sup> Berys Gaut compares the narrow focus of humour studies on jokes to literature studies focussing near-exclusively on advertising slogans. Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 242.

<sup>186</sup> Billig, 2.

examples are paradigmatic may be challenged on two grounds. The first ground is that current-day paradigmatic instances of humour may be determined by material circumstances or even just historical coincidence – some humour practice being dominant now does not necessarily mean that this practice is timeless or representative of all possible practices. The second ground is that what is taken as a paradigmatic example of humour may be prefigured by theory, thus amounting to a subtle form of question-begging.<sup>187</sup> This is most evident in the work of Noel Carroll when responding to a challenge to his incongruity theory of humour.<sup>188</sup> He articulates incongruity theory by appealing to what he considers to be paradigmatic examples of humour, and then claiming that incongruity is what they have in common.<sup>189</sup> Against the challenge that the incongruity theory does not capture instances of humour that trade on recognition or familiarity, he claims that these instances of potential humour do not trade on incongruity, so therefore are not real instances of humour.<sup>190</sup> The recognition-based humour is only able to be ruled out because it is not considered to be a paradigmatic form of humour that has to be explained, and the incongruity theory is only able to stand because only incongruity-supporting examples are considered paradigmatic examples that have to be explained. Altogether, then, my goal is to present a historically-minded overview of different humour practices for the purpose of getting an idea of the range of possible humour practices, and, following from the previous subsection, it is these varied practices for which a theory of humour would have to account.

There is a worry that I believe is best addressed at the start. If I am accusing other theorists of using gerrymandered examples of humour – even if they themselves are not doing the gerrymandering – then how am I to be sure I

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<sup>187</sup> Marshall Sahlins identified this general trend in 1971, when he wrote of sociobiology, “Ever since Hobbes placed the bourgeois society he knew in the state of nature, the ideology of capitalism has been marked by a reciprocal dialectic between the folk conceptions of culture and nature. Conceived in the image of the market system, the nature thus culturally figured has been in turn used to explain the human social order, and vice versa, in an endless reciprocal interchange between social Darwinism and natural capitalism.” The crucial idea being that the idea of “nature” that was being appealed to was itself already heavily the product of cultural influence. Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1976), xv.

<sup>188</sup> Carroll, 48, 52.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 48-49.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

am not guilty of the same? What is it that makes these examples of humour examples of *humour*? My first response is that I have specifically chosen these examples from historical accounts of humour practice. Accordingly, I can at least say that it is not just myself understanding these practices as being of humour. As I will argue, these are all activities centred around the provocation of laughter, and the social role that that laughter plays; this is an additional reason to think of all the examples I present as being of the same sort of thing. Lastly, I do not believe that any of the presented examples will challenge the reader's intuitions very strongly. While they may fall outside of the realm of the so-called paradigmatic examples of humour provided by the internalist theorists, I do not think that any of the examples will be unacceptable as examples of humour.

The three eras from which I will draw examples are classical Greece, medieval Europe, and early-modern Italy. These cases are by no means exhaustive of historical practice, but they are enough to establish a range of humour practice. There are two points of interest in Greece. First is the character of the *gelotopoios* – literally, the “laughter producer.”<sup>191</sup> The *gelotopoios* would make their living by getting invited to the dinner of a rich patron in exchange for making the patron and the guests laugh.<sup>192</sup> Surviving materials, in the form of accounts and guide materials, suggest that the *gelotopoios* did three main things to make the host and guests laugh: they told jokes, they engaged in mimicry, and they flattered the host.<sup>193</sup> What is relevant here is that all three activities were considered to be part of the same practice, which was making the host and guests laugh. By contemporary standards, only the jokes would fall under the category of “humour,” but in the ancient Greek context, all of joking, mimicry, and flattering were part of the same practice of producing laughter. Greek antiquity also saw various festivals which were characterized by insult humour. The *Lenaea* and the *Anthesteria*, for instance, were festivals in honour of Dionysus and were characterized by the suspension of social mores.<sup>194</sup> In particular, men would stand

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<sup>191</sup> Jan Bremmer, “Jokes, Jokers and Jokebooks in Ancient Greek Culture” in *A Cultural History of Humour*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Rodenburg, 11-28 (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1997).

<sup>192</sup> Bremmer, 13-14.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 13.

on wagons and mock passersby.<sup>195</sup> Accordingly, insults can be added alongside jokes, mimicry, and flattery as things that could be part of humour practice in the context of ancient Greece.

Medieval Europe offers two distinct examples of humour practice, one for the nobility and one for the peasantry. Amongst the ruling classes there was the concept of the *Rex Facetus*, or the king who laughs.<sup>196</sup> The laughing king was a theoretical construct made in light of the idea that humans should be understood as *homo risibilis*, or the man who laughs.<sup>197</sup> In elite circles, laughter was deemed either moral or immoral based on the status of the one who was laughing and the one who was generating the laughter.<sup>198</sup> Laughter, in general, was considered ethically risky since it was a loss of control in the face of subservience to God.<sup>199</sup> The *Rex Facetus* was entitled to joke, and thus laugh, because they were in a position of authority relative to all other humans. The king sought to generate laughter, and by laughing his subjects demonstrated their social relation (of inferiority and servitude) to the king. Subjects were not permitted to joke to the king. In peasant circles, humour played a similar role in social structure, but amongst equals. Specifically, there was the practice of the “gab,” which is a trading of banter and tall stories for the sake of generating laughter.<sup>200</sup> While the laughter of the king was his special prerogative, owing to his status, peasants were of equal status and so would be laughing together. Accordingly, the gab pursued laughter similarly to the *Rex Facetus* with the key difference being that one practice used laughter to signal a stratified hierarchy – between king and subjects – whereas the other one used laughter to signal a flat hierarchy – between equals.

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<sup>195</sup> Bremmer, 13.

<sup>196</sup> Jacques LeGoff, “Laughter in the Middle Ages” in *A Cultural History of Humour*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Rodenburg, 40-53 (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1997).

<sup>197</sup> LeGoff, 43.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 49.

Early-modern Italy featured the practice of the *beffa*, a sort of practical joke.<sup>201</sup> The goal of the *beffa* was to lure someone into a vulnerable position and take advantage of them, usually in a way that involved covering the victim in bodily fluids of some sort.<sup>202</sup> *Beffe* worked as a sort of competition between nominal equals in a civilian society with the goal being the schadenfreude the executor of the joke would feel at the suffering of the victim.<sup>203</sup> In this sense, the *beffa* has a kinship with the laughter of medieval Europe in that both are keenly interested in structuring the social order. However, whereas the *gab* and *Rex Facetus* were justified along already-existing social lines, the *beffa* worked as an exercise in creating social power by the joker over her victim.

While these different humour practices are quite varied – varied in form and varied in social role – what they have in common is that they pursue the reaction of laughter. The *gelotopoiios* pursued the laughter of the host, the *gab* pursued the laughter of the peer-group, and the *beffe* pursued the laughter of the joker at the expense of the victim. This suggests that the practice of humour, varied as it is across time, has been to one degree or another oriented towards evoking laughter. Whose laughter is supposed to be evoked may change, but laughter in one way or another is always the end goal. Accordingly, a theory of humour as social practice should look at humour as a practice or set of practices centred around provoking laughter.<sup>204</sup>

To be clear, this approach does not contradict internalist accounts. There is nothing in an account that holds humour to be a historically-developed social

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<sup>201</sup> Peter Burke, “Frontiers of the Comic in Early Modern Italy, c.1350-1750” in *A Cultural History of Humour*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Rodenburg, 61-75 (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1997).

<sup>202</sup> Two examples: “In a story told by Sabadino (no.16), a craftsman goes to the barber to be shaved and sees that the barber’s shoes are very large. ‘He felt an urge to piss in them’ (*li venne voglia de urinarli dentro*), and he does so. In a story by Bandello (1.35), Madonna Cassandra has an affair with a friar, the husband discovers, dresses as the friar, takes laxative pills and shits all over her in the bed.” While these are stories, and not accounts, they may be taken as representative of the spirit of the *beffa* even if they may be more extreme than any practical jokes that were actually executed. Burke, 67.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>204</sup> It is worth noting that Jerrold Levinson speculates something similar in an encyclopedia entry, but only as a refinement to the incongruity theory. It does not seem to have caught on, only being mentioned and then quickly dismissed by Noel Carroll. Jerrold Levinson, “Humour,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 1998): 3713.

practice aimed at producing laughter that makes an internalist account impossible – it is possible that there is a unifying mental process or unifying phenomenology that all instances of humour have in common. All the current internalist accounts allow that humour is something that tends to be expressed in laughter, which fits with a historic development of humour centred around provoking laughter. I argue, however, that this historically-minded account gives a reason to strongly doubt the efficacy of internalist accounts. Remember that internalist accounts involve a distinction between humour-appropriate and humour-inappropriate laughter. This may follow the distinction between Duchenne and non-Duchenne laughter, as it does with Hurley et al, though both Morreall and Carroll do not invoke the Duchenne distinction. What the historical account suggests is that humour developed by pursuing laughter *simpliciter*. There is no evidence to suggest that the laughter of the *beffa*, the *gab*, or the *Lenaean* mockery was evaluated to be specifically humour-appropriate by the standards of the internalists.

I speculate that the pursuit of laughter *simpliciter* should be predicted in a historically-minded theory of humour. This is because humourists seeking an audience, irrespective of whether their audience is themselves, peers, or patrons, would not have any complex internal theory by which to judge the laughter of others. They would simply evaluate their practice by whether or not it generated laughter. This is speculative, but can find evidence in the contemporary practice of stand-up comedy. Comedians evaluate and develop their performances, and central to this development is recording and listening back to how the audience reacted. Laughter is taken as a sign that a performance is funny, lack of laughter is taken as sign that something needs to be corrected or improved.

Altogether, then, I argue for the following. Humour is a social practice that has developed across different historical and cultural contexts. The constant across these eras, in practice, is that humour has been oriented towards provoking laughter. The conditions for the success of humour have been varied and have included both the quality of the humour – as in the case of the *gelotopoios* – and the social positions of humourist and audience – as in the case of the *Rex*



*Facetus*. Since humour practice has been oriented towards provoking laughter, and the social positions of the humourist or audience may determine whether or not laughter is an appropriate reaction, humour is best understood and evaluated as a social practice. An instance of humour is funny if it merits laughter, and it fails to be funny if it does not merit laughter. Whether or not some piece of humour merits a reaction depends on standards specific to the context of the humour-practice. These standards may be various and could include, among other things, the content of the humourist's performance, the skill with which it is executed, or the social position of people involved in the humour.

#### **1.2.4 Two Standards of Humour**

While particular instances of humour may have any number of particular standards, I believe that the social account gives rise to two particular standards. I will term these the standard of comprehensibility and the standard of participation. On the social account of humour, if an attempted humour act is to succeed, it will have to satisfy both these standards. If an attempt at humour is properly funny, then it must be both comprehensible and merit participation.

To say that an act of humour is comprehensible is to say that all necessary parties (usually the humourist and the audience) are able to recognize the act as an attempted act of humour, recognize that act's component parts, and how those component parts function. The act's component parts are just the different parts of a humour act, like the set-up and punchline of a joke. As was established in chapter 1, the audience should be understood normally so that the evaluative focus is properly on the attempted act of humour. So to say that the normative audience recognizes the act as an attempt at humour is to say that the act is recognizable as humour to a sufficiently and appropriately informed audience.

The standard of participation is what is probably most often thought of when an attempt is humour is thought of as funny or not funny. The participation in question is that of the audience, which is standardly but not necessarily in the form of laughter. Laughter is not necessary because while humour developed as a practice centred around the provocation of laughter, it has diversified in such a

way that not all humour practices pursue laughter. If the humour act pursues the reaction of laughter, then the audience participates by laughing (in the appropriate way, if the humour act in question carries such a standard). If the audience does not laugh, or give another endorsing reaction, then they have not participated. Again, the audience is considered normatively, so that the object of analysis is the act of attempted humour – the joke, the story, the *beffa* – rather than the proclivities of some particular audience.

It is worth underlining that both comprehensibility and participation are not all-or-nothing. Humour may be more or less comprehensible without being totally comprehensible or totally incomprehensible. It may encourage or repel participation by degrees. In this way, it is possible to discuss humour as more or less funny without having to commit to some flaw making a humour act not funny at all. The virtues and vices of an attempted act of humour may coexist.

Of the two standards, participation is the more important of the two. It is through the standard of participation that humour may be evaluated as a social phenomenon. In describing why a failure in comprehensibility hurt a piece of humour, it will often be described in terms of participation: the lack of comprehension led to the lack of laughter. Funniness is no longer just the result of some synapses in the brain that either do or do not fire, but the outcome of the way that people interact. This will prove particularly relevant in chapter 5, when the standard of participation allows for a whole new way of ethically evaluating humour.

### **1.2.5 Found Humour**

Accounting for humour as a social practice immediately suggests one very significant lacuna. There are many things that are funny, or amusing, that occur outside of any obvious social practice. These are instances where there is no joker, festival, or other person or ritual to situate what is happening within what would intuitively be called a practice or institution. Rather, there is just the oddly-shaped potato, mistake in speaking, or person falling down a manhole and

dying. I will call these instances of “found humour,” to mirror the term “found art.”<sup>205</sup>

Found humour, like found art, becomes humour because it is engaged as humour. It is not strictly analogous to found art, since found art requires a change in institutional context, moving something from its original context into an art-institutional one. Engaging objects or situations as instances of humour is probably best analogous to engaging instances of noise or sounds as music. Sonic phenomena, intentionally created or not, get engaged as music whether or not they are re-contextualized in an art-institutional context. Such engaged-as-music sounds may range from bird or humpback whale songs (the latter of which often get recontextualized into art-institutional contexts<sup>206</sup>), to the churn of the industrial city, to everyday human speech. Reacting to these phenomena as music does not just mean that one has had a particular emotional response to them, but that they are engaged in certain ways; people (consciously or unconsciously) listen for rhythm, melody, and so on. They engage the sounds in the same way they engage music, and they are able to engage the sounds in this way because they have socially learned ways to engage music.

Similar to music and sonic phenomena, the way we engage with different humour practices are socially learned.<sup>207</sup> The sorts of things that are responded to with laughter, and the ways one does and ought to laugh are, in part at least, learned through formative interactions with parents, peers, and media. All that is necessary for something to be funny in the wild is for it to conform to the standards of or be similar to humour practice. A potato shaped like Richard Nixon may merit amused laughter because it conforms to the practices of recognition-based humour. Mistakes may be funny if they are sufficiently similar to humour practices that trade in *schadenfreude* and degradation.

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<sup>205</sup> By this comparison I do not mean to argue that both music and humour are engaged in the same way. Rather, I just wish to show that what I am proposing for humour – that people may engage with non-institutional phenomena through socially-learned ways of acting for appreciating institutional practices – is not something I have invented ad hoc.

<sup>206</sup> See, for example, *Songs of the Humpback Whale* (1970), produced by Roger Payne.

<sup>207</sup> The exact relative contributions of nature and nurture are unclear and, owing to the role that laughter plays in parent-infant interactions, probably unclarifiable.

The strength of such an account is that it allows for different things to be found funny for different reasons. Just as noise may be engaged as music for its timbre (in the case of the industrial city) or its melody (in the case of a human voice), some instance may be engaged as humour because it is familiar, strange, disgusting, anxiety-inducing, or humiliating. In turn, just as some naturally occurring noise's being rhythmic and melodious may allow that noise to be referred to as beautiful, so to could some situation offering the right mix of reassurance and someone else's misfortunate allow that situation to rightly be called funny.

It is worth noting that the having the category of found humour should not be considered costly to a social account, since a similar idea exists for internalist accounts. Reviewing classical and contemporary accounts of humour in *The Psychology of Humour*, Rod A. Martin and Thomas E. Ford note the importance of what they call the "humour mindset."<sup>208</sup> Invoking empirical research, both from themselves and from others, they show that there is a difference in subjects reporting a stimulus as humorous depending on the subjects' state of mind.<sup>209</sup> If the subject engages a stimulus as something that is the class of thing that could be funny (either a conventional humour object like a joke, or a found event paired with the prompt that this event could be conventionally considered humorous), they were found to more readily identify the stimulus as funny.<sup>210</sup> This is important for the social account, since it means that my account of found humour does not require any commitments that radically differ from those of internalist theories. I may have to describe found humour separately, but I am not inventing any new phenomena.

## 2. The Humour that Makes Satire

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<sup>208</sup> Ford and Martin, 64.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. The specific research which they invoke is Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, "Misattribution Theory of Tendentious Humour," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 16, no.2 (1980); and Thomas E. Ford, "Effects of Sexist Humor in Tolerance of Sexist Events," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 26, no.9 (2000).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

In the previous chapter, I established that for a misrepresentation to be a satirical misrepresentation, it must merit amusement. In keeping with the stipulated definitions offered at the start of this chapter, amusement is simply taken to be the reaction appropriate to humour, and not a specific emotional reaction. The purpose of this section is to articulate, in light of the account of humour given in the previous section, just what it is for a satirical misrepresentation to be amusing. This will constitute the final individual piece of my definition of satire, and I will bring them all together in the next chapter. While the account of what it is for a misrepresentation to be humorous is short, this should not be taken to understate its importance in satire. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, a failure of clarity with respect to the humour in a would-be satirical misrepresentation is a common way that satire fails, and perhaps the most difficult part of creating satire.

This section makes use of the difference between prescribed and merited responses. A prescribed response is the response that a work attempts to bring about in its audience. A merited response is the response either that the audience ought to have or may not be faulted for having. This distinction most commonly occurs in lay discussions surrounding narrative works of horror and comedy. Bad horror movies are condemned as being “not scary” if their offerings of horror are particularly tepid. Similarly, comedies that fail to amuse are condemned as “not funny.” In each case, the lay critics are following a distinction between the reaction that the work is trying to bring about in the audience and the reaction the audience either ought to or may rightly have.

The first important thing upon which to focus is that a misrepresentation, to be a satirical misrepresentation, must specifically merit amusement.<sup>211</sup> This is to say that what is in question is not whether or not any particular audience finds some misrepresentation funny, but whether they ought to find it funny. Since amusement in this context is just the humour-appropriate response, and not the specific emotional reaction, no appeal to emotional response theories like

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<sup>211</sup> The next chapter will feature an in-depth discussion of how a satirical misrepresentation may fail to merit amusement.

fittingness theories or dispositional theories needs to be made. Rather, in following from humour being looked at as a practice, all that is necessary is that a misrepresentation adhere to and be consistent with humour practice, and, importantly, that it succeed in meriting the humour-appropriate response of amusement. Such a standard is extremely permissive with respect to the style of humour but that is a virtue – since satire is standardly thought of as a comedic practice it will capture standard satirical techniques without proscribing any frequently used techniques.

That a satirical misrepresentation must merely merit amusement, and not prescribe a response of amusement, is important for catching satirical misrepresentations that occur in a work's premise. Many satirical misrepresentations will prescribe amusement, which is to say that they will occur in a work at a point where the audience is encouraged to respond with amusement. For example, in the satirical action-comedy *Spy* (2015), the audience is encouraged to laugh at Rick Ford's boast that "during the threat of an assassination, I appeared convincingly in front of congress as Barack Obama." This is part of a series of increasingly ludicrous boasts played for comedy, and through a mix of framing, timing, and the actors'<sup>212</sup> performances the audience is encouraged to laugh. However, in works where there is satire inherent in the premise, there is often no such prescription because the premise, while operated within, is not something that the audience is invited to respond to as such. An example of this can be found in the Neill Blomkamp film *CHAPPIE* (2015), which is in part a satire of the technology industry. Central to the film, and its satire, is that all the human characters completely lack imagination – when faced with the concept of superhuman artificial intelligence they cannot imagine it doing anything more than providing a slightly better service than what they already receive. This misrepresentation is amusing – the technology industry appoints themselves as the visionaries of humankind's future but here they are shown as fundamentally dull-witted and trapped within their narrow worldview – but there is no point at which the work itself prescribes amusement. To say that amusement

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<sup>212</sup> Rick Ford is played by Jason Statham, and in this scene he is talking to a character played by Melissa McCarthy.

is still merited is to say that were the audience to react to this, amusement would be a proper response. For example, were one to reflect upon the setting of *CHAPPIE*, laughing at how the technology industry is misrepresented as dull-witted would be acceptable, even if there is at no point an actual gag to draw attention to this fact.

### 3. Other Humour in Satire

Humour plays several roles in satire beyond its definitional one within the satirical misrepresentation. In this section, I will explore two of humours frequent non-definitional roles within satire: of identifying the satire as either Horatian or Juvenalian satire, and as helping the audience identify a work as satirical more generally.

#### 3.1 Horace and Juvenal

One of the main taxonomies of satire is that of Horatian and Juvenalian satire. Roughly corresponding to the satiric traditions drawing back to Horace and Juvenal respectively, the distinction has been conceptualized in a few different ways over time.<sup>213</sup> Horace worked more in verse and prose, whereas Juvenal would present oratorical diatribes in the public square.<sup>214</sup> One of the distinctions between Horatian and Juvenalian satire focuses on this distinction of form, where the satire of Horatian satire is more embedded in a work of art that is a work in its own sake, whereas the Juvenalian satire is the diatribe that stands alone.<sup>215</sup> Another conceptualization of the Horatian-Juvenalian distinction is in the tone of the work.<sup>216</sup> Horatian satire is much more jocular, and the focus of the work is on entertaining the audience. Juvenalian satire, on the other hand, is vicious and mean-spirited with the primary focus being on the attacks against the satiric target.

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<sup>213</sup> For examples, see Dustin Griffin's historical overview of satiric theory in the first chapter of Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

<sup>214</sup> Griffin, 7-8, 43-45.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 43-45.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*.

Works of satire are now rarely thought to be wholly Horatian or wholly Juvenalian.<sup>217</sup> Horatian and Juvenalian satire were never the sorts of categories to which a satirist had to wholly adhere, and they were never the sorts of categories that determined whether or not a work was satirical or not. Rather, they are traditions that have influenced satirists who have come later. This means that works will often contain both Horatian and Juvenalian elements. Moreover, as satirists became conscious of these influences, they would experiment with them. And not only would they experiment with the influences of Horace and Juvenal, but they would also experiment with different artistic modes. Altogether, this means that in applying the concepts of Horatian and Juvenalian satire to any particular work of art, the goal is not to determine to which category some work of art belongs, but rather to identify and understand just how some particular work functions as satire.

I propose that one way of navigating the distinction between Horatian and Juvenalian satire is by invoking the concept of affiliative and disaffiliative laughter. Research shows that laughter, as a social signal, may be either affiliative or disaffiliative.<sup>218</sup> In lay terms, this is the difference between laughing with and laughing at. In technical terms, affiliative and disaffiliative laughter may be spelled out as follows: laughter is fundamentally a social signal.<sup>219</sup> As a social signal, it may be used to identify and negotiate group memberships and power dynamics.<sup>220</sup> Affiliative laughter is laughter that either represents or attempts to create an aligned group amongst the people laughing.<sup>221</sup> Disaffiliative laughter is laughter that either represents or attempts to create multiple groups with boundaries such that one or more people or targets are excluded.<sup>222</sup> Instances of laughter include a “laughable,” which is the target of the laughter.<sup>223</sup> Laughing at something identifies it as a laughable. The most common pattern of affiliative and

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<sup>217</sup> This is part of a general trend where the older, stricter literary theories of satire are no longer seen to be necessarily true. Griffin, 2.

<sup>218</sup> Glenn, 29-31.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 48-49.



disaffiliative laughter is the initiator of laughter affiliating themselves with other members of an ingroup and disaffiliating the laughable.<sup>224</sup> It is important to recognize that the designated laughable does not have to be a target for disaffiliation. Two paradigmatic cases where the laughable is treated affiliatively are in roast situations – like at a wedding or retirement – where guests make jokes at the expense of an honoured person, or certain sorts of self-deprecating humour where someone makes himself the laughable for the purposes of ingratiating himself to a group.

Since I have defined humour in terms of laughter, the affiliative/disaffiliative distinction can be extended to humour as well. Humour is a social practice that is centred around provoking laughter. Borrowing the sociological language of laughter studies, humour identifies things as laughable. The laughter that humour prescribes may be, although it is not necessarily, affiliative or disaffiliative. Whether humour is affiliative or disaffiliative is determined by the attitude evinced towards the laughable in the joke.<sup>225</sup> How that attitude is determined is managed by the interpretive strategy set out in chapter 1, where the joke is regarded as a sort of utterance and is understood in terms of its content and context, where the attitude motivating the joke is a crucial part of context.

In practice, the difference between affiliative and disaffiliative humour will often be difficult to distinguish. A good example of two similar cases that manage to evince different attitudes are the films *Borat* (2006) and *Bad Grandpa* (2013). Both films follow the pattern of the film's star putting on the disguise of a nominally subaltern outsider (an immigrant in the case of *Borat*, an elder in the case of *Bad Grandpa*) and drawing humour from the reactions of unsuspecting targets. In *Borat*, Sasha Baron Cohen takes on the character of Borat, a racist tourist from Kazakhstan. Using the pretense of making a travel documentary, he interviews a random assortment of Americans from mostly Midwestern states. By initiating with racist comments, the character draws out of the targets similarly

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> I use “joke” here as a shorthand for all the potential modes of humour and do not want to commit to all humour being in the mode of a joke.

racist (or sexist, or otherwise bigoted) statements. In *Bad Grandpa*, Johnny Knoxville takes on the character of Irving Zisman, an octogenarian trying to escort his grandson across the United States to his absent father. Zisman similarly draws humour out of the response to his outlandish behaviour, like trying to mail his grandson in a cardboard box. While both films take the humour from the reactions of unwitting onlookers, I argue that *Bad Grandpa* is affiliative, while *Borat* is disaffiliative. In the case of *Borat*, the targets are presented as people who are ignorant, venal, or vicious. These are people who have morally failed in some deep and fundamental way and are accordingly seen as lesser human beings.<sup>226</sup> The humour is in the targets showing themselves as they really are when they think they can get away with it. The targets are held up as something that the audience is not. In *Bad Grandpa*, on the other hand, the humour comes from the difficulty of the targets to manage the balance between respect for their elders and the absurd behaviour of Zisman. While the stunts pulled in the film are extreme, this helps to bring out that the difficulties that people are having with Zisman are not from their moral failures, but from their attempts at moral decency. While the humour is prank-based, it is fundamentally sympathetic – it trades on common difficulties the audience faces in trying to be morally good people. The humour is affiliative. Perhaps tellingly, the end credits of *Bad Grandpa* show the cast bringing together all of the targets for a barbecue, celebration, and viewing of the film. Despite having been taken advantage of in the initial filming, the targets are willing to come together with the filmmakers and laugh at their own failures. I doubt such an event would have been possible for *Borat*.

In the context of satire, the satirist is presenting the satiric target (or something about the satiric target) as laughable and inviting the audience to laugh at that.<sup>227</sup> Following from my argument in this section, the humour of the satire may be either affiliative or disaffiliative. This may be in the humour that is

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<sup>226</sup> It is probably worth putting *Borat* in the context of the Bush-era United States, where citizens of flyover states were often presented as backwards degenerates who were perverting the course of progress.

<sup>227</sup> As Griffin notes, and as I cover in chapter 1, the relationship between satirist, audience, and target is quite complicated in practice. The satirist, audience, and target are not necessarily three discrete people – the same person may, for instance, be both audience and target.

core to the satire – this is to say the humour of the satirical misrepresentation – but it does not have to be. It simply needs to be directed at the satiric target. I contend that if the humour is affiliative, this is reason to think of the satire as Horatian, and if the humour is disaffiliative, this is reason to think of the satire as Juvenalian. This tracks the second distinction between Horatian and Juvenalian satire, where Juvenalian satire is considered to be more focused on attacking its target, whereas Horatian satire is considered to be more focused on jocularity and enjoyment.

Works of satire will often contain both Horatian and Juvenalian elements, and at times it will be unclear which way a work leans. For example, a 2011 study found that viewers of the satirical television show *The Colbert Report* would tend to attribute the underlying attitude of the show as aligned with whatever were the personal politics of the viewer in question.<sup>228</sup> While most all viewers were able to identify that the show was satirical, and it was a satire of right-wing pundit and newscaster Bill O'Reilly, liberals would identify the ultimate political point of *The Colbert Report* as being liberal, whereas conservatives would identify its point as being conservative.<sup>229</sup>

### 3.2 This Is Satire

It is necessary for any work of satire to contain some signal to let the audience know that the work they are engaging with is satirical. The use of humour can be very effective for this, as it can force the audience to reevaluate the thing with which they are engaging. It can be used to break the flow of narrative and draw attention to some feature. This is in some way similar to the way that laughter can show that one is just joking, or a carefully inserted joke in a conversation can show that the speaker is not serious. John Morreall proposes something similar to

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<sup>228</sup> Heather LaMarre, Kristen Landreville, and Michael Beam, "The Irony of Satire: Political Ideology and the Motivation to See What You Want to See in *The Colbert Report*," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 14, no.2 (2009): 212-231.

<sup>229</sup> This is probably how Stephen Colbert ended up getting hired to perform at the White House Press Correspondents Dinner for George W. Bush.

this in his account of play theory, where humour altogether developed out of enacting fake threats to trigger false alarm laughter.<sup>230</sup>

One artist who often makes use of this sort of identifying humour is the filmmaker Neill Blomkamp. In his debut feature, *District 9* (2009), he seeks to do this in action scenes with gore that he finds funny.<sup>231</sup> This is particularly pointed during the climactic action scene, which could otherwise be engaged as nothing more than a simple fight between heroes and villains. The humour is used to draw attention to certain features of the scene, which are part of the thematic core of the satire. For example, one humorous gore explosion is inflicted upon a mercenary soldier who climbed a watchtower set up by the Nigerian gang. The soldier taking the watchtower unifies two themes running throughout the movie. The first is the dual role of, on one hand, government, military, and rational administration, and, on the other, crime, religion, and superstition, in maintaining the oppression of subaltern people. The second is control of technology. Throughout the film, the two antagonists – the international corporation that employs the mercenaries and the Nigerian gang – have vied for control and the ability to operate alien technology. In the scene with the watchtower, then, these two themes coincide. One oppressive side seamlessly takes control of the other's technology and uses it to continue the oppressive mission against the aliens. All this could easily pass without notice in a normal action scene – the humour helps draw attention to the fact that something is happening that deserves further consideration.

Blomkamp pulls a similar trick in his next film, *Elysium* (2013). Early in this film, the protagonist, Max, is brutalized by robotic police officers. He is then sent to talk to a robotic processing drone. When Max gets irritated, the processing drone humorously offers him calming medication, literal chill pills. This joke makes clear that the interaction between Max and the robotic police force is important, and indeed the film will go on to interrogate the role of technology in enforcing justice. Without the humorous interaction with the processing drone –

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<sup>230</sup> Morreall, 43.

<sup>231</sup> Neill Blomkamp, "Commentary: Neill Blomkamp," *District 9*, DVD, directed by Neill Blomkamp (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2009).

for example, if the film had just had the interaction with the police force – it would be easier for the audience to miss that the robotic police force is playing the role of intentional object in a satiric misrepresentation.

The use of humour to engender a change in tone can work the other way too, with the sudden absence of humour being used to emphasize that something is satire. Many satires are heavily comedic, so a well-timed drop into seriousness can help to make clear to the audience that a work is not just a comedy but one with a satiric edge. One film that does this particularly well is Michael Bay's *Pain and Gain* (2013). The film, based on a true story, follows a gang of body builders as they kidnap and torture a rich client for the sake of stealing all his material wealth. The true story is famous for the Sun Gym Gang's plan being so utterly stupid that the victim could not get the police to believe him, and the gang consequently got away with it. The film is thoroughly comedic, emphasizing the Sun Gym Gang as a bunch of bumbling and sexually insecure gasheads. The film could easily pass with the audience missing not necessarily the venality and malice of the gang, but that this venality and malice are bad things that the film is seeking to criticize. Accordingly, the film inserts a number of scenes where the humour drops, such as when Daniel Lugo, leader of the Sun Gym Gang, pushes the kidnapped Victor Kershaw to the floor and roars directly into the camera, "I don't just want what you have, I want you not to have it." The scene is a sudden shock, breaking the comedic tone of the movie, and confronting the audience with something deeply uncomfortable.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to present an account of humour in satire. I have provided that in three sections. First was an account of humour itself, focusing on humour as a social practice oriented around provoking laughter. Second was an account of what is meant by holding that satirical misrepresentation must be humorous. I gave a very permissive account of humour in satirical misrepresentation, allowing that for a satiric misrepresentation to be funny all it

must do is adhere to the conventions of humour and succeed in meriting a positive response. Lastly, I gave an account of frequent, practical uses of humour in satire. These uses help the audience engage the satire of the work, but are not definitional.

At this point, I have provided the basic points of a definition of satire – about humour, criticism, and audience engagement. In the next chapter, I will draw all these elements together and provide a unified definition of satire. I will also properly engage the existing literary theory on satire to show that both my theory and the arguments I have provided so far are copacetic with the existing understanding of satire.

## **Chapter 4: An Account of Satire**

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the material of the first three chapters and offer a coherent theory of satire. To achieve this, this chapter will contain four sections. The first section will be a short collation of the first three chapters, arranging what I have written about interpretation, misrepresentation, and humour. The second section will cover the literary theory on satire. I will not be challenging the literary theory - rather, my goal will be to show that the philosophy I have written about satire does in fact track satire as it is generally understood. In the third section I will engage the two existing analytic accounts of satire: Nicholas Diehl's "Satire, Analogy, and Moral Philosophy," and Dieter DeClerq's "A Definition of Satire (And Why A Definition Matters)." In the fourth section I will draw out clarity as a virtue of good satiric work, as made evident by my theory of satire.

### **1.1 A Theory of Satire**

The theory of satire that I present will be the following: "a work is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it criticizes a target by way of a funny misrepresentation." The first part of the definition I will focus on is "in part or in whole," since this does not draw from any of the previous chapters. This clause simply has the effect that it is possible both for a work as a whole to be satirical – a work of satire, so to speak – or for elements within an otherwise unsatirical work to be satirical. An example of a work that may be called a work of satire would be the film *Dr. Strangelove*, which tells the story of the United States careening towards an apocalyptic war due to a mix of stupidity and incompetence. An example of the latter – satire within an otherwise unsatirical work – would be the character of Dr. Bigbee in the novel *The Watch that Ends the Night*. The story of *The Watch* is a loosely autobiographical account of the author Hugh MacLennan as he reflects on the failed radicalism of his youth, and reconciles his feelings for his recently deceased wife, Dorothy MacLennan, and his best friend Dr. Norman Bethune. At one stage of the novel the lead character, George, goes to work at a boarding school outside of Montreal run by Englishman and Anglophile Dr. Bigbee.

Bigbee is a satire of the Anglophile tendency in English Canada — he is obsessed with representing and teaching English history, and knows very little about Canada at all. He returns to England at each opportunity, and spends his time in Canada insulating himself in a room thoroughly ordained with pictures and relics of English history. The character of Dr. Bigbee, and the themes and ideas which surround his character, appear in little more than one chapter of the book. Altogether, while the book as a whole is not satirical, the character of Dr. Bigbee is. A work may contain satire without being entirely a satire.

The effects of the chapter on trust and interpretation will be drawn out more fully in the final section of this chapter, where I focus on the value of clarity. As it effects the definition of satire, what is important is that the satire must in some way be evident in the finished product of the work itself, and cannot solely depend on the intentions of the work's makers. This shows in the theory of satire as I write “...it criticizes a target...” — it is not sufficient for a work's maker to imagine themselves to be making a criticism, or for them to be believing themselves to be using a funny misrepresentation, they have to achieve that in the work. This is largely just a continuation of the common approach to interpretation where, since what is being interpreted is the work itself, for the intentions of the artist to be relevant they must be manifest in the work.

There are not many high-profile instances of works that completely fail to be satirical because the artist does not succeed in making his intentions manifest in the work. This is because if an artist has failed to make his intentions manifest at all he likely lacks the basic aptitudes and competencies to make a work of any relevance by any merit. (There are more ambiguous cases which I will engage in the final section of this chapter on clarity.) The best example is probably the film *Score! A Hockey Musical*. The film is a musical that tells the story of a teenaged hockey prospect trying to make it as a serious player despite not fighting.<sup>232</sup> In terms of substance, the film is full of the sort of trite, “aw shucks” self-denying nationalism that permeates Canada and can turn into a vicious xenophobia without

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<sup>232</sup> Fighting and violence in general has a privileged place in Canadian hockey culture.



much prompting.<sup>233</sup> The film is also, according to director Michael McGowan and a handful of reviews, a satire, although just how it is a satire goes unmentioned.<sup>234</sup> It cannot be a satire of hockey stories, since the story it tells is straightforward and conventional.<sup>235</sup> It cannot be a satire of musicals since there is no way that the conventions of musicals are misrepresented or criticized – the film simply is a musical. Altogether, if the intentions of the filmmakers were to make a satire, none of that is manifest in the film itself.

The two remaining chapters to be discussed are those on misrepresentation and humour, and their respective relationships to satire have already been discussed within their respective chapters. Misrepresentation first distinguishes satire from mere invective. Works of satire criticize a target. However, plenty of other works also criticize targets. It is the use of misrepresentation that makes the criticism distinctly satiric – otherwise the work is merely criticizing its target directly. The misrepresented target of satiric criticism is referred to as the “intentional object,” which, along with the “model” (the target outwith the work and the basis of the intentional object), composes the “double object.” Since satire does not just misrepresent the model but specifically criticizes the model through the way it is misrepresented, it is either in or through the features that make the intentional object a misrepresentation of the model that the model is criticized. Holding that the criticism happens “by way” of the misrepresentation allows for two possibilities. One is where the misrepresentation itself constitutes the criticism. This is a staple of political cartoons where a politician may be misrepresented as being pig-like (they are greedy or gluttonous), having a long nose (they lie), or being dressed like a Nazi (they are a Nazi). The other is that the misrepresentation may form the basis of the criticism so that while the misrepresentation may not itself constitute the criticism, it is still essential for the

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<sup>233</sup> The reason this film was able to poke its head out of obscurity is its trite nationalism, which led to it opening the otherwise-prestigious Toronto International Film Festival in 2010.

<sup>234</sup> Michael Rechtshaffen, “Score: A Hockey Musical -- Film Review,” *Hollywood Reporter*, October 14, 2010, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/score-hockey-musical-film-review-29970>; Stephen Cole, “Score: A Hockey Musical: It’s Love on Skates,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 26, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/score-a-hockey-musical-its-love-on-skates/article4329798/>; Greig Dymond, “Review: Score: A Hockey Musical,” *CBC*, October 21, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/review-score-a-hockey-musical-1.923048>.

<sup>235</sup> In fact, its story is nearly identical to the popular and unsatirical 1986 film *Youngblood*.

satiric criticism. This is common in dystopian satires. For example, in the film *Brazil* the perennial Christmas is the basis of the criticism that commercialism has undermined the authentic meaning of holidays and other social rituals.

There are two points to make about the requirement that the misrepresentation be funny. The first point is that “funny” plays a normative role here – it must be the case that the audience ought to find the misrepresentation funny whether or not any particular audience actually does. The second point is that requiring the misrepresentation serves as a guarantor of the connection between the model and intentional objects. It is essential to the humour of the misrepresentation that it applies to the model. If the criticism does not apply then then humour will fail, and so the satire will fail. Humour may also fail for ethical reasons (which will be the subject of the next chapter), in which case the satire will fail. In cases such as these the attack on the model is considered to be simply cruel, and as such fails to be an actual criticism.

This last point draws attention to something that is relevant but not fully articulated in any of the previous chapters: that satire specifically criticizes its target. To say that satire criticizes its target is to say that it identifies in its target something that it considers to be negative, and identifies it as negative. Accordingly, criticism is more specific than merely attacking a target, it is attacking a target for some particular quality the target possesses. If all a work manages to manifest is a distaste of the target, and not a distaste for some particular feature of the target, then the work is not satirical. I choose criticism rather than attack also because there are some satiric criticisms that are made with such conviviality that it seems inappropriate to consider them attacks. While a negative feature of the target is identified, there is no real attempt at injuring or insulting the target. Instances of such may not be too common, but they do exist and will typically be found in the most tepid of Horatian satire. Such an instance may be found in a skit from the 2004 White House Correspondents’ Dinner where then President George W. Bush fruitlessly searched for nuclear and chemical weapons in the Oval Office. While there was a real criticism behind the sketch – concerning the superficial, inept, and unsuccessful search for so-termed weapons

of mass destruction in Iraq – the toothless nature and setting of the skit makes it difficult to consider it a real attack on Bush.

Altogether, I offer the theory that a work is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it criticizes a target by way of a funny misrepresentation. The rest of the chapter is devoted to three things. The first thing is putting my theory in the context of existing literary theory on satire. While I believe that my theory is of a different sort than literary theories, I believe it is important to invoke the literary theories to show that what I am discussing does in fact track what is considered to be satire, and I have not wandered off following some philosophical chimera. The second thing is to examine the existing philosophical theories of satire and show them to be inadequate. In the final section of the chapter I will articulate and defend clarity as a particularly important value of satire.

## 2. Literary Work on Satire

So far I have attempted to give a philosophical account of satire. One important ingredient is to show that what I have provided meaningfully tracks what is commonly understood to be satire. For that reason, I now turn my attention to literary theory that has been written on the topic of satire. My goal is not to challenge their writing, but just to show that what I have provided follows what they describe. In this section, then, I will cover three areas. First I will examine current work on the state of satiric theory. As I will show, overarching theories of satire are largely out of favour, and writers prefer to focus on particular periods or stylistic elements. Accordingly, I will also look at theory that emerged out of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, when overarching theories were more in favour. Since I am merely seeking to show that my theory follows what is considered to be satire, it is sufficient to look to these mid-Century theories without needing them to be wholly correct. Lastly, I will review my account in light of the literary theory and show that I am writing about what is commonly accepted to be satire.

The central modern text on satire is Dustin Griffin's 1993 *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*. Griffin situates his work as coming after a relative lull in the study

of satire, and focuses on an overview of 20<sup>th</sup> Century theorizing. This makes his work particularly useful for establishing a baseline of theory since *Satire* is as much about writing about satire as it is about satire. Griffin identifies satiric theory as existing along two axes. The first he terms “inquiry and provocation,” which can be taken to mean the critical end of satire.<sup>236</sup> This is the part of satire that is focused on making a point. The second he terms “display and play,” and this has more to do with the sorts of techniques that make satire popular and enjoyable to the audience.<sup>237</sup> He presents the history of theorizing over satire as being focused on the former, the inquiry and provocation that gives cognitive value to satire. The conventional theorizing, according to Griffin, would often hold the following four point assumption: (1) that satire revolved around a “bipolar”<sup>238</sup> pattern of praise and blame; (2) at the thematic centre of each satire is a moral standard; (3) the satirist appeals to that standard, and assumes that it is shared; and (4) the satirist works as a preacher, seeking to persuade.<sup>239</sup> That such an account is common lends weight to the idea that satire is at heart a moral technique – even if particular theorists may be more or less precise, more or less right or wrong, there is nevertheless a consensus that satire has a point and that point is some sort of moral education. However, Griffin complicates this with an important insight. Defences of satire as morally valuable, he argues, tend to arise when satire is being criticized for being indulgent and vicious.<sup>240</sup> For example John Dryden’s “Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire,” published at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, was in part motivated by the beginning of a moralistic backlash against satire.<sup>241</sup> While being published after Dryden’s “Discourse,” Griffin cites Richard Blackmore’s *Satyr against Wit* as an example of such a piece. As Griffin writes:

Dryden’s theory of satire... needs to be situated in its fullest rhetorical context as an attempt to reshape contemporary thinking

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<sup>236</sup> Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 35.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>238</sup> I understand this to mean that satire divides the world into the virtuous and the vicious, and is interested in assigning particulars into one or the other camp.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>240</sup> Griffin, 29.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

about satire, to justify Dryden's own practice (especially in "fine raillery"), and to influence its reception. It remains to note, in summary fashion, that Dryden's theory is of limited value for present-day theorists seeking any comprehensive account of the genre and of limited value even for explaining the practice of satire in Dryden's own day. Although it has been shown that Dryden's "Discourse" was widely known in the eighteenth century and that commentators on satire commonly quote it approvingly, his theory represents not so much what satire was and had been as what Dryden and his followers wanted it to be.<sup>242</sup>

Theory as a "defence" of satire would become common in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and Griffin notes that theory written by people like Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and Francis Bacon was motivated by the need to defend satire as morally valuable, rather than just a cruel indulgence.<sup>243</sup> Although Griffin does not fully frame the writing as such, the classical theorizing of Horace may also be read as such a defence, where Horace seeks to situate himself in a tradition of outspoken moral criticism.

The scepticism of the moral defences of satire (which is not the same as a scepticism of the potential moral value of satire) leads Griffin to focus on satire as a literary technique. This means a focus on satire as a thing through which the author demonstrates skill, satire as something written with particular regular techniques, and satires as particular works that are written in particular contexts.<sup>244</sup> This leads to a focus on investigating satire where the goal is not to figure out what satire is, but how it is created and received. The focus is on writer, text, and audience. This approach to satire is also evident in other, more recent, contemporary theoretical works on satire. Charles Knight's 2004 *The Literature of Satire*, for instance, focuses on how literature works as a performance of satire, and what that means for classifying satire as a genre.<sup>245</sup> Fredric Bogel's 2001 *The Difference Satire Makes* argues for understanding satire

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<sup>242</sup> Griffin, 21.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>244</sup> It is worth noting that Griffin focuses on literary satire.

<sup>245</sup> Charles A Knight, *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

by way of a “triangle,” involving reader, artist, and object.<sup>246</sup> Paul Simpson’s 2003 *On the Discourse of Satire* examines satire as a media phenomenon that is created in a discursive context of conventions which support a triadic structure of satirist, satiree, and target.<sup>247</sup> Given the repeated invocation of ideas concerning roles resembling utterer, audience, and utterance, it is unsurprising that Simpson and Knight invoke Austin and Grice respectively.<sup>248</sup> Bogel does not invoke any names, but does refer to “speech acts.”<sup>249</sup>

While contemporary writers eschew overarching theories of satire, writers from the middle of the twentieth century did not. They wrote in a context where there was more optimism about offering a unified theory of satire. Of these writers, the most prominent is Northrop Frye, who offered an analysis in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). In a subsection of the third essay titled “The Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire” Frye first offers a definition of satire as “militant irony.”<sup>250</sup> Its militancy is identified with a clear set of moral norms, and it takes a clear set of standards against which its target is measured.<sup>251</sup> As Knight identifies, Frye is largely just returning to Dryden’s old definition, and consequently it faces the same weaknesses: norms are not always so clear, and works of satire do not always take such a clear position.<sup>252</sup> As with Dryden, such an account is as much about what makes satire good (by Frye’s standards) as what makes satire satire. Later, Frye provides this refined account of satire: “Two things, then, are essential to satire: one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack.”<sup>253</sup> This account merges both technical requirements and stylistic preferences. The requirement of fantasy, for example, play two roles. As a technical requirement, it distinguishes satire from “pure denunciation.”<sup>254</sup> While the boundary is unclear, the side of pure denunciation is an attack that is just insult. It expresses personal distaste, but nothing much

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<sup>246</sup> Frederic V Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>247</sup> Paul Simpson, *On the Discourse of Satire* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 86.

<sup>248</sup> Knight, 39; Simpson, 70.

<sup>249</sup> Bogel, 34.

<sup>250</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 223.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

<sup>252</sup> Knight, 14.

<sup>253</sup> Frye, 224.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

beyond that. As stylistic preference, Frye notes that the fantasy is needed to make some topics approachable. About *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift he writes:

When in another passage Swift suddenly says, discussing the poverty of Ireland, "But my Heart is too heavy to continue this Irony longer," he is speaking of satire, which breaks down when its content is too oppressively real to permit the maintaining of the fantastic or hypothetical tone.<sup>255</sup>

The need for distance between the fantasy of the work and the brutality of the reality is not definitional for satire, but in particular cases, such as *A Modest Proposal*, it may prove necessary to the success of the particular work.

Frye's *Anatomy* manages to serve as an ur-text for the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century with respect to satire, so even though there are other writers their works mostly serve as footnotes to him. Ronald Paulson's *The Fictions of Satire* begins by taking up Frye's definition with the point of refining and improving it.<sup>256</sup> He makes the point of differentiating between what defines a work as satire, and the conventions to which works tend to adhere. Works that are satire have what Paulson refers to as a "central image," which summarizes the point of the satire.<sup>257</sup> For an example Paulson cites *A Modest Proposal*, and the central image is the cooking and eating of children.<sup>258</sup> A modern example of a central image would be that of Judge Dredd where the image is that of the faceless, unaccountable, executioner-lawman. The central image contains all the elements essential to the satire, and then the conventions of satire have to do with how that central image is expressed (Paulson focuses on the Juvenalian and Horatian traditions as the two ways of expressing the central image). With respect to the target within the central image, Paulson refers to there being a "dualism of subject," which is to say that there are two parts to the subject – the subject as it is within the work and the subject as it is outwith the work.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Frye, 224.

<sup>256</sup> Ronald Paulson, *The Fictions of Satire* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press), 3.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Alvin Kernan's *The Plot of Satire* explicitly excavates Dryden's old approach, and presents satire as a work where the author tries to make manifest a personality conducting the satirical attack.<sup>260</sup> In support of this Kernan notes that satiric works often use the first-person in launching their attacks, although this may just be a preference of the historical era that he's investigating.<sup>261</sup> Importantly, the personality may be but is not necessarily that of the actual author – the personality is constructed through the work and the author may seek to have the satire speak in their own voice or create a new voice for the work. According to Kernan, the satiric attack makes use of what he calls morality and wit.<sup>262</sup> Morality provides the standard against which the target is being measured, and the justification for finding the target lacking. The wit is meant to establish the superiority of the satiric personality, and properly belittle the target. This allows Kernan to contrast satire with what he terms invective, diatribe, and lampoon.<sup>263</sup> Each of the three alternatives lack an essential ingredient of satire. Invective lacks wit, and as such is just an attack against a target. Diatribe may be morally loaded and humorous, but it lacks a distinct target. Lampoon may have a target, but it does not seek to seriously degrade or attack the target, making in a more playful sort of engagement.

## 2.1 Crosschecking the Account

The account of satire that I have provided is “a work is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it criticizes a target by way of a funny misrepresentation.” This fits comfortably alongside the literary accounts of satire. The two most common elements in the literary accounts also form the basis of my account, which is that satire has an attack, and that this attack involves humour in some essential way. Moreover, following Frye and especially Kernan, it is not just that the attack is funny, but the humour in some way essentially shapes and informs the attack. Frye's use of the term “militant irony” presents an image of the humour itself being turned into a weapon, and Kernan notes that in successful satire both the

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<sup>260</sup> Alvin B Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 6-9.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, 12.



morality and the wit will inform each other.<sup>264</sup> Placing misrepresentation at the core of satire captures both what Kernan refers to as the “dualism of subject,” and also what Paulson calls the “central image.” Not only does the misrepresentation form the double object – the target of attack both within and outwith the work – but it stands at the centre of the satire because it is being attacked. My account also follows Griffin’s looser, non-definitional tendencies of satire. Griffin pointedly uses the terms “inquiry and provocation,” in contrast to the more classical approach where satire is considered to specifically be an attack. Similarly, as I use the term “criticize,” rather than the stronger “attack,” I merely mean to capture that satire identifies something particular as being bad for some reason. This allows for satire to be playful, friendly, or non-threatening in a way that is excluded by definitions which put an emphasis on attack and use words like “wound,” “maim,” or “eviscerate.” Similarly, the role of humour follows what Griffin refers to as the tendency to “display and play.” I believe that my account also follows Griffin inasmuch that the humour of satire often features in a way that is not definitional to satire, but rather follows either generic concerns (such as sorting Horatian and Juvenalian satire) or showcasing the skill or virtue of the satirist. On this point, Griffin and Kernan come close together, as each put an emphasis on the personality behind the satire. Even though they do it in different ways – Kernan ties the role of personality much more thoroughly to the meaning of the work whereas Griffin puts greater emphasis on the self-promotion of the author – each gives a role to some sort of authorial voice. This element shows up more in the work underpinning my account than my account itself. In the previous section I included that by requiring that the satire must be evident in the finished work itself. The author must succeed in creating the voice that underlies the satire – Kernan’s satiric personality, whether that of the real author or generated by the work.

The point of this exercise is not to either evaluate the literary works on satire or to evaluate my work by the standards of the literary works. Rather, all I mean to show is that what I have written is within the same area as the literary works, and it picks up on the same phenomena which the literary works deem

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<sup>264</sup> Frye, 223; Kernan, 7-8.

important to a work being satirical. There is the centrality of the double object, the importance of humour, and need to create some sort of voice for the point of criticism and attack; all of these elements are present in both the literary theories and my account. These parallels do not ensure the correctness of my account, but they do provide the assurance that what I have been writing about does reasonably track the artistic phenomenon of satire, and I have not just wandered off on my own philosophical tangent.

### 3. Philosophical Work on Satire

Very little on satire has been written in the realm of analytic philosophy, and what of it exists is not preoccupied with the question of what satire is. There is a brief mention of satire in Berys Gaut's *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (2007) but the focus is on whether satire poses any special problems for the ethical evaluation of art.<sup>265</sup> Eva Dadlez invokes satire in her 2011 article "Truly Funny: Humor, Irony, and Satire as Moral Criticism" but this is again just as a way to get at questions to do with ethical evaluation.<sup>266</sup> More Recently there is "Satire, Analogy, and Moral Philosophy" (2013) by Nicholas Diehl. While the argument of the article concerns whether or not it is possible to practice analytic philosophy through satire, he begins the article by offering a partial account of satire. It is with this account which I will now concern myself.

Diehl takes the work of Griffin as his base in two ways. The first is that he accepts Griffin's characterization of the mid-Century consensus on satire.<sup>267</sup> The second is that he also accepts Griffin's characterization of current work on satire as taking the mid-Century consensus as a starting point and seeking to improve or refine the consensus without necessarily putting one's account forward as a complete account.<sup>268</sup> This second point is methodologically important, since it means that while Diehl will be providing an account of what he takes to be typical

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<sup>265</sup> Gaut, 246-248.

<sup>266</sup> EM Dadlez, "Truly Funny: Humor, Irony, and Satire as Moral Criticism," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 45, no.1 (2011): 1-17.

<sup>267</sup> Nicholas Diehl, "Satire, Analogy, and Moral Philosophy," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 71, no.4 (2013): 312.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

of satire, this does not mean he takes what he provides to be essential to satire. This means that his account is not susceptible to simple counter-examples, since such examples may simply belong to a different approach to satire. Accordingly, in arguing against his account of satire, I will show that he mislocates the defining features of satire.

Diehl understands the mid-Century consensus of satire as entailing the following: satire is a polemical attack, made using wit and ridicule.<sup>269</sup> The goal is to combine the wit with some sort of exaggeration, with the end of persuading an audience.<sup>270</sup> Satire is separated from comedy by the fact that it tends to be darker in tone and content, and the target of the satire is drawn from the real world.<sup>271</sup> Accepting Griffin's criticism of the mid-Century consensus, Diehl speculates but does not defend the idea that a family resemblance account of satire is ultimately correct.<sup>272</sup>

Diehl's own contribution is that satire commonly, but not necessarily, advances argument through analogy. The majority of his paper is concerned with the argument that this lets satire be a tool for practicing analytic philosophy but my concern is just with his claim about how analogy fits in satire. His account of analogy in satire has two steps. The first is that satire has a fictional representation of a real world object, and that both the representation and the object possess the properties of  $p_1-p_n$ .<sup>273</sup> The second is that, following from the analogy, since the fictional representation receives some moral criticism, the real world object merits that same moral criticism.<sup>274</sup> Diehl supports this account by way of using Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* as an example. The first step is an analogy between the tract and the tract's author, and real world authors with their real world publications. These were tracts concerning a solution to poverty in Ireland that made use of a morally detached arithmetic, referred to the Irish and beasts or savages, displayed prejudices against Irish Catholics, and were "afflicted

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<sup>269</sup> Diehl, 312.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 313.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

with an unjustified, self-congratulatory hubris.” Given the analogy, both fictional and real authors are deserving of moral criticism for some reason R.<sup>275</sup>

There are two interpretations of Diehl’s formulation of argument by analogy within satire. One can be set aside, because it has little to do with satire as satire, but rather just describes something commonly found in satires. The other is to take his formulation as not just concerning the argument by analogy, but satiric representation more broadly. It is with this interpretation which I will concern myself. The first, less important interpretation, is that the argument by analogy which he attributes to many satires is simply a common feature within satire, and not definitional. The analogy is just a common way of rendering satiric criticism. It is possible to still talk sensibly about analogy within satire just like it is easy to talk sensibly about exaggeration within satire. Exaggeration is a common form of satiric misrepresentation – quite possibly the most common – and there is much that can be gleaned from discussing exaggeration in satire, but it is not definitional to satire. Accordingly, I can leave this interpretation of Diehl’s account since it does not challenge mine.

The second interpretation is that what Diehl is offering is an account of essentially satiric misrepresentation, and how that misrepresentation serves to launch the satiric criticism.<sup>276</sup> By this interpretation, the analogy is not just a way that satires often make a criticism, but it is a way that satiric works make a criticism such that if they did not do this they would not be satirical. Under this interpretation, his account falls short of being able to distinguish satirical works from non-satirical works. His problem is twofold. The first is that while he stresses the similarities between the representation and the real world object, he does not require there be a difference between the two. This means that there may be no double object. As I argued in the second chapter, without a double object there is no satire because the model object<sup>277</sup> is just directly criticized. Accordingly, the

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<sup>275</sup> Diehl, 313.

<sup>276</sup> I will bracket the possible divergence between criticism and argument here, which is important to Diehl’s greater project but not mine.

<sup>277</sup> I move here from his term (“real world object”) to my term (“model object”), as I believe it is more precise in this case. There are also a few reasons that “real world object” is unpalatable – for example, fictional objects, ideas and concepts are all things that may be a satiric model but, in

model object must be misrepresented which means that not only must the intentional object and model have properties in common, but the intentional object must also have additional properties that intentionally misrepresent of the model. The second problem is that Diehl offers no connection between the (mis)representation and the criticism. He writes that the analogy between the representation and the real world object means that the criticism of the representation will apply to the real world object, but this is not necessarily the case.<sup>278</sup> Consider the following example from Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* (1855-7). The story is not wholly satirical, but it is satirical in part. One of the instances of satire can be found in the characters of the Barnacles.<sup>279</sup> As their name suggests, they attach themselves to the hull of the state and feed off its detritus while contributing nothing. One particular Barnacle, named Frederick, is encountered by the protagonist Arthur Clennam in the circumlocution office, and during the encounter Frederick's monocle keeps falling out, and he keeps trying (unsuccessfully) to replace it. There are satire-relevant criticisms that can be drawn from this encounter. For example, one such criticism would be that the British ruling class – the model for the Barnacles – desperately affect the cultural mannerisms of authority as a kind of performance, while knowing the mannerisms as nothing but performance and not even being particularly good at it. However, there are also satire-irrelevant criticisms that could be drawn, such as Frederick Barnacle being bad at wearing monocles, or having too-large eyes. On my account of satire, the difference between the relevant and irrelevant criticisms can be navigated through the use of misrepresentation. Barnacle's flaws are properties attributed to him through misrepresentation, and it is those properties that are used to criticize the model. What is important, qua satire, is not that Barnacle is deserving of moral criticism, but that he has some property that is deserving of criticism. Irrelevant properties, such as Barnacle's too-large eyes, are not misrepresentative properties, because they are not meant to intentionally misrepresent the model object. This means that criticism drawing from these

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one way or another, only dubiously “real world” objects. However, I do not believe that these variations present anything that Diehl could not accommodate with the appropriate hedging or rephrasing.

<sup>278</sup> Diehl, 313.

<sup>279</sup> Dickens has a particular gift in naming characters. I feel like many could accept characters named Mr. Meagles and Tite Barnacle as satirical knowing nothing but the characters' names.

properties does not in turn apply to the model object. By simply using the similarities that make up analogy and representation, Diehl does not have access to this argumentative resource. Diehl's account cannot distinguish between satiric criticism, non-satiric criticism, and criticism that, while within a satire, is irrelevant to the satire.

I now move to the one philosophical attempt to provide an account of satire, Dieter DeClerq's 2018 article "A Definition of Satire (And Why a Definition Matters)." He offers the following definition of satire, which may be taken in a strong form or a weak one: satire is "a genre which since Roman times has guided the interpretation and evaluation of works on the ground of their purpose to critique and entertain."<sup>280</sup> On the weak definition he defends "critique" and "entertainment" as necessary conditions for satire. On the strong definition he holds those conditions to be sufficient. On each account, there is a third condition that critique and entertainment must interact though neither is "wholly instrumental" to the other.<sup>281</sup> He advances his definition with a negative case against a cluster account of satire, and a positive argument in favour of his own account. Since my goal is simply to show that my account is preferable to his, I will skip over his negative account and focus on the positive one. To reject his definition, I will target the first two conditions in turn. I will show that his condition of critique is too narrow, and his condition of entertainment is inaccurate.<sup>282</sup> The result is that his definition of satire misidentifies paradigmatic satirical works as unsatirical, and unsatirical works as satirical. While he predicts the latter, I believe the problem is far more extensive than he acknowledges.

DeClerq defines critique as a "committed moral opposition against a target, sustained by an analysis of that target," often centred around a perceived social wrongness.<sup>283</sup> This moral opposition must be the "emotional drive" of the opposition against the target, and this emotional drive is crucial to distinguishing

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<sup>280</sup> Dieter DeClerq, "A Definition of Satire (And Why A Definition Matters)," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76, no.3 (2018): 319.

<sup>281</sup> DeClerq, 319.

<sup>282</sup> I believe that the problems with his account extend well beyond the points I will make, but my argument in this section is sufficient for showing my account to be preferable.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid*, 323.

satirical works from unsatirical works.<sup>284</sup> Importantly, the work must seek to actually resolve or ameliorate the social wrongness, instead of settling for merely articulating disapproval.

While the moral centre that DeClerq claims is commonly thought of as a central piece of satire, that claim is also incorrect. To recur Griffin's point from the previous section, while defences of satire have often foregrounded its moral purpose, those defences occurred in particular historical contexts where satire was under attack. The morality of satire was only stressed as a defence against the accusation that it was either immoral or amoral. Making such a moral interest actually definitional to satire has the ill-effect of being unable to account for a number of foundational and paradigmatic works of satire. As Griffin notes, satirists, especially literary satirists, targeted each other with some frequency. Foremost is Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*, a mock epic whose target is not anyone's moral failings, or even any moral problem at all.<sup>285</sup> Rather, the target of *The Dunciad* is the poor writing of the day, especially that of Colley Cibber.<sup>286</sup> While the characters of *The Dunciad* may be variously stupid or inept, their models are not real world people but the characters within Cibber's writing. The target for criticism is not anyone's moral failures, but Cibber for writing such dim characters. Similarly, a big part of contemporary satiric practice is genre satire, where a work takes as its target a genre's standards. Consider the horror satire *Tucker and Dale vs Evil*, where two innocent rednecks, Tucker and Dale, are mystified by the terrified actions of a bunch urban teenagers who see Tucker and Dale as horror stock characters. Satires may even be specific to particular shows, as *Galaxy Quest* satirized *Star Trek* and its fandom. Mel Brooks made a career off of genre satires, with *Space Balls* (targeting late-1970s space adventures), *Blazing Saddles* (targeting Hollywood Westerns), and *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (targeting the Robin Hood mythology).

The critique condition puts DeClerq's definition of satire at odds with the actual practice of satire. While many works of satire centre on moral criticism,

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<sup>284</sup> DeClerq, 323.

<sup>285</sup> Griffin, 36.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

many also do not. A further problem can be identified with DeClerq's definition of critique by his requirement that satire's moral criticism must not settle for merely articulating a problem but must seek to resolve it. Seeking to resolve such a problem may be understood as weakly as seeking to resolve it by way of raising awareness of it. This demand by DeClerq is strange, as it is simultaneously very strong and very weak. That a satire must seek to attack and resolve a social problem is a very strong condition, and I argue an implausibly strong one. As Griffin notes, many satires have been interested in merely exploring a topic.<sup>287</sup> He notes the tendency of satire to be described (and so-described by the satirists themselves) as sermons, dialogues, farragoes, and anatomies. He takes all of these terms to suggest open-ended inquiry.<sup>288</sup> Moreover, DeClerq has committed himself to the position that each and every work of satire, to be satire, must be fully committed to resolving the social problem which it identifies. To attribute such a practical and concrete intention to each and every satire is implausible. On such an account, works that otherwise would be considered satirical, works that have been considered paradigmatically satirical, would not count as satirical because their focus was on mockery rather than amelioration. DeClerq's addendum that seeking to resolve a problem may be pursued by simply bringing attention to that problem is too weak to save the condition. If drawing attention to a problem is enough to qualify as seeking to resolve that problem, then each and every would-be satire would meet such a standard since attention would be drawn to any problem by mere virtue of that problem being within the work. The criticism itself would constitute the attempt to solve the problem since the criticism would instantiate the problem within the work, thus bringing attention to it.

Altogether, DeClerq's requirement that satire is morally centred is too strong and unreflective of satiric practice. Critically, the demand that satire centre on moral criticism excludes paradigmatic works of satire like *The Dunciad*. If a definition of satire excludes the paradigmatic works that have guided criticism and practice for 250 years, then it is a poor definition.

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<sup>287</sup> Griffin, 39.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 41.



DeClerq's second condition, that of entertainment, also fares poorly. He defines a work as entertaining insofar as it provides an aesthetic experience that is fun and divertive.<sup>289</sup> An aesthetic experience is understood as divertive inasmuch that in experiencing it, the subject focuses primarily on that experience.<sup>290</sup> The subject is "absorbed" in the experience, and it draws them away from everyday life as a pastime does.<sup>291</sup> A work succeeds at being entertaining if it creates in the audience the divertive experiences it seeks to create.<sup>292</sup>

The problem with the entertainment condition is that it does not meaningfully track anything related to satire. While DeClerq provides quotations from a number of literary and media theorists who refer to satire as typically entertaining, this is just a function of satire having to be oriented towards the consumption of either a patron or paying audience. It is entertaining the way that any work is entertaining and for the purposes that any work is entertaining: the need to create, retain, or otherwise satisfy an audience. This is evident, too, in how DeClerq formulates the entertainment condition. For an experience to be divertive, it just has to be the case that the subject is focusing on the experience. This is not describing satire, this is just describing aesthetic appreciation. The entertainment condition does not track whether or not a work is satirical, just whether a work of art is a work of art that can be evaluated aesthetically.

Altogether, DeClerq offers a definition of satire centred around two necessary conditions, critique and entertainment. Critique is too narrow, as it centres moral criticism when satiric criticism does not in fact need any moral element. Entertainment is inaccurate, since it makes the mistake of confusing a nearly universal feature of art – that it is made to appeal to an audience or patron – as a defining feature of one particular genre. Since each condition fails individually, the weak version of his definition fails. And since the weak version fails, so too does the strong version.

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<sup>289</sup> DeClerq, 323.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

#### 4. Clarity

I would now like to return to a point which I mentioned in the first section of this chapter, which is that it is frequently the case that it is ambiguous to what extent, or whether or not altogether, a work of art is satirical. This is particularly acute with respect to the possibly-satiric elements to do with misrepresentation – whether some element within a work is a misrepresentation, and whether that misrepresentation conveys criticism – but it is also possible with respect to the question of whether or not something is an attempt at humour. For this reason, I would like to defend clarity as an essential value of satire. I will begin with some slight hedging and three paradigm examples, which will serve to bring the issue into relief. I will then argue that since a work’s meaning depends on the intentions behind it<sup>293</sup>, a work may be better or worse depending on how well or poorly those intentions are actualized in the work. This is of particular concern in satire, as satires may contain more complicated or morally dubious content, and satires simply tend to be talked about in such a way that the real intentions behind a work are given particular prominence.

Discussing clarity as an artistic value requires some short account of artistic value. Artistic value comes with its own large and unsettled discourse so what I would like to provide is not so much a thorough account of artistic value but rather a way of talking sensibly about artistic value without committing to a particular account. I propose to talk about artistic value as something that contributes to the value of a work of art qua art. I am taking my cue from the account that Berys Gaut gives in *Art, Emotion and Ethics* but I do not mean to present the full account that he does.<sup>294</sup> He bases his account in the practice of artistic criticism. Following Frank Sibley’s work on aesthetic properties, he argues that the evaluative terms of

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<sup>293</sup> Following from my discussion in the first chapter, I take “intentions” to cover not just literally-existing intentions, but whatever input or other element plays the role of intentions in the interpretive approach to a work.

<sup>294</sup> Gaut has a second half to his account to deal with the attribution of aesthetic properties to things that are not works of art. As I am dealing with satire, that is not a concern for me. He also appeals to an account of art to justify his account as non-circular. I do not believe that the charge of circularity is any problem for me here; the relative contentlessness of my account should make it copacetic with whichever full account of aesthetic value the reader would like to plug in.

art-critical practice can be taken to indicate aesthetic values.<sup>295</sup> Terms like “beautiful,” “dainty,” or “oppressive” are used to not just describe a work, but evaluate it as good or bad. Accordingly, one of the things that I must show in this section is that a work may be described as clear or unclear in such a way that it is being evaluated as better or worse as a work of art.

As a clarifying point, it is worth making explicit that there are ways of evaluating a work that are not relevant to a work’s value qua art. Examples of such instances of value might be a work being too expensive, or an installation too difficult to present (maybe it’s too large or difficult to transport), or perhaps a statue being better or worse as a weapon to be used as self-defence in the case of a home invasion. One of my tasks in this section will be to argue against the challenge that clarity is merely of this latter class, an evaluation of the work that does not bear of its value qua art.

It is further important to clarify the scope of clarity, since “clarity” is used in different ways in conversation. When I speak of clarity, what I am considering how clearly the making intentions (or whatever plays the analogous meaning-making or otherwise content-determining role in an interpretive theory) are presented in the work. It may be the case that the work is unclear in other ways. For example, many works are purposefully ambiguous as to their meaning. A film like *Mother* (2009) by Bong Joon-Ho may make a point of a key character’s state of mind being beyond the reach of the audience. A horror novel like *House of Leaves* (2000) may make a point of the reader being unsure of what’s going on at all. James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939) makes a point of writing in difficult to parse dialect. All of these works are unclear in the sense of everyday parlance, but all are clear in the sense that I am using the term, such that they successfully and clearly present the making intentions. For the sake of clarity,<sup>296</sup> I will refer to this former kind of purposeful unclarity as ambiguity.

#### 4.1 Examples

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<sup>295</sup> Gaut, 34-36.

<sup>296</sup> I regret nothing.

I would now like to bring forwards some examples that will serve as paradigm cases for elucidating the concept of clarity. The first examples two concern the question of whether or not a work is satirical at all. The second two show how a work may be better or worse by virtue of being more or less clear.

*Snowpiercer* (2013): Bong Joon-Ho's *Snowpiercer* is a dystopian satire, a common sort of satire where the intentional object is the whole society in which the story takes place. The model is often some feature of political society or political society as a whole, although that is not necessarily the case. For *Snowpiercer* the model object is a hierarchical, arguably capitalistic society. This model is misrepresented as existing entirely within an ordered train where the poor live in squalor at the back of the train, the professional classes live in the middle of the train, and the hedonistic rich live in first class by the front of the train. The plot of the film follows a revolution from the tail section to capture the engine room at the front of the train.

The film uses multiple techniques to get across its point, many of which rely on there being close real-world analogues that the audience will readily recognize. That the story involves the political ordering of the fictional society primes the audience to look for, or at least recognize, analogies to real-world political society. To keep the satire from fading into the background, the film uses several scenes to foreground particular satirical points. The first of these is towards the end of the first act when Minister Mason, a representative from the front, lectures the tail-end denizens on their place in the "sacred order" of the train. Mason, bearing a conspicuous visual resemblance to Ayn Rand, gives a comical speech about how everyone is kept alive through order and the tail-enders, by failing to remain passive and supplicant, threaten to destroy the whole train. The talk itself is absurd, and the film draws attention to the absurdity by two tonal breaks of the sort that I described in chapter 3. First, at the start of

the speech, someone drops a tray with a great clatter and then Mason has to cut off her two translators because there is not enough time for them to translate everything she says. This quickly undermines the seriousness of Mason and ensures that she is seen as a ridiculous character. The second tonal break is at the end of her speech where she awkwardly checks to see that she has more time and, to try and fill the remaining time, calls the train's conductor Wilford over the loudspeaker. (He, of course, does not respond.) The satiric point is concluded by a third tonal break, this time a sharp return to violence. Andy, who has been having his arm frozen while Mason is speaking, is brought in front of the rest of the tail-enders and has his arm shattered with a hammer. The quick transition between the hapless Mason and the violence to Andy makes clear the tie between the absurd system and the real violence it inflicts.

A second focal point occurs towards the middle of the film where the surviving revolutionaries, about six in number, reach the car where young school children are being taught by a very pristine- and pregnant-looking teacher. The bright colours of the room contrast with the rest of the film, which makes the scene immediately stand out. The revolutionaries watch as the teacher leads the class in song. The song, similar to Mason's speech earlier in the film, is absurd and transparent propaganda.<sup>297</sup> This is evident not only in the song's lyrics, but also how the camera focuses on the teacher's comically contorting face as she sings. As with Mason's speech, there are two important tonal shifts in this scene. The first is when the teacher ushers the children to the window to show them the frozen corpses of nine people who had previously tried to leave the train. She presents them as proof that it is only the tightly-controlled order of the train that keeps everyone alive. While this is happening, Namgoong Minsoo is also explaining the frozen corpses to his daughter Yona. Unlike Mason, however, he is explaining the personal history of the leader of

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<sup>297</sup> "What happens if the engine stops? // We all freeze and die"

the nine, and why she chose to leave the train. This serves to underline that not just is what the teacher saying propaganda, but it is also less than completely true. The second tonal break is towards the end of the scene when, during the distribution of boiled eggs, the teacher pulls a sub-machine gun from the basket of Easter eggs and begins firing. As with the speech scene, this tonal break makes explicit the taught propaganda as a method of enforced control.

*Taken* (2008): I have chosen *Taken* as an example for a film that was intended to be a satire, but so far as I can tell has absolutely no evidence of its being satirical. In fact, I am extremely confident that *Taken* is not at all meant to be satirical. However, I have had someone argue that it is (and that it is successfully a satire) so it is probably as good a choice as there will be for an example of a film that has no clear satire at all.

The story of *Taken* can be thought of as a modern Western for the context of the United States' post-9/11 trauma and xenophobia.<sup>298</sup> Liam Neeson plays a down-on-his-luck former CIA agent named Bryan Mills who is dealing with the dissolution of his nuclear family because he could not get over his military past. When his daughter is kidnapped by ethnically-ambiguous Albanians while on a trip to Paris, Mills flies to Paris to save her. Over the rest of the film Mills hunts, tortures, and kills each and every antagonist until he saves his daughter, reunites his family, and earns his daughter's undying love by getting her singing lessons with a pop star.

The argument in favour of *Taken* being a satire rests on two central points. The first point is that the story is overly simplistic. There is very little depth to the story's protagonist, Mills, and even less to

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<sup>298</sup> Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream* (2007) provides a good overview about the repopularization of the mythological Western in the United States after 9/11. While published a year before *Taken*, what Faludi provides so well predicts *Taken* that the film might be rightly considered a successful prediction made by Faludi's argument.

everyone else. The antagonists are formless and exist only to die. The plot is a mix of the time's paranoid fantasies – a mix of France, crime, and Muslims – and is resolved by naked fantasy. The second point is that the violence is exaggerated. This is not just in the individual violence that Mills commits against the characters but also the outsized role of violence in the narrative. The simplistic narrative and exaggerated violence together indicate that the work is satirical.

The arguments that the narrative is simplistic and the violence is exaggerated each earn different responses. I will begin with the former because I believe that there is something particularly interesting about the latter. That the narrative is simplistic is not necessarily something to indicate that a work is satirical, especially if there is nothing to draw attention to the simplicity of the narrative. Many stories may be reduced to one or another archetype, and some stories will more closely adhere to archetypes than others just as a matter of course. Moreover, such that *Taken* may be understood as a primal revenge fantasy where the United States reasserts its masculinity, the simplicity of the narrative coheres quite well with the basicness of the story.

The claim that the violence is exaggerated depends on a suppressed premise concerning what level of violence ought to be considered normal for such a film. As I asserted in the previous paragraph, *Taken* tells a story of revenge that comes from a place of felt emasculation. Through his violence, Mills not only vanquishes his enemies in a straightforward sense but he also reaffirms his masculinity not just as a father but specifically as a father who is a protector figure. The violence within *Taken*, while extreme, is not out of line with the rest of the story. There is nothing that suggests that the violence is a misrepresentation of some other, more basic type of violence, and the violence is certainly not played for laughs. What makes the claim that *Taken's* violence is exaggerated

particularly interesting is that it highlights the role that background expectations play in identifying misrepresentations.<sup>299</sup> Exaggeration, after all, is relative. It is accordingly incumbent upon the maker of a would-be work of satire to either correctly identify and understand what would be the usual baseline for the sort of work they are creating, or to create a work that manages to shape the audience's expectations before violating them.

*Pain and Gain* (2013): *Pain and Gain* faces two particular challenges as a satire. The first is that it faces the challenge of satirizing attitudes towards masculinity and consumerism by showing these attitudes actualized in all their excess. This is especially difficult because many people will look at that excess as something to be celebrated – Wall Street traders cheered when *Wolf of Wall Street's* Jordan Belfort beat his pregnant wife so he could get at his emergency stash of cocaine.<sup>300</sup> The second is that the film is directed by Michael Bay, who has a reputation for extremely shallow and indulgent active movies.<sup>301</sup> Accordingly, it is a priority for *Pain and Gain* to make clear to the audience that it is a satire. The movie may nevertheless be considered satirical without the additional clarifying points, but it will be worse for it because the satire will be easily muddied.

The basic satire of *Pain and Gain* takes its aim at American macho culture, ties American hyper-masculinity to both sexism and consumerism, and presents consumerism as the essence of the United States. The plot derives from the true story of the Sun Gym Gang, a group of personal trainers who kidnapped, tortured, and stole the

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<sup>299</sup> A close cousin of this sort of analysis has to do with the violation of moral standards. A work may be misidentified as satirical if a critic takes some particular immoral feature of a work to be so far beyond what is believable that it must be a joke or at least an exaggeration, when that immoral feature may trade upon a moral belief that is in fact quite common or widely held.

<sup>300</sup> Stephen Perlberg, "We Saw 'Wolf of Wall Street' on Wall Street with a Bunch of Wall Street Dudes and It Was Disturbing," *Business Insider*, December 19, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/banker-pros-cheer-wolf-of-wall-street-2013-12?IR=T>.

<sup>301</sup> This reputation is inaccurate but widely held.



property of one of their wealthy clients. Their plan was so stupid and poorly executed that the police would not believe the victim, allowing them to get away with their crime. In the film, each main character represents some or other articulation of the American dream: Daniel Lugo, the leader, wants a large house and to be a community leader; Adrian Doorbal wants treatment for his erectile dysfunction (pointedly a result of using steroids) and to have a settled domestic life; Paul Doyle is at first the prisoner who redeemed himself through religion, and then the shopping-addicted cokehead; Victor Kershaw, the victim, is simultaneously the immigrant success story and the cut-throat businessman. The satire is often articulated in one of two ways. The first is by contrasting a character's words – usually Lugo's – with an American flag, tying the character's absurd pontifications about greatness and dessert to the idea of America itself. The second is by having Lugo greatly overestimate the gang's abilities, such as when he states that his team should be able to infiltrate Kershaw's mansion in half the time that special forces could, because of their "superior fitness." There are also other, more subtle points of satire such as when detective Ed DuBois proclaims that all one needs in life are the simple things, but says this while sitting on the pier of his multi-million dollar waterfront property. This is enough to establish *Pain and Gain* as a satire, but it is still important that the satire is clear to the audience so as to reduce the potential for misunderstanding.

What makes *Pain and Gain* a satire could easily be taken as straightforward points of comedy and be celebrated. The triumph of the delusional halfwit is a genre in itself. Accordingly, *Pain and Gain* includes numerous moments that do not necessarily contribute to the satire directly – this is to say they do not help constitute the double object or contribute to the funny misrepresentation – but they help make clear that the film is satirical. These are achieved with tonal switches where the film, a comedy throughout, not only stops being

funny but does so in a way that confronts the audience directly. The two most prominent examples happen during the torture of Kershaw. The first happens when Lugo's poor attempt at a Scarface imitation fails and Kershaw successfully identifies him. At this point Lugo throws Kershaw to the floor, unmasking him, and shouts into his face (and the camera), "I don't just want everything you have, I want you not to have it." The moment presents a sharp tonal break from the rest of the film thus far. It achieves this not just by Lugo threatening Kershaw, but also by Lugo threatening the audience through the camera. It not only changes the tone of the film, but it challenges the audience identifying with the gang and forces them to identify with Kershaw instead. A few scenes later, the second tonal switch happens when the gang retrieves Kershaw from the couch where they have been leaving him. He is bound, blindfolded, and has been lying in a pile of his own urine and faeces, which is shown sloughing off of him as he gets up. This scene is disgusting in a way that confronts the audience. Importantly, it is also shortly after the audience is forced to identify with Kershaw. This means that Kershaw's humiliation is not presented to the audience as a triumph that affirms the superiority of the gang, but rather something horrible that has happened to Kershaw to which the audience should sympathize.

These two scenes, the confrontation by Lugo and the abjection of Kershaw, help make *Pain and Gain* more clear. Without them, it could be the case that it is unclear whether the film is a satire or a celebration, or just what the satirical point of the film was. The disjoint that the scenes present both challenge the audience to re-evaluate what is happening in the film, and force them to identify in a particular way with respect to the protagonists (in this case, against them).

*Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009): *RotF* is a particularly useful example because it was produced during a Hollywood writer's

strike. This means that it is skeletal: the ideas are unrefined and easy to see. The *Transformers* series of movies follow a war between two factions of giant killer robots, one nominally good and the other nominally evil. The movie is layered with minor satirical elements – the one I would like to focus on is the two minor characters Skids and Mudflap. The best way to describe the characterization of these two comic relief characters is that they are heavily racialized as black through use of stereotypes (dialect and gold teeth primary among them) and act something like a modern-day minstrel show. They are a couple of bumbling idiots who fall over, screw up, and make a deal about how they do not know how to read. Another feature of the movie is that all of the robots learned how to act by absorbing broadcasts of American popular culture. Given these two pieces of information, the satire that Skids and Mudflap present is quite straightforward – they are a funny misrepresentation of an essentialization of popular culture that brings forward that popular culture is, in some fundamental way, deeply racist.

While the putative satire of *RotF* can be easily reconstructed, it is unclear within the work itself. The reference to how the robots learn to act is made in passing, and never dwelt upon. More importantly, Skids and Mudflap are only ever presented in the context of straightforward comedy. Their actions are never identified as racialized within the film, and there is no jarring tone switch of the sort that I mentioned in chapter 3, the sort that signals to the audience that what is being presented should not be taken at face value. Rather, as Skids and Mudflap appear in the film, they succeed in coming across as little more than extremely racist comic relief characters. A typical scene containing Skids and Mudflap has them flanking and following one of the lead characters while bickering. The bickering will escalate into physical violence that culminates in one knocking the other down, occasionally scattering the loser's gold

rings. There is no critical edge to the humour, with the joke of the scene being entirely the robots' (racialized) incompetence.

What makes *RotF* such a good example is that it presents an element of a work that is at least attempted satire, contains pieces that can be identified as supporting it being a satire, and yet on at least an intuitive level fails to be satirical. I argue that this is because *RotF* is a film, and its satirical elements fail to be put across filmicly.

Accordingly, even if the film does contain everything needed for *Skids* and *Mudflap* to be satirical, it does not present them in such a way that the audience will standardly engage with these audience (they are not primarily in what is called the language of film) and so the satire is not clear.

#### 4.2 Summary and the Reintroduction of Trust

The four examples I have provided elucidate the concept of clarity by showing how it is essential to understanding the articulation of satire within a work. The first two examples make apparent how clarity is important as to whether or not a work is satirical. The different components of the satire – the misrepresentation and the criticism – must be articulated within the work. It is the work itself that is satirical, not whether some particular audience member takes a work to be satirical, so in showing that a work is satire it is necessary to appeal to what appears in the work itself. Nevertheless, audience members do have beliefs and expectations that form a baseline of experience, so even if a work is satirical, its point may be more or less clear depending on how well its satire is articulated. This is what the latter two examples show. Clarity may matter in two different ways as a value of a work. The first way is that it can be more or less clear that a work is satirical at all. As with the example of *Return of the Fallen*, a weak articulation of the satire may leave it unclear just to what degree a work actually is satirical. This affects the way a work is received and how it ought to be received, and therefore affects its value as a work of art. For two works of art, the one that is clearly satirical will be, all else being equal, the superior work. The

second way is that the satirical point may be more or less clear. Satires have critical points as part of what makes them satirical. If that point is articulated more clearly, the work will be better. If that point is articulated less clearly, the work will be worse.

Clarity makes way for the reintroduction of the idea of trust as articulated in the first chapter. As I argued, to the extent that interpretation involves the sussing out of an artwork's making intentions (or relevant analogue) the interpreter will also have to consider what those intentions could be, and in the process of considering what those intentions could be they must consider the character of the work's maker or makers (or relevant analogue). I now supplement that by arguing that the degree to which a work may be more or less clear depends, in part, on the degree to which the work's authors are trusted. The more the author is trusted, the easier it is for her intentions to be clear within the work. If she is less trusted it is not impossible for her work to be clear, but it is more difficult. This is evident in the latter two examples I provided, both of which are directed by Michael Bay.<sup>302</sup> Rightly or wrongly<sup>303</sup>, Bay has a reputation as a film maker who deals in superficial, contentless filmic indulgence for 13-year-old boys. This means a mix of violence, explosions, and sexualized images of women with no meaning beyond their surface expression. Both *Pain and Gain* and *Revenge of the Fallen* involve attempted subversions of violent and sexualized imagery. From an interpretive approach that takes a work's real author into account, Bay is not trusted. This means that a viewer interpreting the spectacular or violent imagery of the films has reason to doubt a subversive purpose to Bay's filmmaking. A similar story can be told with respect to the racialized robots Skids and Mudflap from *Revenge of the Fallen*. Since Bay has in the past used racist stereotypes of black people for no reason other than the comedy of the stereotype<sup>304</sup>, when faced with the stereotypes of Skids and Mudflap it is difficult to trust that Bay has anti-racist intentions. And even if it can be sussed out that Bay has anti-racist

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<sup>302</sup> Film-making is a collaborative venture but Bay has a reputation as an auteur, and it just makes things simpler to, in this case, talk about *Pain and Gain* and *Revenge of the Fallen* as if he was the sole author.

<sup>303</sup> Wrongly

<sup>304</sup> The introduction to *Armageddon* (1998) is likely the most straightforward example of this.

intentions, and the robots are an anti-racist statement, there is still the question of just to what degree Bay is only articulating an anti-racist statement. It may be suspected, for instance, that even if there is some anti-racist purpose to the robots that the stereotype they embody is still being held up as an object of mockery. In lay terms, even if it can be identified that Bay intends to make an anti-racist statement, there may still be doubt over his ability to “mean it that way.”

For the sake of explicitness I would like to re-underline that interpretation is normative. This means that what is in question is not what one would understand of *Pain and Gain* but what one ought to understand of *Pain and Gain*. When a work’s meaning is more or less clear, that refers to a sort of unclarity within the work itself. Similarly, to say that a work’s author is untrustworthy, or may not be trusted with respect to some particular topic, this is a comment about the character of the author (real or hypothetical). In the first chapter, I argued that trust is rarely absolute – it is rare that a person is either trusted completely, or not at all. I took this to mean that there is always a level of unclarity with respect to meaning in communication. That argument applies no less to works of satire. The remove of the authors’ mental states and the distance of the industrial process mean that there will always be some degree of unclarity with respect to satire. This may apply to whether or not a work is satirical, to what degree a work is satirical, and what the point of a satirical work may be.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered and defended the following account of satire: a work is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it criticizes a target by way of a funny misrepresentation. I focused on what may be called the coherence of satire – what satire is, whether a work is satirical, and what the satirical point may be. This involved bringing together the necessary elements of a satire, and arguing that they must exist in such a way that they may be accessed and understood by the audience. In the next two chapters I will show some of the analysis that this account of satire makes possible. In chapter 5 I will focus on what is probably the

natural extension of the last section of this chapter, which is extending the analysis of clarity and trust into dealing with humour. Given the social account of humour I presented in chapter 3, clarity and trust give a new way of engaging the ethics of humour. Since satire both readily uses humour and depends upon the misrepresentation being funny, a work failing to be funny may damage or completely undermine the satire.

## Chapter Five: Ethical Failings of Satire and Humour

In the last chapter I brought together my prior work to present a theory of satire and concluded by beginning to look at satiric failure. In this chapter I will continue to look into the ways that satire can fail. Specifically, I will look at cases where satire may fail because the humour is unethical. I choose to focus on these cases because I believe they play an outsized role in the public discourse about satire in two different but related ways. The first is in the discussion about putative works of satire. Mainstream examples would be shows like South Park and, before them, the Simpsons which attracted criticism for immoral humour. The second is as a subspecies of the “just joking” defence, where someone defends something that they have said or otherwise presented on the grounds that they were just being satirical. One such example is the case of a Florida school teacher insisting that her Neo-Nazi podcast was just a work of satire.<sup>305</sup> (It is worth noting that these second sorts of cases often fail in multiple ways, but for this chapter we will charitably accept that they are genuine attempts at satire and examine how they fail with respect to the ethics of their humour.)

The theory of satire that I have presented is that *a work is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it makes a criticism by way of a funny misrepresentation*. If the misrepresentation fails to be funny, then the satire fails in turn. If it is possible for humour to fail because it is unethical, then it is possible for satire to fail because its necessary humour is unethical.<sup>306</sup> That humour may fail for ethical reasons is a contested position, and so I must argue for it. Accordingly, this chapter will have two sections: the first where I argue that humour can fail for ethical reasons, and the second where I give a discussion of cases where satire fails due to ethical humour failings. Both sections will build to a discussion of trust, and the role of trust in ethical failings of humour. This is because I believe that the issue of trust, and the issues that emerge out of the discussion of trust and humour, are the most important to how ethically difficult humour and satire are

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<sup>305</sup> Matt Stevens, “Florida Teacher Says Her Racist Podcast Was ‘Satire’,” *New York Times*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/07/us/florida-teacher-racism.html>.

<sup>306</sup> As discussed within chapters 3 and 4, not all humour within a satire is essential to that work being satirical.



both used and engaged. A result of this is that this chapter does not so much provide a definite guide for decoding which humour is ethically good or bad, but rather a prediction for when and where people will disagree over the acceptability of some satire or humour, and what underlies that disagreement.

The full structure of the chapter is as follows: the first section will be subdivided into three subsections. The first subsection will provide as background existing approaches to the ethical evaluation of humour. This includes a look at two sorts of theories – feeling-centred theories, that concern how a person reacts to a piece of potential humour, and “attitude endorsement” theories that concern whether finding a joke funny entails some kind of endorsement of the humour’s content. Since I provide a non-standard account of humour (a social account, in contrast to the standard internalist accounts), I will position my account as drawing elements from both feeling-centred and attitude endorsement theories. The second subsection will adopt the work of Ted Cohen to propose a way of evaluating humour acts like speech acts. This will establish a standard by which humour acts can fail. The third subsection will present the argument that humour acts can fail on ethical grounds. This will draw to a focus on ethically ambiguous humour, and the importance of clarity. The second section of the chapter will focus on satiric failures and it will comprise four subsections. The first subsection will give an overview of how satire may suffer either partial or full failures based on its essential humour being unethical. The next two subsections will focus on full and partial failures respectively. Subsection two will focus on cases where the humour completely fails, thus rendering the misrepresentation “simply cruel.” Subsection three will focus on cases where the humour is merely ethically ambiguous, leading to partial failures. The fourth subsection will focus on satire in the context of mass culture, and argue that the political and economic dynamics of mass culture work as a sort of millstone around satire’s neck, burdening mass-produced or mass-marketed satire with a permanent unclarity.

## 1.1 Ethics of Humour

The purpose of this section is to give an account of how humour may be harmed or helped by its ethical content. I will use as a base the social account of humour that I presented in chapter 3. This will be built into a small account of humour acts and, recurring the argument on trust and interpretation from chapter 1, how such acts can fail. Central to my account is how confident the audience may be that the possible humourist is in fact joking and, if they are, how and in what way. The trusting of intentions is especially important for making ethical evaluations of humour, since a lot of ethically-dubious humour is acceptable in some circumstances but not in others. The usual paradigm of ethically-dubious humour is group-based humour, which is to say humour that trades on group identities, such as racism, gender, and disability. I will argue that the reason group-based humour is (limitedly) accepted from members of the ingroup but seen as unethical from members of the outgroup is because of the ability of the audience to trust that the humourist has the right sets of intentions with respect to the members of the ingroup, and what defines their ingroup. This means that ethically-dubious humour substantially depends on the ability of the humourist to present themselves as trustworthy, which in turn means that group-based humour is not out of bounds for members of the outgroup, but it is more difficult.

I begin with a brief overview of existing theories, although I will not make much use of them. This is because existing theories of the ethical evaluation of humour, be they feeling-centred or attitude-endorsement theories, trade on internalist conceptions of humour. As when I presented the internalist theories in chapter 3, my goal is not to either affirm or refute these theories. I just mean to present them to show what the discourse is on the ethical evaluation of humour, and to contextualize what I propose later.

## **1.2 Existing Theories**

Most theories about the ethical evaluation of humour may be categorized as either attitude endorsement theories or feeling-centred theories. I begin by addressing attitude endorsement theories since, in the contemporary literature, they come first chronologically. They take as their starting point an argument put forwards by

Ronald de Sousa in *The Rationality of Emotion* (1987). The central idea of de Sousa's theory is that there exist jokes that depend upon the audience endorsing some particular attitude.<sup>307</sup> Some attitudes should not be endorsed because they are unethical and false.<sup>308</sup> Therefore jokes may be subject to ethical evaluation in certain circumstances. It is worth noting that de Sousa's conclusions are not meant to be particular to humour, rather he is using humour as a case study to sketch a way that emotions play a role in an ethically good life.<sup>309</sup>

De Sousa's theory holds the position of a bugaboo in the discourse – it is frequently invoked, but only as a foil. The most frequent target of de Sousa's theory is the contention that endorsing an attitude may be required for getting a piece of humour. For example, Aaron Smuts isolates the endorsement condition by characterizing de Sousa's argument as follows<sup>310</sup>:

1. Understanding a joke requires understanding the propositions upon which the joke relies
2. Understanding or "getting"<sup>311</sup> the joke is insufficient for finding it funny.
3. If one has a negative attitude towards certain key propositions, then a joke will fail.
4. It is impossible to hypothetically endorse these propositions in such a way that will revivify the joke.
5. This means that there exist jokes where a positive attitude towards certain key propositions is necessary to find the jokes funny.
6. From this, the attitude endorsement theory follows.

Smuts accepts premises 1-4 so that he can focus on point 5.<sup>312</sup> Against de Sousa's contention, Smuts argues that premise 5 is simply unsupported.<sup>313</sup> He writes that premise 5 is in effect an empirical claim, and that de Sousa should present

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<sup>307</sup> Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 290.

<sup>308</sup> de Sousa, 295.

<sup>309</sup> de Sousa, 275.

<sup>310</sup> Aaron Smuts, "The Ethics of Humor: Can Your Sense of Humor Be Wrong?" *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, no.3 (2010): 336.

<sup>311</sup> "Getting the joke" is a colloquial term, and so the different ways in which it is used by different theorists should not be understood as meaning the same thing.

<sup>312</sup> Smuts, 337.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

empirical evidence in support of it.<sup>314</sup> Absent that empirical evidence, Smuts puts forward his intuition, that mere familiarity with attitudes is sufficient.<sup>315</sup>

Noel Carroll similarly attacks premise 5, arguing that there is no good reason to believe that attitudes underlying jokes must be endorsed.<sup>316</sup> He puts forward that it is possible to imagine believing the attitudes that underlie a joke, as opposed to necessarily endorsing them.<sup>317</sup> He also pushes farther than Smuts by arguing that exactly what a necessary belief might be is too unclear.<sup>318</sup> He takes the following joke as an example: “M leaves a hockey dressing room and claims she was gangraped. She wishes.”<sup>319</sup> Carroll suggests “rape is just a variant of sexual intercourse” as the sort of morally bad belief that this joke may rely on.<sup>320</sup> Against that, Carroll writes, that he found the joke perfectly funny but instead believed that M, as a stand in for a famous actress, was simply lying about being raped to hide her promiscuity.<sup>321</sup> The force of this objection is that while endorsing some particular attitude may be sufficient for a joke succeeding, that does not mean it is necessary.

David Benatar similarly attacks the necessity of some particular attitude, and adds a challenge to the workability of evaluations made under an attitude endorsement framework.<sup>322</sup> He argues that introspection is not reliable for identifying what attitudes are actually relevant, which makes theorizing over possible necessary attitudes difficult at best, and hopelessly obscure most of the time.<sup>323</sup> This supports a distinction between the “contextual” and “non-contextual,” evaluation of a joke.<sup>324</sup> Jokes, or humour, are considered

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<sup>314</sup> Smuts, 337.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Noel Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 98.

<sup>317</sup> Carroll (*Humour*), 99-100.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, 94-95.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> While I do not mean to evaluate the arguments here, this example *really* does Carroll no favours.

<sup>322</sup> David Benatar, “Taking Humour (Ethics) Seriously But Not Too Seriously,” *Journal of Practical Ethics* 2, no.1 (2014): 29.

<sup>323</sup> Benatar, 29.

<sup>324</sup>Ibid, 27.

contextualized insofar as they are instantiated in a particular context.<sup>325</sup> There are concrete tellers, a concrete audience, and the joke or humour is actually happening. Non-contextual evaluation involves evaluating the joke on its own, without appeal to teller, audience, or other features of context.<sup>326</sup> In context, it is possible that a joke may “arise from” some particular attitude.<sup>327</sup> This is to say that the teller of the joke may be motivated by some endorsed attitude, and that attitude may be unethical. If that attitude is expressed by the joke, then the audience may be offended.<sup>328</sup> If the audience’s offence is merited – if they belong to a group in a context where they are entitled to be offended – then the joke is unethical.<sup>329</sup>

The other major group of theories are what I will call feeling-centred theories. These theories take humour to have some associated feeling-centred response (usually some form of amusement) that is definitional to humour, and that this response may or may not be blocked by a joke’s ethical content. I situate Berys Gaut’s ethicism at the centre of such theories although, as with de Sousa, he is short of allies. Ethicism rests on top of a deeper theory, called the merited response theory. MRT holds that emotional responses may be evaluated normatively, which is to say that there are circumstances where they are merited (features of circumstance in some way legitimate the response), or unmerited (features of circumstance either do not legitimate or illegitimate the response).<sup>330</sup> He supports MRT using lay talk about comedy and horror: comedies are considered to fail to be funny and horrors to fail to be scary, but the content of those works is readily understood as attempting to be funny or scary.<sup>331</sup> Ethicism adds that it is possible for a joke’s unethical content to obstruct a joke’s humour.<sup>332</sup> This does not mean that the joke is wholly unfunny, just that it is less funny insofar as it is

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<sup>325</sup> Benatar, 27.

<sup>326</sup> Noel Carroll presents a similar classification of joke types and tokens, although he does not invoke it in this debate. Carroll, 90-92.

<sup>327</sup> Benatar, 30.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>330</sup> Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 231.

<sup>331</sup> Gaut (2007), 231.

<sup>332</sup> Berys Gaut, “Just Joking: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Humor,” *Philosophy and Literature* 22, no.1 (1998): 65-6.

unethical.<sup>333</sup> As with attitude endorsement cases, the content of the joke that may be ethical or unethical is the attitude which the joke evinces.<sup>334</sup> According to Gaut, some of these attitudes are morally wrong, and so may count as a reason to find the joke not funny.<sup>335</sup> Since these attitudes are not the whole of the joke, they do not exhaustively determine the funniness of the joke.<sup>336</sup> Furthermore, certain unethical attitudes may be more or less relevant socially relevant.<sup>337</sup> To support this point, he gives the example of dead baby jokes.<sup>338</sup> These jokes trade on attitudes that are putatively immoral – that dead babies are in some way enjoyable.<sup>339</sup> However, he notes, there is no widespread social problem of infanticide, so there is no reason to take serious umbrage at such jokes.<sup>340</sup> Accordingly, the ethical cost is low, and so the immorality does little to harm the funniness of the joke.<sup>341</sup> Racist humour that occurs in a racist society, on the other hand, comes with a high ethical cost and so the immorality greatly restricts the joke’s humour.<sup>342</sup> Note that the joke may still be on balance funny, but insofar as it is unethical it is worse.

Ethicism has a number of foils. On the side of autonomism, which holds that humour cannot be harmed by immorality, there is Ted Cohen. Cohen accepts that there may be social reasons to not laugh, but that does not bear on the humour itself.<sup>343</sup> Holding a position that is in some ways similar and in other ways radically different is Daniel Jacobson, who holds that while a joke may be helped or harmed by its moral content, there is no systematic connection between the two.<sup>344</sup> This means that there are occasions where a joke may fail for ethical reasons and there are occasions where a joke’s ethical content may be irrelevant, but there is no

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<sup>333</sup>Gaut (1998), 65-6.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 82.

<sup>344</sup> Daniel Jacobson, “Ethical Criticism and the Vice of Moderation,” in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 351-2.

way to give a systematic account of what ethical features of a joke are going to matter in which circumstances. Jacobson will often get classified as a contextualist or immoralist, with the implication of the latter being that there are situations where a joke may be more funny on account of its immoral content.<sup>345</sup>

The two most prominent opponents to Gaut, as with de Sousa, are Carroll and Smuts. Carroll advances what he calls “moderate moralism.”<sup>346</sup> While Carroll does tacitly leave room for humour that works because it is immoral, his main disagreement with Gaut is over the merited response theory. Carroll argues against the merited response theory, arguing in its place that views humour as trading on imagining attitudes.<sup>347</sup> If an attitude is sufficiently immoral, this may trigger a subject’s imaginative resistance and cause the joke to fail.<sup>348</sup> While Carroll does not use these terms directly, a critical point seems to be that instead of Gaut’s normative approach to what is funny he substitutes a more descriptive one. Humour fails when imaginative resistance kicks in, rather than a joke merely being less funny because imaginative resistance ought to kick in. Smuts’ approach is similar to Carroll’s, though he focuses more explicitly on normativity. The key failing of Gaut’s normative approach is that it is what he calls “unilateral normativity,” meaning that Gaut provides a theory of when jokes fail to be funny, but never when ethical content makes an otherwise-unfunny joke funny.<sup>349</sup> Smuts adds to this that the merited response theory holds that in cases of ethically-failed jokes, Gaut’s theory has to give an account of what other emotions subjects should feel and when.<sup>350</sup>

Attitude endorsement theories and feeling-centred theories are not the only two theories for ethically evaluating humour, but they are the central two.<sup>351</sup> What

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<sup>345</sup> For more in depth on the point of immoralism specifically, see Nannicelli (2014) and Dean (2018). Immoralism specifically has not received the same focus as moralistic ethical evaluation for reasons that are probably interesting but also not relevant to my project.

<sup>346</sup> Noel Carroll, “Ethics and Comic Amusement,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, no.2 (2014): 251.

<sup>347</sup> Carroll (*Ethics*), 249.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid*, 251.

<sup>349</sup> Carroll makes a similar point but does so more as an aside. Smuts makes it central to his criticism. Smuts, 341.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>351</sup> Smuts begins to sketch a sort of character responsibility view in “The Ethics of Humour,” but does not give a thorough account so much as show that there is dialectic space for it to exist. *Ibid*, 344.

I would like to highlight of the two of them is that they focus on internal phenomena, much like the theories of humour which underlie them. Both theories also fundamentally only interrogate individuals. The questions are about what an individual believes, and what state of mind that individual must have to find a joke funny. They're about how an individual feels in response to a joke. While these theories have useful resources, they are ultimately not usable for my social account, which regards humour as a social phenomenon that must be evaluated as such. I will now turn to building an account of how the ethical evaluation of humour would work under the social account.

### **1.3 The Act of Humour**

The purpose of this section is to present a way of talking about humour under the social account of humour. It will provide the framework for discussing the ethical evaluation of humour in the section after. The goal is to establish a way to sensibly write about humour acts failing, which is necessary to discuss how humour acts may fail for ethical reasons.

#### **1.3.1 Review: Trust, Interpretation, and Constraints on Speech Acts**

At this point I would like to re-establish some ideas from earlier in the dissertation which will be again relevant in this section. In the first chapter I argued that listeners or other audience members to a speech act can be understood as trusting (or distrusting) a speaker (or other utterer) with respect to the intentions behind the speaker's speech act. I based this in an approach that used speech acts as a model for interaction between utterer and audience, and I used a reflexive intentions model for understanding how utterer and audience engage. A speech act may be standard speech, but it may also be used as a model for works of art and artistic meaning. Understood this way, works of art are utterance-like in that they involve an artist, artists, or other authorial character articulating some idea through an artistic medium, which the audience in turn understands through engaging with the artistic medium. This is not exhaustive of how works are created



or engaged but, since the concern of my thesis is satire, it is sufficient.<sup>352</sup> As I surveyed in chapter 1, there are multiple approaches to understanding a work's meaning based on the importance that is given to a work's actual authors and those authors' actual intentions. All of these approaches, however, may be understood as working through an approach of reflexive intentions.<sup>353</sup> I choose to use the Gricean approach to reflexive intentions.<sup>354</sup> This means that the meaning of a work of art is understood by the audience understanding the work's author's intentions, the audience understanding that the work's author meant for these intentions to be understood, and the audience understanding the work's author's intentions by way of understanding that the work's author meant for these intentions to be understood. Since the audience is engaging the author's intentions, it is important what the audience considers it possible for the author's intentions to be. This gives way to what I articulated as trust. For some facet of an artwork to convey meaning, the audience must trust the artist to be sufficiently capable of constructing that facet. To believe that a work has some particular meaning, the audience must trust the character of the author in that they believe that the author is the sort of person who could or would mean what they, the audience, are considering that the work might mean. Trust is not necessarily absolutely present or absolutely absent. The audience may trust the author a fair bit if they consider the author to be talented, or only a little bit if they consider the author to be incompetent. They may trust an author to have a subtle point if they believe the author to be intelligent, or mistrust an author if they believe he's just a boor.

It is important to underline that this account of interpretation is normative, not descriptive. This means that it describes how a hypothetical or idealized audience ought to react, and it does not predict how a real audience will. Under this account, if the audience trusts the author that is because the author is

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<sup>352</sup> This sort of meaning-centred account would not capture, for instance, the articulation or enjoyment of colour in painting or rhythm in music.

<sup>353</sup> For simplicity I will present my analyses using the language of there being an actual author, but as I present in chapter 1 this approach does not necessitate there being an actual author.

<sup>354</sup> As I note in chapter 1, this is not the only approach. There is also, for example, the relevance theory of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson. I choose to use the Gricean approach just because it is formulaic, and it is common among philosophers of art. I do not believe that any of the claims I advance depend on the preference of the Gricean approach to reflexive intentions over others.

genuinely trustworthy, rather than a real audience being gullible or overly-suspicious.<sup>355</sup>

This model applies easily to cases of humour. Humour acts are often straightforwardly speech acts, with short narrative jokes being a paradigmatic example. Humour acts may also be more closely analogous to works of art, such as short comic vignettes in a newspaper. In this chapter I will use “humour act” to refer to an act that is meant to be funny, whether it succeeds or not. Humour acts do not encompass all humour – I discuss found humour in chapter 3 – but they are a sufficient focus for this chapter.

### 1.3.2 Ted Cohen and “Getting It”

This subsection concerns the epistemological constraints on a humour act succeeding. In *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*, Ted Cohen describes jokes as being more or less “hermetic.”<sup>356</sup> The degree to which a joke is hermetic is determined by how much background knowledge is necessary to “get” a joke, where getting a joke involves not just a level of understanding of the content of the joke, but also engaging with it in such a way as to find it funny.<sup>357</sup> This second characteristic – engagement – is why explaining a joke to someone is not necessarily sufficient for him to get it. While Cohen specifically writes about jokes, it is not a stretch to apply this model to humour acts in general.<sup>358</sup>

Every joke is more or less hermetic, since even the most accessible jokes require some baseline level of competence to get.<sup>359</sup> These standards could be as basic as linguistic understanding or simple pattern recognition, but they are still standards and they are still present. Even though all jokes are to some degree hermetic, it is still sensible to consider “hermetic jokes” as a separate class. The

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<sup>355</sup> This is not circular. As I write in chapter 1, the audience in question is a normative audience, and not a real one. Accordingly, to say that the audience only trusts the author if the author is trustworthy is only to say that what is in question are the characteristics of the author and not the gullibilities of the audience.

<sup>356</sup> Cohen, 12.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Cohen acknowledges as much. Ibid, 1.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid, 12.

standards of knowledge or understanding to get these jokes are particularly high, and the communities that get these jokes may be particularly restrictive.<sup>360</sup> Two common sorts of hermetic jokes are in-group professional and ethnic jokes. These are jokes that are told amongst in-group members, and depend upon knowledge of or familiarity with a common set of defining experiences. Cohen notes that hermetic jokes are particularly good at creating what he calls a “community of appreciation,” an in-group held together with a particular level of emotional intimacy.<sup>361</sup> This maps on well to the understanding of affiliative humour that I offered in chapter 3. Similarly, I argue that Cohen’s account gives a good base for understanding disaffiliative humour through hermetic jokes. If a joke is uttered in a particular social setting where most participants get the joke, but others do not, then the humour can work disaffiliatively by way of excluding the people who do not get the joke from the community of appreciation. I will give a further account of this sort of disaffiliation in the next subsection on how humour may fail for ethical reasons.

If humour may depend a set of common knowledge or experiences being understood (or otherwise “got”), then there will also be humour acts which depend on the joke-teller or humourist being able to evince that they also understand or are familiar with some in-group knowledge or some in-group experiences. Accordingly, there will be humour acts where it is essential for the humourist to put some aspect of themselves at the forefront if the humour act is to succeed. This happens often with major stand-up comedy specials. For example, in *Laugh at my Pain*, Kevin Hart offers a lot of jokes that depend on him having money troubles, despite his at present being a multi-millionaire. To support the character that Hart wants to put forward during the show, the show begins with Hart leading a tour around impoverished North Philadelphia where he grew up. This makes clear to the audience that when he is talking about being short of money, he is talking about being short of money in a way which they understand and to which they can relate. This helps build Cohen’s community of appreciation.

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<sup>360</sup> The best analogy I can think of for classing some jokes as hermetic jokes while holding that all jokes more or less hermetic is accepting that all people hold some racist beliefs but only a limited number of people qualify specifically as racists.

<sup>361</sup> Cohen, 28.

### 1.3.3 Humour Acts Failing

The Cohenist scheme suggests two ways that humour acts can fail on the social account of humour. It may fail to be comprehensible, and it may fail to engender participation. Each of these failures are not necessarily absolute – humour may be better or worse on these accounts without being either wholly successful or wholly failed. Humour may fail on account of being incomprehensible for two reasons, and both are straightforward. The first is that some attempt at humour may not clearly be an attempt at humour. If the person attempting the putative humour act did intend for the act to be a humour act, then it may be thought of as a sort of failed utterance since the would-be humourist failed to articulate an utterance that embodies their intentions. Since humans will usually have some sort of familiarity with humour – Michael Billig points out that play, laughter, and teasing are found in infant-raising practices – total failures are extremely rare.<sup>362</sup> More common is a partial failure because it is unclear just how much the act in question is supposed to be humorous. Consider the following example of how a new neighbor, Howard, introduced himself to my family several years back. We had met his wife so we knew who he was and that he was coming but we had not met him personally. At some point he knocked on our door and, upon being answered, said, “I’m here to talk to you about Jesus. Have you planned for after you die?” This joke was unevenly received because we were just meeting Howard and, at that moment of engaging the utterance, were unsure of just to what degree he was joking. The situation suggests that it is at least in some part a humorous utterance, but we did not know him well enough to know just how much of a joke it was. For example: is he religious? Is this a topic he cares about deeply or not at all? It was even not instantly obvious that we were talking to Howard, as opposed to a door-to-door evangelist. Altogether, the humour act was not entirely clear.

The second way that a piece of humour may fail on terms of comprehensibility is that it is too obscure. There exists humour that has hermetic

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<sup>362</sup> Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2005), 205.

conditions: conditions of knowledge or expertise necessary to render the humour comprehensible. If some hermetic conditions are not met, then the humour will be less funny. If the hermetic conditions are unmeetable, then the joke will fail completely. Again, it is rare for a joke to fail completely; more often they will be partially hurt by obscurity, and less funny for it. A total failure might be an attempt at a linguistic pun for a language that none of the audience speak, like a play on the linguistic similarity between grandmother (“bobe”) and the legendary medieval knight Bevis (“Bovo”) to an audience that is unfamiliar with Yiddish. A common sort of hermetic joke that suffers for its hermeticity is one based on mutual past experience. This could either be in the form of a story of some event – the nonplussed audience given the explanation of “you just had to be there at the time” – or a reference to that event. Such references are particularly common in serialized or other brand-conscious television that seek to reward long-time viewers with references to older shows.

Since failures are partial, highly hermetic jokes may still be funny by other means. For example, hermetic jokes, if presented in the right context, may be very strong at creating participation. This manages the intuition that some may have about highly hermetic humour being among the best.

Hermeticity is also central to humour that fails because it does not succeed in – or possibly actively repels – engendering the participation of the audience. Elements of this are present in some of the examples I’ve presented so far: Howard’s attempt at a joke suffered because we were not sufficiently aligned with him, and we could not fully participate because we were unsure of his character. Referential humour from television shows often plays on the viewer’s identity as a fan, and the humour may work better or worse depending on how strongly a show’s viewers identify specifically as fans. These examples show how comprehensibility and participation are often related, but participation may be better isolated, and there are situations where the failure of some piece of humour is best understood by its failing to engender participation.

Examining participation foregrounds humour's social element. Of the examples in chapter 3, humour practices like the gab (the sharing of stories in a social environment) and the *Rex Facetus* (the practice holding that the King was privileged in initiating humour) had social criteria which may be understood from the perspective of participation. In each case, the humour practices attempt to put members in a particular social position, and have them act in a way according to that position. Common ways of understanding humour like "laughing with" and "laughing at" also foreground audience members participating in a particular manner. "With" and "at" suggest that they are participating with either the humourist or other audience members in their laughter. Since there is humour that relies on participation, there exists humour which may be worse due to lack of participation. As with comprehensibility, partial failures are more common than total failures, but total failures do exist and, in some cases, may be somewhat common. Consider a person trying to ingratiate themselves into a group by telling a joke at the expense of someone outside of the group. If the joke-teller is not a member of the group, there are many circumstances in which it will be difficult for the group to laugh along with the joke-teller. This is because they are not fully aligned with the joke-teller, and perhaps have no reason to align themselves against the joke's target. Many people also have some time in their life where they tried to relate a humorous story to an audience who did not react. This is the sort of situation where the story-teller might append, after the non-reaction, some version of "I guess you had to be there at the time." What is happening, on my analysis, is that the ability to participate is mediated by the connection to the original event in question. We can adjust the example to sidestep comprehensibility concerns by considering cases where the story is well-known – the story-teller has told this story many times – but never garners much of a reaction except from those who were "there at the time."

Total failures of participation happen when humour is not just poor at attracting participation but actively repels it. Examples might include an attempt at a humorous story that includes far too many or too specific personal details, or someone's attempt to ingratiate themselves to an audience with a self-aggrandizing joke at the expense of the audience. A particularly interesting

example of encouraging (and failing to encourage) participation is found in Mo’Nique’s 2007 stand up set *I Coulda Been Your Cellmate*. The set is delivered to the people imprisoned in Ohio Reformatory for Women. Some of the humour succeeds strongly, especially when Mo’Nique displays familiarity with the dynamics of prison life – for one bit she looks for the “baddest bitch here” and playfully dismisses one woman for not being a maximum security concern – or talks about common experiences like masturbation and trying to find sexual pleasure without a partner. Some of the humour also fails completely. When Mo’Nique tries to offer life advice – on how to act morally and how to succeed – the audience grows quiet and there is even a slight feeling of hostility. The spots highlight Mo’Nique’s position as highly successful comedian and actress, and so set her against the audience. The humour alienates the audience. That they, prisoners and performer, share some background may even make the alienation more acute as the humour, far from encouraging the audience, underlines to them that their lot in life is determined as much by luck as just desserts. The audience cannot participate, and so the humour fails.

#### 1.4 Humour Acts Can Fail on Ethical Grounds

Having set up how humour acts can fail, I will now turn my attention to how humour acts can fail on ethical grounds. Part of this requires supplementing the story of how humour fails with one about how humour can be immoral. This will involve focusing on the humour act as a way of exercising power within a social context. Since the humour can be used to exercise power, this renders humour acts subject to ethical evaluation. In humour there are ways that humour acts can be unethical such that the audience ought not participate<sup>363</sup>, then humour can fail on ethical grounds. As with all humour, failures are rarely total and what is at question is not whether some humour is funny or not but whether it is more or less funny. Importantly, there are two ways that humour may be more or less funny on ethical grounds. Not only is there the question of the severity of the ethical infraction (and its role in the humour) but there is also the question of the clarity

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<sup>363</sup> Participation usually but not necessarily takes the form of laughter. I elaborate on this in chapter 3.

of the ethical infraction. This is to say that it may be ambiguous whether or not the humour is unethical. On this point I will brush by de Sousa's attitude endorsement theory that I presented earlier. However, rather than focusing on what attitude the humourist may have in initiating the humour act I will instead foreground the act and what attitudes or other intentions are apparent to the act's audience. I will conclude by returning to a point that I made in my chapter 4 account of satire, which is that the virtue of this account is not so much that it will allow one to confidently declare jokes more or less funny but rather that it will accurately predict where and how disagreements over a joke's funniness will take place.

#### 1.4.1 Not Participating in Unethical Humour

In section 1.2.3 I argued that humour can suffer by either failing to merit or even outright repelling audience participation. The humourist cannot bring the audience onside, and so the audience does not laugh. In some such cases, the reason the audience cannot get onside is an ethical one. This is to say that there exist attempts at humour where the audience ought not participate for ethical reasons. There are two sets of ethical reasons why an audience ought not to participate in a humour instance, which I will refer to as ingroup- and outgroup-related reasons. Outgroup-related reasons are more common with disaffiliative humour (humour that deals in "laughing at"), while ingroup-related reasons are more common with affiliative humour (humour that deals in "laughing with").

In chapter 3 I outlined that one of the things that humour does as a social act is negotiate group dynamics. It helps determine who is in the group, and who is out. By targeting someone with disaffiliative humour, you exclude them from the group by having the in-group "laugh at" them. "Laughing with" can similarly be a way to include someone in a group.<sup>364</sup> Since humour can be used to manage group

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<sup>364</sup> Initiating laughter is a technique used by anthropologists to present themselves as friendly. It is used when the anthropologist does not share a language with the people she is joining for study. Henk Driessen, "Humour, Laughter and the Field: Reflections from Anthropology," in *A Cultural History of Humour*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Rodenburg, 222-241 (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1997).



membership, humour acts may therefore be exercises of power. Exercises of power by one person – or group of people – over another are morally evaluable. This means that there are cases where it is wrong to participate in a humour act (that is: laugh) because it is immoral. Since bringing about participation is part of how a humour act succeeds, and therefore part of how such an act is judged as superior or inferior, if a humour act repels participation because participating would be unethical it is then worse for being unethical. Similarly, humour may be stronger for being ethical if there is an ethical reason in favour of participation. All of this is normative and not descriptive, so I am making theoretical claims about the nature of humour and not descriptive claims about anthropological groups.

The most frequently invoked examples of unethical humour are bigoted jokes, usually racist. One such example, used in the debate surrounding attitude endorsement theory, involves throwing a basketball to distract a group of black men from committing a gang rape.<sup>365</sup> The joke is presented as an example as it potentially relies on unethical beliefs for its humour – stereotypes surrounding black criminality and obsession with basketball. Another set of examples, unrelated to attitude endorsement theory, can be found in Michael Phillips' 1984 "Racist Acts and Racist Humour." The first example he uses is that of cutting a Chinese man's queue.<sup>366</sup> There is no real attitude expressed by such a prank but it is still racist because it is ostracizing.<sup>367</sup> The prank attacks a feature that putatively defines the target as Chinese, and then makes the target the subject of disaffiliative laughter because of what identifies him as Chinese. Phillips notes that the prank works not by targeting the Chinese man for wearing a queue, but by using the queue as a way of attacking the man for being Chinese.<sup>368</sup> While it is only the hair that is cut, it is the person who is the target. This extends to racist mockery more broadly: the feature being made fun of is incidental to the targeting

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<sup>365</sup> Both Cohen and Carroll use this joke as an example.

<sup>366</sup> Phillips' use of the Chinese queue may date his paper but the style of racist humour still exists. A recent example of the same can be found in Calgary, Alberta, where an 11-year-old Kainai boy had his braid cut at school. Lauren Krugel, "Son's Braid Cut at Calgary School: Indigenous Mother Hopes for Teaching Moment," *CBC*, June 3, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/sons-braid-cut-at-calgary-school-1.4689811>; Michael Phillips, "Racist Acts and Racist Humour," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 14, no.1 (1984): 88.

<sup>367</sup> Phillips, 88.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

of the racialized person. The second example he uses is that of caricatures and insults that trade that work by describing the target. He invokes schoolyard jibes where describing the target – “She has black skin!” or, “His eyes look different!” – is the entirety of the joke. There are also jokes that trade on statistical truths, like a racialized minority having lower levels of literacy or lower health expectancy. A pointed example of the strength of this sort of racist humour is how the watermelon went from being a symbol of black self-sufficiency in the American South, after the civil war, to a symbol invoked by racists against black Americans. William R Black identifies the beginning of this move with a newspaper cartoon from 1869 which does no more than show some black children eating watermelon while carrying a caption about a particularly-black “fondness for watermelons.”<sup>369</sup> It is racist humour by description.

While bigoted humour is often the focus for studies of unethical humour, the account given generalizes easily. Phillips’ account of racist humour, especially, easily generalizes to explain how humour may be unethical even if it is not bigoted. This sort of exclusionary humour, for example, is typical of bullying. Margaret Atwood describes this sort of schoolyard bullying in her semi-autobiographical novel *Cat’s Eye* where the protagonist Elaine Risley is bullied by her supposed friends. One of the regular forms this bullying takes is that they follow behind her and describe her as she walks. Cyberbullying and other forms of internet-organized harassment also fit into the model of humour centred around attacking and mocking people. Members of websites like 4chan and Kiwifarms justify bullying – ranging from anonymous mocking to real life attempts to get people fired – as being “for the lulz.”<sup>370</sup> While bullying can fall along bigoted lines it does not do so necessarily, and does not have to be bigoted to be immoral.<sup>371</sup> It

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<sup>369</sup> William R. Black, “How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope,” *The Atlantic*, December 8, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/12/how-watermelons-became-a-racist-trope/383529/>.

<sup>370</sup> Members of websites like 4chan and Kiwifarms are often described as “trolls.” I think a good definition of trolling would be something along the lines of “a form of comedy centred around provoking a reaction from an unwilling target.” Understood as such, it is easy to see how trolling and bullying coincide.

<sup>371</sup> Phillips provides a discussion of how to think of situations where the bullying does fall along bigoted lines. Since racism is (among other things) an ideology, bullying along racist lines can serve to buttress ideological racism irrespective of the intentions of any of the participants. Phillips, 96.

is humour that works to exclude the target, and this exclusion can be sufficiently serious that participating in it is a serious moral offence.

There is also humour that is unethical without it fitting in to any broader classification. This is humour that harms. Consider a playful exchange between friends, when one friend goes too far – one person mocking another for their best friend dying young: “it’s good that you were both so young, that means you didn’t really appreciate the friendship.” This is a hurtful and alienating jibe. The humour is substantially at the target’s expense, and so to participate in the jibe is to participate in hurting the target.

It is important to note that not all moral offences are of the same magnitude. Participating in the bullying of a vulnerable minority is not the same as overstepping common respect in banter between friends. There will be plenty of instances where humour will have some moral component, but that component will be so small as to be irrelevant to the judgement of the humour. Hiding a friend’s beer at the pub will cause them some small distress, but the ethical wrongness of such an action is microscopic. Altogether, this means that humour suffers more for more serious moral infractions, and less for less serious moral infraction. This does mean that humour at the expense of vulnerable populations stands to suffer more, but that is ethically intuitive. Definitional to a population being vulnerable is that members of that population are disproportionately subject to violence, and in a worse position to withstand violence. Jokes at the expense of the systematically disenfranchised are capable of hurting more because there is a whole system (ideological or concrete) magnifying that harm.

The discussion of humour so far in this subsection has concerned outgroup-targeted humour. It has been about “laughing at,” and people who may be harmed by being laughed at. Something briefly has to be said about ingroup-oriented humour, where people are laughing together and the target, if there is one, is not present. It’s the sort of humour defended with some version of “well it’s just me and my friends here, so I don’t think we’re hurting anyone.” Phillips’ discussion of racist humour is instructive here because he situates particular racist acts within a

broader ideological structure of racism.<sup>372</sup> Racist humour, even if only among friends, works not just to solidify the ingroup but to solidify the ingroup along racist lines.<sup>373</sup> Phillips evidences this with a counterfactual, noting that were one to pointedly not laugh along with a racist joke, even among good friends, one would find themselves at least partially alienated from that group. He writes:

Those among us who fail to laugh – or who object to laughter – are immediate outsiders, perhaps even traitors. In general, the price of objecting is a small exile. By participating, however, one accepts membership in a racist association (albeit a temporary one). The seriousness of so doing, of course, is far less than, e.g., the seriousness of joining an official white supremacist organization. But notice that the difference in seriousness diminishes the greater one's participation in such informal communities of feeling.<sup>374</sup>

Racist humour helps form racist groups, and in turn those groups help compose society.<sup>375</sup> Accordingly, the things that define these groups are never completely separate from their broader social outcome. Phillips notes with reference to bigotries that systems like racism are ideological and widespread.<sup>376</sup> This means that racism in a racist society spreads easily, and so there are more of these “informal communities of feeling.”<sup>377</sup> It is unethical to participate in buttressing racism, even in a racist society. Accordingly, racist jokes, even in the case where it is a small group of friends laughing along, are less funny for being racist.

The framework I have provided so far to discuss humour that is worse for being unethical also works for humour that is better for being ethically virtuous. Just as humour can suffer if there is an ethical reason to not participate, it can benefit if there is an ethical reason to participate. Just as humour can be used to foster groups based upon unethical lines (such as the racist ingroups described by Phillips), it can be used to foster ethically meritorious groups. Humour at the

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<sup>372</sup> Phillips, 96.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

expense of a racist outgroup can affirm antiracism within the ingroup.<sup>378</sup> Similarly, humour can be ethically meritorious if the target of the humour, for one reason or another, is a just target for the power that humour can exercise. This is humour that conforms to the lay idea of “punching up.” Real instances of this sort of humour where the target is present are rare since if the target really does hold that power then the would-be humourist and potential audience are probably not in much of a position to actually get away with any kind of direct humorous attack.

So far I have discussed how humour may be more or less funny by way of its ethical content. To achieve this, I have assumed cases where the ethical content of the humour act is clear. However, this is rarely actually the case. Humour is often unclear for one reason or another. This could be a feature of the humourist not being well known to the audience, or the humourist just not being very good. In the following subsection I will engage unclear humour and, recurring the discussion on trust from earlier in the chapter, and provide an account of how to deal with ethically ambiguous humour.

#### **1.4.2 Ethically Ambiguous Humour**

The ethical content of humour is often unclear. In this subsection I will engage the two different ways that this ethical content may be unclear. The first is that the ethical content of the humour might not be well articulated. The second is that the humourist’s intentions and motivations might be dubious. In each case, I argue that what is at issue is humourist failing to earn the audience’s trust, and failing to be clear in their humour. This means that ethically dubious humour is less funny to the extent that its ethical content is unclear.

I have previously defended evaluating works of art by clarity. I defended clarity with respect to works of art, but it is applicable to humour for the same reason. Humour cannot succeed without the audience “getting it.” Humour that is unclear is, from the perspective of the audience, more or less obscure, which in

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<sup>378</sup> There are, of course, many reasons to be suspicious of hollow protestations of one’s goodness, especially when these originate from corporate advertisements. There is more to opposing racism than mocking racists.

turn hinders their ability to get it. Accordingly, one of the tasks of the humourist is to make sure their works are clear.<sup>379</sup>

A work being ethically unclear interferes with the audience getting it. While all humour suffers from the audience not completely getting it, this is more pronounced in the case of ethical evaluation. This is because the ethical evaluation of humour under the social account emphasizes humour as a way that power may be exercised. If the audience cannot be sure of the ethical content of some humour, then they have an additional reason to not (fully) participate because they have reason to be cautious of exercising power over someone or some group in a vulnerable position.

In cases where the ethical content of humour is poorly articulated, it is mostly clear that the humour has some ethical content, but exactly what that content is is unclear. The audience knows what the topic is, but is unsure just what point the humourist is trying to make. This is usually clumsy, inept humour between acquaintances when the would-be humourist overestimates their own ability, but there are examples from professionals. Many can be found in the world of political cartooning, where professionals are on a tight deadline, and so must scribble whatever they can as quickly as they can. Consider a 2014 cartoon by Michael Ramirez. The subject is a WWII-era bomber with the campaign logo of Barack Obama on the tail. The nose bears the writing “Ebola Gay” and it is dropping a bomb labeled “Ebola.” There is no other detail or labeling. From the cartoon’s context as a political cartoon, and its invocation of Obama and Ebola, it is evident that there is some moral content to this cartoon. What that content is, however, remains a mystery. Another example can be found in a 2003 cartoon by Ted Rall. In it a Palestinian terrorist reacts to George W Bush saying “they hate us for our freedom” by soliloquizing about how well Bush understands him and how well-to-do his friends are before blowing himself up. In each case, the cartoon is not very funny to begin with, but that is to be expected. A failure of clarity is fundamentally a failure of competence, and if a professional humourist is not

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<sup>379</sup> As I noted in chapter 4, a work being “clear” means that it is clear what the audience’s response ought to be. Works that are purposefully obscure may still in this sense be clear.

particularly good at getting across the humour of their work, they are likely poor at other aspects of their work as well. In each case, though, the works are nevertheless still worse for ambiguity surrounding their ethical content. The Ramirez cartoon is total nonsense, unclear whether or not it is even lampooning Obama. It is unclear who is being laughed at and who the prospective audience would be laughing with, and this repels participation. The Rall cartoon is a little more clear. Bush is definitely the target, and there appears to be at least some sympathy for the Palestinian figure. However, the exact ethical content of the cartoon is still unclear. Specifically, the attitude towards Palestine and Palestinians is unclear, and it is unclear how much of the humour is at their expense. The prospective audience may be confident that they are aligning against Bush, but it is unclear whether the audience is aligned with or against (or have no particular position with respect to) the Palestinians. With both cartoons, unclarity surrounding the humour's ethical content damages the humour because the audience cannot be sure with whom they would be participating. If humour only brings about reluctant or half-hearted participation, then it is inferior.

Humour that suffers from poorly articulated ethical content is often not much of an issue because it is usually otherwise bad. When humour is between “not particularly funny” and “completely unfunny” its particular gradations are rarely the subject of debate. Humour with unclear intentions or motivations is much more contentious. In some way, all unclear humour suffers from unclear intentions. My criticism of Ramirez and Rall can be read as the problem with their work being that what they intended was unclear. Accordingly I must clarify that when I write of unclear intentions in humour I am writing about something more specific. To explicate this sort of humour, I want to recur the examples of unethical humour from the previous subsection. There is group-based humour that may be affiliative or disaffiliative. Disaffiliative humour may be used to exercise power. Disaffiliative humour that targets vulnerable groups is ethically dubious. Common and severe examples of unethical disaffiliative humour include racist humour, sexist humour, and bullying. Where “unclear intentions and motivations” comes in is that humour does not always announce itself as clearly racist. From the audience's perspective it is often unclear whether a piece of humour is affiliative

or disaffiliative, and for group-based humour with ethical content that is significant.

There are two ways in which the affiliative or disaffiliative nature of group-based humour may be ambiguous. The first is that it may be ambiguous as to whether the humourist is trying to be affiliative or disaffiliative. The second is that even if the humourist is trying to be affiliative, they may nevertheless have a conception of the group(s) in question such that the humour is nevertheless unethical. Both are similar, although the second requires an additional degree of argumentative finesse to set out. In each case the humourist must be able to make clear that their intentions are of the right sort: either that they do not mean to target a vulnerable minority, or that they are affirming an ingroup that includes the humourist and audience as equals. In cases of ambiguous humour, it is important that the humourist earn the trust of the audience. Recall the analysis of trust and humour that I gave surrounding Kevin Hart's *Laugh at my Pain*: jokes about him being short of money require that he situate himself as someone who knows what being short of money is really like, so he begins his show by establishing his childhood in a poor area of Philadelphia. Ethically dubious humour requires a similar feat from the humourist – for them to make clear, in one way or another, that they intend their humour affiliatively or disaffiliatively as appropriate.

An additional level of finesse is necessary to make sense of cases where the humourist is trying to be appropriately affiliative or disaffiliative but there are nevertheless doubts about the way they conceive of the groups in question. This is the paradigm case of someone making a joke to a group where that joke is normally only told amongst members of that group, but the humourist is not part of that group. Recall the way the idea of trust was set up in Chapter 1, part of what is in question is not just what the utterer intends, but what the utterer is capable of intending. That is very important when dealing with ethically dubious humour. If a white humourist makes a joke surrounding racialized blackness, then even if the humourist intends the joke to be affiliative the degree to which the humour actually is affiliative will depend, in part, on how the humourist conceives



of blackness. The content of the humour depends on what “black” is taken to mean, and what “black” is taken to mean in the mouth of the humourist. What “black” can mean depends on what can be successfully uttered into an utterance in such a way that the audience can believe the utterer to intend. Accordingly, if a humourist wants to make a joke that trades on the concept of blackness, they must make sufficiently clear that they do not take being black to be something pejorative. Note that this does not mean that a conception of a group identity cannot be negative. Plenty of affiliative humour by oppressed groups trades on the oppression that their identity confers. But the humour still succeeds because it manages to convey a sense of camaraderie or solidarity.

Humour that trades on group identities requires the humourist to evince an understanding of that group identity, and what it is like to be a member of that group. This makes sense of why group-oriented humour is often more readily accepted from members of a group than from someone who is not a member of a group. If a white humourist wants to make a joke that trades on blackness, then they must make clear a sufficient familiarity to or understanding of the experience of being black. The advantage of such a framework is that it does not just allow for non-group members to make jokes that are normally reserved for group members, but it helps explain when and why they succeed. Consider the following cases.

*Russell Peters* – Peters is an Indo-Canadian stand-up comedian who deals in ethnic humour. He makes jokes concerning the behaviour of ethnic minorities, immigrants, and people of colour. (These groups are often coextensive in his comedy.) Peters is also extremely popular with people of colour. For example, in his shows he will ask if there are any Mexicans in the audience. He will then single out the respondents and make jokes concerning Mexican stereotypes and affect a stereotypical Mexican accent. This sort of humour could easily be considered unacceptably racist, but it is accepted and specifically accepted by members of the target communities. Peters succeeds, I suggest, because he often focuses on his own upbringing as a racialized immigrant and how that set him apart in Canadian

society. His most famous line concerns his heavily-accented father threatening to beat him, often in relation to Peters trying to follow the lead of a white friend. Peters gains the audience's trust by showing deep familiarity with the experience of being marginalized for being a racialized immigrant.

*The Infidel* – This is a 2010 film starring Omid Djalili as Mahmud Nasir. Nasir has lived his life as an average middle-class Muslim in London's East End. When clearing out the house of his recently-deceased mother he discovers that he was adopted and is in fact Jewish. The plot of the film follows Nasir trying to balance learning to be Jewish enough to satisfy a persnickety rabbi while also being Muslim enough to fool a caricature of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Part of Nasir learning to be Jewish is learning to embody various stereotypes, and at one point he goes through a dream sequence dressed as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. These jokes work because the film manages to evince a sufficiently strong and nuanced sympathy of being Jewish (one which even situates 'authentic' Jewishness opposite paper-official Judaism). The sympathetic portrayal of Jewishness allows the film's humour to work affiliatively, successfully working off an in-group of both Jews and Muslims. One of the more subtle jokes to reinforce this is characters' continual use of "Jesus," as an expletive, reinforcing both Jewish and Muslim mutual distance from an English culture that is baseline Christian.

*Team America: World Police* – The 2004 movie provides an example of where humour suffers from the humourists not earning the necessary trust. The film is a putative satire of American imperialism, featuring a photogenic<sup>380</sup> American special operations team that combats terrorism. The film aspires to be an exaggeration and according takedown of American attitudes towards the rest of the world. However, its humour suffers because its portrayal of Arab Muslims fails to rise above simple racism. The Arab Muslim puppets

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<sup>380</sup> As photogenic as marionettes can be.

are all dressed stereotypically and speak a nonsense language consisting mostly of “durka durka.” They live in the country of Durkistan. The film fails to afford the characters of even the voice and place that Rall provides his Palestinian character. Since the film has nothing to elevate the characters above flat stereotypes, the film’s humour suffers. Even if it manages to identify Arab Muslims as victims of American imperialism, the impoverished conception of the Arab Muslim identity leaves the impression that the humour is still disaffiliative towards Arab Muslims. Participation is repelled for an audience that is cautious of participating in racism against Arab Muslims.

As the examples show, an implication of the trust argument is that no topic of humour is ever completely off limits due to being unethical. The reason these topics appear to be off limits is because they require the humourist to be highly trusted by the audience. Creating that level of trust is difficult, and beyond the skill of many.

In sum, ethically dubious humour requires the audience’s trust of the humourist. They must trust that the humourist is acting appropriately affiliatively or disaffiliatively, and they must trust that the humourist is the sort of person who is capable of having the appropriate intentions. As I noted in Chapter 1, this trust is rarely absolute or completely absent. Rather, it works in degrees. It is a question of the audience trusting the humourist more or less. As the examples show, giving particular evaluations in terms of humour is quite difficult. What makes a humourist seem trustworthy might be quite ephemeral. The strength of my theory is not in providing concrete judgements in concrete cases, but in predicting where disagreements will happen.

Under the social account of humour, humour is better or worse by how it merits or repels participation (in the form of laughter). Humour acts have ethical content that can affect participation. Humour will most often repel participation if it targets a vulnerable group. There is much humour where it is unclear the extent (or in what way) a vulnerable group may be targeted. In these cases, humour will

stand and fall by how much the audience trusts the humourist. Consequently, it is one of the tasks of the serious humourist to earn the audience's trust. Since trust is never absolute, ethically dubious humour will always be dubious, and will always suffer a bit but not necessarily a lot. I now return to satire, and how what I have provided so far this chapter interacts with my account of satire.

## **2. How Unethical Humour Can Harm Satire**

This section will provide an account of how satire suffers for its humour being unethical. It will take a similar structure to the previous section. First, I will show how satire can fail if the humour fails for ethical reasons. As with ethically dubious humour, total failures are rare. The account of full failure serves mostly to support the second subsection, where I engage partial failures of satire. As with humour, satire depends upon the audience trusting the satirist. Ethically dubious humour requires the satirist have a considerable degree of trust from the audience. I conclude with a third section on how the mass media context can serve as a millstone for satire with respect to humour. Professionally produced satire has many authors and is produced in a more or less opaque industrial context. In this subsection I will discuss how it affects the humour in satire and set up a transition to Chapter 6 where I will more fully discuss satire in a mass media context.

Some notes on what I am focusing on in this section. The topics are humour and satiric failure. I am focusing on how humour can fail, and how this affects whether or not a work is satirical. I do not want to focus on judgements of whether a work of satire is better or worse as a work of art, although some of that will necessarily feature in the subsection on partial failures. As was the case in the first section of this chapter, and in previous chapters of this thesis, I believe that the virtue of the account I provide here is not so much that it will allow someone to readily pinpoint whether or not some work is satirical, but rather that it predicts where and how people will disagree over a work being satirical.

### **2.1 Full Failures and "Simply Cruel"**

I have argued that a work is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it makes a criticism by way of a funny misrepresentation. This account centres the satirical misrepresentation, otherwise known as the “double object.” The double object comprises the model – the target of the satire beyond the work – and the intentional object – the misrepresentation of the model within the work. The way the model is misrepresented in the intentional object either embodies or conducts the satiric criticism. As I argued in chapter 2, that the misrepresentation is funny serves to guarantee the criticism of the model by way of its misrepresentation. I presented the example of Michael Crichton writing one of his critics into his novel *Next* as a pedophile and argued that since this misrepresentation is “simply cruel,” the humour fails along with the satire. I promised to complete the argument in this chapter, which I will now do using the tools provided in the first section.

The term “simply cruel” is explained easily with the tools from this chapter. The cruelty is in the real or potential harm of the humour, which repels participation. “Simply” connotes that there is nothing more to the attempted humour than this cruelty. Not only does the cruelty snuff out the potential humour, but it means that there is nothing of substance for a criticism. Similar to how, on Phillips’ analysis, the cutting of the Chinese queue does not trade on any concrete attitude but is just an act of alienation, so too does simply cruel humour fail to convey any real criticism. There is merely distaste or a brute exercise of power, and without actual criticism the double object fails. The satirist may convey their attitude towards the model, but there is nothing in how the model is misrepresented in the intentional object that constitutes a criticism of the model.

Total satiric failures are rare, and I suspect that Crichton’s Crowley is a model for the majority of them. The distaste of the author for target is too strong, and so any criticism disarticulates. There is no reason for Crowley to be a pedophile other than that is the heaviest slur that came to Crichton’s mind. Most satiric failures are partial, and they will be explored in the next subsection. There are also other ways that satire may suffer from unethical humour. As I wrote in chapter 3, satirists often make heavy use of humour beyond just using it to make a work satirical in the first place. Satire where this secondary humour is unethical

will likely be worse as a whole work, but that will have no bearing on whether or not it is satirical.

## 2.2 Partial Failures and Unclarity

As I argued in subsection 1.3.2, most ethical failures of humour are partial, and not total. This is because humour is frequently ethically ambiguous, rather than being entirely and straightforwardly unethical. The two main ways that I identified for humour to be ethically ambiguous were for the humour to be poorly articulated, and for the intentions behind the humour to be unclear. With respect to satire, and whether or not a work is satirical, both of these potential ambiguities may be treated as the same. This is because in the context of interpreting a work of art, they are the same: the audience is trying to identify and understand the work by way of its authors' intentions.<sup>381</sup> They are faced with prescribed humour, and the question of whether or not they ought to participate. Since interpretation requires engaging intentions, poor articulation and unclear intentions are one and the same.

Ethically dubious humour in satire is quite common, and works of satire are executed with more or less competence. Works that suffer from ethically dubious humour because they are generally poorly made are not very philosophically interesting. If the humour is ethically dubious then the work will not clearly be satirical. If the work is not clearly satirical, then it will likely be worse overall as a work of art. Not necessarily so, but probably. The more philosophically interesting cases are the ones that more centrally feature questions about trusting the author.

Trust features centrally in both understanding art and engaging humour. Since satire uses humour to both determine and inform satiric criticism, the audience's trust of the author is important in two simultaneous ways: the humour must be understood as either affiliative or disaffiliative with regard to both the model and the intentional object. Satiric humour targets both the model and

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<sup>381</sup> Or whatever plays the role of authorial intentions in the interpretive scheme being used. I give a full account in chapter 1.

intentional object. Humour is ethically evaluated by how it relates to the groups it affiliates with and disaffiliates from. Since satiric humour has two targets, satiric humour has two sets of group relations to be evaluated. Humour could be ethical with respect to model but unethical with respect to the intentional object, and vice versa. If both the model and intentional object are important, then the humour will in part depend upon the clarity of the misrepresentation; if it is not clear what the model is, for instance, then the humour dynamics of affiliation and disaffiliation will be less clear. I engaged with clarity and misrepresentation in the previous chapter, so I will not fully review the argument and examples here, but I do recommend revisiting the *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* example after finishing this chapter.

The complexity of satiric humour provides more opportunities for the humour to be ethically dubious. The humour may be dubious in how the intentional object or model are characterized, since either may be characterized as a vulnerable group and targeted with harmful, disrespectful, or otherwise unethical humour. This requires the satirist to make clear their position with respect to all morally relevant groups in the satire; which groups are treated affiliatively and which groups are treated disaffiliatively. As I noted in section 1.3.2, a significant part of this is articulating how the groups are conceived. A satirist may make clear they consider themselves to be acting affiliatively, but if they cannot evince that affiliation, there will be a level of distrust and that distrust will render the satire at least partially ambiguous. Consider the following example:

*Chappelle's Show* – Dave Chappelle presents what I consider to be the most prominent example of satire suffering for being unclear. He famously aborted his highly successful show and sent himself into exile because he did not feel his show's anti-racist message was being sufficiently received as an anti-racist message. He decided to stop the show when filming a sketch concerning a black fairy in blackface that convinced black people to act in stereotypical ways. While filming he felt that one of the spectators, a white man, was laughing in the wrong way. He took that laugh to mean that he was reinforcing stereotypes instead of undermining them. On my analysis, this can be

understood as Chappelle deeming his work insufficiently clear. The abject conceptions of racialized blackness that he used were received such that the disaffiliation was targeted not just towards the abjectness, but to the racialized blackness itself.

Note that the evaluation does not involve the topics of race and racialized blackness being in any way “off limits.” But they are complicated topics, and they require high degrees of skill to be effectively broached satirically. The popularity and endurance of *Chappelle’s Show* suggest that he was frequently successful, but not in this case.

### 3 Conclusion and Transition – Mass Culture and Trust

The *Chappelle’s Show* example suggests a subject that I will engage more fully next chapter. The show was a piece of mass media with many authors, and was distributed to a wide audience. This posed two difficulties for the audience and the audience’s trust. The first is that the show was an industrial product, and so had multiple authors. There were the writers, possibly actors, and possibly studio executives. As trust involves a judgement of the authors’ character, this multiplicity of authors inhibits trust because the authors are various and unknown. Their character is unknown. It is unclear who is being trusted. The second is that the industrial process means that all the authors are at an extensive remove from the audience. It is difficult for the audience to be able to trust the authors if they are not well known. This suggests that mass culture and the industrial process of cultural production will always serve as a millstone around the neck of mass-produced satire.

In this chapter I have provided an account of how humour may be ethically evaluated, and how its ethical content may help or harm it. Of central importance are the social dynamics of the humour. Humour is an exercise of social power, so the social standing of the affected groups is important. Since satire depends on humour, if humour can fail for its ethical content then satire can fail for unethical humour. It is rare that humour completely fails due to being unethical, so it is rare that satire completely fails for its humour being unethical. However, satire is



structurally complex and often engages topics that are morally complex. This means that satire often contains ethically dubious humour. The ethical dubiety means that the nature and extent of the satire are often to some degree, even if not a large one, unclear. This does not mean that ethically dubious satire should be off limits, but rather that the skill needed for it to fully succeed is quite high.

## **Chapter Six: Applying the Theory in a Mass Media Context**

This Chapter applies the theorizing of the previous five. I have so far given an account of satire – a work is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it criticizes a target by way of a funny misrepresentation – and in this chapter demonstrate some of its explanatory value. Specifically, I want to use my account of satire to give a story about satire’s political potency. This is an account of what political effects mass media satire should be *expected* to have. In a sense, I am offering predictions: if my account of satire is correct, then this will be the case.

I use the word “predictions” guardedly: I would like to bring the theorizing of the last five chapters out into the world, but I do not wish to fall into making straightforwardly empirical claims. I wish to avoid making empirical claims because I do not believe that a philosophical theory of satire is actually well-positioned to invoke the existing empirical literature, mostly from the domain of media studies. This is because different media studies research operates on different understandings of satire, sometimes explicitly so but oftentimes only implicitly evident in the examples or cases used. To the extent that the studies use different understandings of satire, they do not provide evidence in favour of any empirical claims I would like to make. Ideally, of course, a virtue of my account of satire is that it could provide the sort of theorizing that could organize and orient future empirical research, and provide a common base so as to ensure that different studies are not talking past each other.

In this chapter I will split satire into two different types and investigate each in turn. The first object of inquiry is what I will call “mock news.” By mock news I mean the genre of program that often takes the form of a news commentary show and focuses on current events.<sup>382</sup> This genre is worth pulling out because it explicitly takes politics as its subject matter, often comments directly on politics, and there is a common sense idea that these shows are particularly politically potent. While the genre of mock news is quite narrow, it still allows for

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<sup>382</sup> This genre of program has in the past been called “fake news,” but I feel like it is best to move on from that term.

quite a diversity of approaches. On the one end there is a show like *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* wherein the host, John Oliver, covers the weekly news and makes funny comments. Opposite it is something like *The Colbert Report*, hosted by a fictional Stephen Colbert who offers fake and ironic commentary on the daily news. Other examples range from *Brass Eye's* fake investigative journalism, or The Onion's satire of new media clickbait *Clickhole*.<sup>383</sup> It is worth noting that not all mock news is satire, and that which is satire is not equally satirical.<sup>384</sup> Accordingly, in this chapter, when I refer to mock news I refer to the parts of it which are satirical. I will lay out exactly what these parts are in section 2. The second object of enquiry is what I will call "ensconced" satire. These are works of narrative fiction which may be in part or in whole satirical. Examples of ensconced satire may be fully satirical, both in premise and narrative, like Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985). They may also be pieces of satire in otherwise non-satirical works, like with the character Dr. Bigbee in *The Watch that Ends the Night*.<sup>385</sup>

Altogether, this chapter will proceed in the following three sections. In the first section I will give an account of mass media. I will follow the account that Michael Mulkey provides in *On Humour* (1988) to describe the pressures on the production of mass media satire in an industrial setting. Mulkey's account will be presented in such a way as to make it consistent with the account of trust and interpretation which I provided in chapter 1, and this will provide the basis from which the analysis of the next two sections follows. In the second section I will

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<sup>383</sup> It is worth noting that paradigm examples of mock news skew liberal. There is a valuable investigation to be had as to (1) the degree to which the mock news genre is more copacetic with liberalism, and, more interestingly, (2) the degree to which there is an overattribution of the title satire to liberal shows, and an underattribution of the title satire to conservative shows. A case to illuminate point (2) would be the structural similarity between *The Daily Show*, which is often taken to be a paradigmatic case of satire, and *Infowars with Alex Jones*. While there is a large difference in the quality of facts each show employs, they keep the same shape of mostly media criticism, some interviews, and the occasional entirely-fictional sketch. Each show centres humour, and makes humour central to its criticism. If *The Daily Show* is satire, then there is a good chance that *Infowars* is too. Jones's conspiracy-mongering often lands him well opposite reality, but no part of satire trades on its content being true.

<sup>384</sup> Mock news that is not satirical usually falls into the category of what might be called "news with jokes." These sorts of mock news shows proceed simply, with the host introducing some piece of news and then either them or guests making jokes about it. On my account, since there is no misrepresentation involved, these shows are not to be considered satire. Accordingly, much of shows like *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* will be unsatirical. Perhaps less controversially, British panel shows like *Mock the Week* and *8 Out of 10 Cats* are unsatirical mock news shows.

<sup>385</sup> See previous comments in ch. 4.

engage mock news on two points: how much should it be expected to convince those it targets, and how much should it be expected to change the opinions of its audience. I argue that mass media mock news should not be expected to convince its criticized targets of very much, as its targets will be chosen from those who do not watch the shows. There are three aspects to this point that will be addressed: how the show creates and maintains an audience, how the show must affirm the audience to keep them, and how this affirming of the audience means that the show will not seriously criticize the audience. I argue that there is greater hope for changing the opinions of the viewers, but that this must be done subtly and can probably not be done to great effect. In the third I engage ensconced satire and argue that the industrial production of mass media satire acts as a negative pressure on satire since it makes the work less trustworthy. I close the chapter with a qualified conclusion: satire is not useless, but it should not be expected to be the driving force behind political change. To be useful, satire should be put to clear ends and used to enhance existing positions.

### 1.1 Empirical Studies

As I noted in the introduction, using empirical evidence to support my argument is tricky. While there are empirical studies on political humour and satire, different studies use different understandings of satire so I cannot simply use them to show the truth of a theory based upon my account of satire. In fact, some theorists use different accounts of satire across their own studies. For example, a 2004 study by Dannagal G. Young uses Jay Leno and David Letterman's political humour as the basis of studying the effects of satire on the 2000 American election.<sup>386</sup> In contrast, a 2011 study she conducted with Lindsay H Hoffman makes a point of distinguishing between satire and politically-targeted late night comedy, a distinction which would exclude most of what was considered satire by

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<sup>386</sup> Dannagal Goldthwaite Young, "Late-Night Comedy in Election 2000: Its Influence on Candidate Trait Ratings and the Moderating Effects of Political Knowledge," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 48, no.1 (2004): 6.

Young's 2004 study.<sup>387</sup> Further, since studies are generally interested in the broader phenomenon of the effect of satirical shows, rather than my narrower concern of how satire influences as satire (based on my account), the effects that these studies show could just as easily be the product of something other than satire. So when a 2011 study by Jay Hmielowski et al finds demographic breakdowns in the consumption of satire, that could just as easily track demographic preferences for certain sorts of humour as it could track class preferences for political content.<sup>388</sup>

An issue of a different sort is how studies carve up the political terrain. While studies do appear to be reasonably consistent on this matter, the problem is that the political terrain they use is impoverished. Specifically, they at least appear to consistently use a liberal-conservative dichotomy, occasionally mapping that onto the American dichotomy of the Democratic and Republican Parties. The deficiencies of this approach are severe. The American mainstream of liberal and conservative excludes ample political terrain, and keeping to the mainstream seems ill-suited to investigating the effects of at least putatively transgressive comedy. The use of specifically American politics may also play a distorting effect to the extent that American politics diverge from those of other countries. For example, when Amy B Becker produces a study as to the effects of satire on the political engagement by Americans, and looks at Democratic and Republican party members specifically, those results are going to be substantially affected by models of cultural politics and political participation particular to the United States.<sup>389</sup> Altogether, the limited and distorted political terrain that studies use confounds the ability to draw

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<sup>387</sup> Lindsay H Hoffman and Dannagal G Young, "Satire, Punch Lines, and the Nightly News: Untangling Media Effects on Political Participation," *Communication Research Reports* 28, no.2 (2011): 164.

<sup>388</sup> Jay D Hmielowski, R Lance Holbert, and Jayeon Lee, "Predicting the Consumption of Political TV Satire: Affinity of Political Humor, The Daily Show, and The Colbert Report," *Communication Monographs* 78, no.1 (2011): 107.

<sup>389</sup> Amy B Becker, "Playing with Politics: Online Political Parody, Affinity for Political Humor, Anxiety Reduction, and Implications for Political Efficacy," *Mass Communication and Society* 17, no.3 (2014): 436; Amy B Becker, "Comedy Types and Political Campaigns: The Differential Influence of Other-Directed Hostile Humor and Self-Ridicule on Candidate Evaluations," *Mass Communication and Society* 15, no.6 (2012): 798-799.

reliable conclusions about the political efficacy of satire. The studies are not showing the effects of satire so much as they are showing the functioning of the United States' cultural-political media. And while this is valuable, it is not the sort of data that I can use to evaluate satire such as I have engaged it.

## 2. Mass Media

I understand mass media as that network of media technologies (mainly television, radio, print, and internet) which distributes media products to multiple audiences. It is currently typical of mass media that each particular medium is dominated, to a greater or lesser degree, by a relatively small number of large companies which exercise a great deal of power as to what gets chosen for distribution. In print, these would be publishing companies for books and news media companies for newspapers. For film and television, these would be studios and production houses. Many of these companies are private companies mandated to pursue maximizing profit, though there are also publicly held companies like the British and Canadian Broadcasting Corporations. The mass production of mass media creates an industrial setting: more or less organized sets of institutions and standard practices oriented towards creating final products, where those products are the movies, shows, and books that audiences consume.

The immediate implications for my account of satire are twofold. The first is that since the meaning of a work of art is determined in part by the intentions behind its making, and the industrial context of mass media comprises sets of standard practices concerning how works of art are made, works created in an industrial context have their meaning affected by that context.<sup>390</sup> I will term this the 'procedural implication'. The second is that the industrial process means that works, as they are created, are subject to many different inputs which may affect a work's meaning more or less. These inputs may come from people working specifically on some particular work, like a film's director or a book's author, from

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<sup>390</sup> See ch. 1 for my full account of the relationship between intentions and work meaning such that it is relevant for this analysis.

editors who work for the media companies, and even from figures like managers and executives who want to make sure that the work conforms to some greater standard or goal. The most extreme example of such an input is found in the 1955 film production of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The CIA intervened in the film's production, with the desire that the film remake the book into a straight-forwardly anti-communist text. The book's humans, representatives for capital and the aristocracy were removed, so that the story had no analog of the predatory capitalism that was the allegorical motivation for Orwell's story.<sup>391</sup> The systematic possibility of such interventions in industrially produced mass media I will term as the input implication. I will discuss these implications in greater detail towards the end of the section, in the specific context of satire. Before that, however, I would like to engage Michael Mulkay's account of the mass production of humour and satire which will flesh out the nature of the industrial production of mass media.

Mulkay focuses on what he calls the "mass production of humour," and takes the satirical television show *Yes, Minister* as his case study.<sup>392</sup> *Yes, Minister* is an ensconced satire that ran from 1980 to 1982, centring on conniving government bureaucrats working to ignore or redirect an incompetent government minister. Mulkay identifies two central and related challenges for the mass production of televised humour. The first is that the showrunners must create and retain an audience.<sup>393</sup> Retaining an audience, importantly, requires not doing anything to alienate the existing audience. This does not mean that the audience must be constantly flattered, but the show must not do anything to permanently drive them away. Mulkay identifies this primarily with a show's premise.<sup>394</sup> Assuming that it is the show's premise and fundamental dynamics that created the show's current audience, that premise and those dynamics cannot change too much. This creates a lot of tension with the second challenge, which is that these shows must be created in a very demanding industrial context.<sup>395</sup> For television

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<sup>391</sup> Laurence Zuckerman, "How the C.I.A. Played Dirty Tricks with Culture," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2000, page B00007.

<sup>392</sup> Michael Mulkay, *On Humour: Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society* (Padstow: Polity Press 1998).

<sup>393</sup> Mulkay, 178.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

shows like *Yes, Minister* this means creating a new show every week. The showrunners have to do something to give the audience a reason to keep watching new shows, which demands frequent novelty. However, novelty is limited because whatever novelty there is cannot change the premise or fundamental dynamics of the show, lest the audience be alienated.<sup>396</sup>

While Mulkay is explicitly focusing on humour rather than satire, and while not all mass media satire is created in a week-over-week industrial context, his model generalizes well to mass media satire broadly. This is in part because humour plays a large part in satire, both as something that determines what is satirical and as something that is just a commonly used feature in satires.<sup>397</sup> What applies to creating mass media humour will often apply to creating mass media satire because in creating a work of satire, a humorous work is typically also created. More importantly, however, is that the two challenges identified by Mulkay apply to satire as much as humour. In the mass media context, satires are created with an audience in mind. Even works that are not weekly productions, like films or novels, are vetted by that part of the industrial process that cares about marketability and profitability. So a film like *Pain and Gain* (2013) will be vetted for its ability to appeal to audiences for action movies, the actors who appear in the film, or the film's subject matter. There is also the pressure for sufficient novelty, at least so far as to gain enough of an audience to justify the resources put in to creating the work.

This account of the mass media context allows me to flesh out the procedural and input implications for mass media satire. The context of the procedural implication is one of rapid production for the purpose of getting a product to an audience.<sup>398</sup> This amounts to something that plays the role of an intention behind a work's making. The answer to the question of why some feature

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<sup>396</sup> Mulkay makes the observation that this can lead to pessimistic satire. If a show's satire rests in its premise, then the target of the satire can never be defeated. In the case of *Yes, Minister* this means that the bureaucracy remains forever intransigent, and the minister forever incompetent. Mulkay argues that this creates the impression that the intransigence and incompetence are eternal and unchangeable. Mulkay, 190.

<sup>397</sup> I offer a full discussion of humour in satire in Ch. 3.

<sup>398</sup> I offer a full discussion on how I engage intentions and work meaning in Ch. 1.



of the work is there may be that it was convenient, that it was consistent with standard practice, or just that it was meant to appeal to a broad audience. These candidate intentions are going to be constantly present for any mass media work. Their candidacy serves to slightly obscure the meaning of any mass media distributed work; any feature of the work might be there only for reasons of procedural expediency. The input implication also plays an obfuscatory role, since it does not just introduce more people as a work's potential creators but it specifically introduces people whose interests in the work are likely to be different than the work's normal creators. A manager or executive is far more likely to be motivated by procedural-type reasons: adhering to normal production methods or, especially, trying to create a work that is maximally profitable for the company. Importantly, from the perspective of an audience engaging and interpreting the work, it is often ambiguous to what degree these managerial and executive figures were involved with the creation of a work.<sup>399</sup> This ambiguity means that procedural-type intentions are always candidate intentions for informing a work's meaning, irrespective of whether or not this sort of procedurally-motivated interference actually occurred.

I will demonstrate the effects of the procedural and input implications in the upcoming sections of mock news and ensconced satire. A preliminary conclusion for this section is that the context of mass media – the industrial production and industrial managers – undermines the audience's ability to trust the work. In chapter 1 I argued that one of the domains of trust was the institution of the artworld, which is a set of conventions and practices governing the creation and appreciation of art. For this domain, the mass media context undermines (but does not necessarily violate) the reflexivity condition for trust. The audience is uncertain whether and to what degree the work under consideration is being guided by intentions that are appropriately responsive to the audience's optimistic attitude towards the making intentions.<sup>400</sup> Following my argument in chapter 4, to

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<sup>399</sup> There is an interesting parallel here between the potential arbitrary involvement of an executive and the idea of domination as per republican political philosophy.

<sup>400</sup> I recur that the audience is being discussed in normative terms. This is not a description of real life audiences, who may have very particular expectations concerning corporate attitudes towards brands, marketing, and fanservice.

the extent that the audience's trust is undermined the work becomes less clear; the audience cannot be sure of the relevant art-making intentions. All mass media satire, then, suffers a sort of penalty for existing within the context of mass media since the context of mass media makes the work less clear.

### 3. Mock News

In this section I will apply my analysis of mass media to mock news and argue that mock news shows should not be expected to influence the beliefs of its targets, but it may subtly change the beliefs of its audience. I argue that its ability to change beliefs is severely limited because, following from my analysis of mass media, its audience should be expected to be composed of people who already accept the satirist's arguments.

I recur that I am looking at how satire works *as satire*. This will exclude other ways that satire may have political influence. (For instance, research done in 2004 suggested that while Saturday Night Live coverage of the US election may not have directly influenced viewer opinion, it did affect how news media covered the candidates and that coverage, in turn, did influence viewer opinion.<sup>401</sup>) As I argued in chapters 2 and 3, satiric criticism is conducted through the humorous misrepresentation of the model in the intentional object. Misrepresentation is used to add features or characteristics to the intentional object that the model does not have. Context makes clear that these misrepresentative features are the basis of a criticism of the model. Humour guides the attitude of the criticism and the nature of the satire: disaffiliative humour indicates a Juvenalian satire that tends to reject or be hostile to the satiric target, while affiliative humour indicates a Horatian satire that tends to be more forgiving of the satiric target.<sup>402</sup>

#### 3.1 The Limits of Mockery

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<sup>401</sup> Young (2004).

<sup>402</sup> More on the Horatian and Juvenalian distinction in satire can be found in chapters 3 and 4.

As I set up in the introduction, mock news is not always exactly satire. There is also much mock news that is satire adjacent. This will be the sort of mockery that does not bother with satiric misrepresentation. Popular examples of such satire-adjacent shows are British panel shows like *Mock the Week* and *8 Out of 10 Cats* where panelists answer questions and make jokes about current events. Accepting these satire-adjacent shows as typical of mock news, it is fair to say that mock news satire, even when properly satirical, de-emphasizes misrepresentation in favour of direct criticism and mockery. If mockery is central then questions of affiliative and disaffiliative humour are central, since this is how the satirist guides the audience's attitude towards the target. Disaffiliative humour renders the satiric outside the satirist's or below the group's standards. Affiliative humour accepts the satiric target into the satirist's group. This is where the analysis of mass media becomes important. Since mock news shows are mass media products that seek to attract and maintain an audience they must not alienate their audience, and in turn one of the shows' key tasks is to manage their mockery so as to keep their audiences.

Since mass media mock news must be centred on maintaining an audience, and mock news theoretically deals in political and moral criticism, this creates a strong pressure to affirm the audience. Challenging criticism leveled at the audience might alienate them and challenging criticism week after week might drive them away entirely. Targets for criticism, then, are typically chosen from outside of the group of the audience. If the targets are chosen from outside the audience then, by definition, the targets are not people who regularly watch the show. The dynamic, then, is that the moral and political criticism that is the stock and trade of mock news should be expected to affirm the audience, and target people who are not the audience. These two points together mean that mock news should not be expected to change many minds. The people who are watching the show are not likely to face anything that demands they change their beliefs, and the people being criticized are unlikely to be watching the show to receive the criticism.

This point can be strengthened by the argument that there is reason to expect that the targets of the satire would find the criticism unconvincing, even if they received it. Satiric criticism is standardly backed by merely social power. The criticism is only as effective as the targets care (or are made to care) about the satirist's standards. If the satiric target does not care about meeting the satirist's standards, then they are free to disregard the satiric criticism. As I argued above, in mass media, satiric targets outwith the audience will face disaffiliative humour. If the audience does not care about being part of the audience's ingroup, they do not have to care about the audience rejecting them.

I have presented a model of mass media satire that puts at its centre a politics of inclusion and exclusion. The audience forms an included ingroup, and the satiric targets are drawn from an excluded outgroup. I have argued that criticism against the outgroup is ineffective in changing the targets' beliefs because the targets are not going to be part of the show's audience, and even if they were to receive the criticism they would be unmoved if they did not care to meet the satirist's standards. I want to conclude this section of the analysis with a case that demonstrates an extreme, where mass media satiric criticism might go so far as to reinforce the targets' beliefs.

*Culture War*: "Culture war" is the term that has come about to describe a certain cultural dynamic from the US that was dominant from roughly the middle of the 1980s through the middle of the 2000s, although expressions of it still remain. It refers to a sort of political bifurcation of class where class is defined by, instead of wealth or material realities, cultural preferences and activities.<sup>403</sup> The best expression of this is found in a 2006 advertisement by the Club for Growth, attacking Democratic Party Candidate Howard Dean by describing him as "latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, New York Times-reading, body-piercing," and "Hollywood-loving."<sup>404</sup> These

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<sup>403</sup> Thomas Frank offers a discussion of the culture war dynamic in the chapter "The Two Nations," in *What's the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 13-27.

<sup>404</sup> Frank, 17. The Club for Growth still has the advertisement up on their youtube page, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4-vEwD\\_7Hk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4-vEwD_7Hk).

characteristics all seem to be clustered around a vague idea of someone coastal, urban, and metropolitan, and put in contrast (as the imagery of the advertisement suggests) some ambiguous down-homey, old-timey, common-sensey essence of America.

Understanding the culture war dynamic allows the following analysis of mass media satire. Owing to the nature of mass media production, major mock news shows are produced in coastal centres (Los Angeles and New York in the American context, Toronto in Canada, and London in the United Kingdom), and distributed by major companies which are in turn coastally based. In a context where many viewers buy into the dichotomies of a culture war narrative, the satirists that run mock news shows will find themselves squarely in one camp: that of the perceived urban elites. The alignment of mock news shows will be furthered by the fact that the audiences for these shows strongly trend towards young people, either college students or college-educated, who are at least vaguely cosmopolitan in their outlook.<sup>405</sup>

In culture war contexts, mock news shows should not only not be expected to convince or persuade their satiric targets, but they should be expected to solidify their targets' beliefs. As I argued earlier, disaffiliative satire works by setting up a group dichotomy - and us and them - and identifying the target as outside of the group. In a culture war context, the satiric target accepts the group dichotomy, but views the opposite group of the satirist and audience as the outgroup whose standards should be eschewed.

I want to put this analysis in the concrete context of former Toronto mayor Rob Ford. Ford ran for mayor as a populist, claiming that he would "stop the gravy train," and he gathered his support

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<sup>405</sup> Hmielowski et al, 107.

from the city's periphery.<sup>406</sup> He was also an idiot and a buffoon - while video of him smoking crack would not surface until after he was elected, even at the time of campaign he was known as a drunken idiot prone to falling down, a slob and utterly disrespectful.<sup>407</sup> He displayed a unity of bigotries, he dealt marijuana, and he skipped ethics orientation for city council members because he believed he did not need it since his uncle had been a member of provincial parliament.<sup>408</sup> In other words, for the mock news shows, and anyone else who drew their livelihood from the intersection of humour and politics, he was manna from heaven.

Much of the humour directed at Ford made it clear that he did not belong.<sup>409</sup> He lacked the temperament and capabilities to govern. He was disreputable - he was not the sort of person that Torontonians would want to represent Toronto. Following from my previous analysis, I want to argue that this should be understood as satirists putting forwards that Rob Ford is 'not the right sort of person' and that he 'violates our standards'. He did not have the character that the satirists considered to be appropriate for a political elite. To the city's periphery, that he was not the right sort of person for the perceived downtown elite was a virtue. Him being satirized by someone who Ford supporters viewed as being the opposite side in a culture war style dichotomy reaffirmed to them that Ford was on 'their' side.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> David Topping, "How Toronto Voted for Mayor," *The Torontoist*, October 28, 2010, [https://torontoist.com/2010/10/which\\_wards\\_voted\\_for\\_who\\_for\\_mayor/](https://torontoist.com/2010/10/which_wards_voted_for_who_for_mayor/).

<sup>407</sup> John Cook, "For Sale: A Video of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford Smoking Crack Cocaine," *Gawker*, May 16, 2013, <https://gawker.com/for-sale-a-video-of-toronto-mayor-rob-ford-smoking-cra-507736569>.

<sup>408</sup> Other highlights include wanting to replace Toronto's waterfront developments with a ferris wheel, suggesting that child molesters were "the main cause of people jumping off bridges," and arguing that women could not get AIDS because it was transmitted exclusively by gay men.

<sup>409</sup> *This Hour has 22 Minutes*, "The Best of Rob Ford Special," Episode 311. Directed by Vivieno Caldinelli, Michael Lewis and Stephen Reynolds. Written by Mike Allison et al. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, November 12, 2013.

<sup>410</sup> Andray Domise, who ran against Rob Ford for city council, gives a personal account of Ford's popularity here: <https://medium.com/@andraydomise/rob-fords-voters-have-souls-too-824688d767d>.

### 3.2 Sneaking in Beliefs

I have so far focused on the expected effect of mock news satire on the targets of the satire, since that tracks the lay belief in the power of satiric attack, and not given much reason for optimism. In telling this story, I have treated the audience as a fixed variable: they have their preferences and it is through appealing to these preferences that they are attracted and kept as an audience. They are, however, not so fixed and, I argue, if satire is going to change people's beliefs it is more likely to be those of the audience than those of its targets.

As with the previous subsection, I am still focusing on how satire works *as satire*, so I will leave to the side other ways that a mock news show might affect the beliefs of its audience. In the case of changing the audience's beliefs, satire works through trickery. It does not offer a convincing argument as to why the audience ought to believe something, but offers the implication that this is what the audience already believes. And it accomplishes this through the same mechanisms of affiliation and disaffiliation that I analyzed in the previous subsection.

Mock news satire regularly deals in disaffiliative humour. The satiric target is identified as someone or something that either is or ought to be outside of the ingroup that contains the satirist and the audience. The reasons for the rejection of the target are given in the satiric criticism. This allows for a trick of implication. The satirist is only explicitly focusing on the satiric target, and does not necessarily say anything about the audience. However, the audience is subtly characterized by its rejection of the target; the audience must be characterized in some way that the target, for the reasons identified in the satiric criticism, is unacceptable to them.

The audience does not necessarily explicitly accept this sort of characterization. In fact, they might not accept (or even recognize) any characterization at all. Rather, the audience simply goes along with the satire, and the satiric humour. They laugh as the "us" against the targeted "them." This

provides room for the satirist to construct the “us,” the ingroup and what defines that ingroup. This is not something that can be done cavalierly and the audience’s preferences do not simply disappear. However, if the satirist is careful and clever, they may insert beliefs or characteristics that do not contradict the beliefs or values of the audience members. The beliefs, in turn, may be unconsciously taken up by the audience as beliefs they have always had. The characteristics of the target are characteristics that were always reason for the target being rejected. Consider Stephen Colbert’s treatment of Fox News personality Bill O’Reilly.

*The Colbert Report: The Colbert Report*, while a broad mock news show, as also specifically constructed as a satire of the Fox News program *The O’Reilly Factor with Bill O’Reilly*. *The O’Reilly Factor* was notorious during the early 2000s for being the epitome of a degenerate kind of right wing infotainment. Bill O’Reilly, the titular host, would loudly shout exaggerated theories of how all doubt of American President George W Bush was part of a treasonous conspiracy, he would loudly shout at hapless guests before cutting their microphone (denying them a chance to respond), and use didactic graphics to inform his audience that they should be in a state of constant terror.

Colbert presented a very specific satire of O’Reilly, affecting his bullying style and referring to O’Reilly as “Papa Bear.” He would refer to himself as pursuing not truth but “truthiness,” something that felt true enough even if it contradicted reality. Every episode would have a monologue titled “The Word,” where he would give the same sort of didactic monologue that O’Reilly did, and he would conclude episodes with the “Threatdown,” a list of threats to America. To pointedly mock the absurdity of O’Reilly’s fear-mongering, Colbert would always include “bears” as a top threat to the United States. His interviews also mocked O’Reilly’s self-aggrandizing not just in the questions he asked – an early Colbert interview features the famous question “George Bush: great President or greatest President?” – but by beginning not in an introduction of



the guest but an extended re-introduction of Colbert where he bows and waves to the crowd as he walks over to the interview.

Colbert's satire of O'Reilly criticizes him for his fear-mongering, self-aggrandizing, and dishonesty. By so-characterizing O'Reilly, he subtly characterizes his audience in opposition to that. Colbert's audience believes in moderation, fidelity to the truth, even-handedness, and, through the context of *The Colbert Report* being a mock news show, some value of media discourse. There are a few ways in which this could lead to the subtle inculcation of beliefs. One is that if the audience only accepted some of these beliefs to start, in which case the satire nudges them to accept all beliefs. The most pointed transition, I believe, would be between the values that are specifically negations of the criticisms of O'Reilly (fear-mongering to level-headed, dishonest to even-handed) and the broader value of media discourse. Another is in a transition between satiric targets. If the audience accepts the dynamic created by Colbert's satire of O'Reilly – of reasonable fairness against wild unreasonableness – then by changing satiric targets, Colbert subtly characterizes the new target as similar to O'Reilly. In 2011, Colbert chose to target Occupy Wall Street. By choosing Occupy Wall Street as a target, he is just not criticizing Occupy but subtly putting forward that the participants of Occupy are opposed to his audience. If the audience is defined by their values of moderation and even-handedness, then the participants of Occupy, by virtue of being the satiric targets, must in some way be the opposite of those values. It is like a subtle argument by analogy. There is some ingroup-outgroup relationship between Colbert's audience and O'Reilly, the ingroup-outgroup relationship is defined by certain values, there is an ingroup-outgroup relationship between Colbert's audience and Occupy, therefore Occupy possesses the same values for which O'Reilly is rejected.

I believe that the Colbert example gives two reasons to be pessimistic about satire's ability to influence its audience's beliefs. The first is a practical

reason: the effect has to be slight and subtle, since the audience must already accept much of what the satirist is proposing they believe. An audience wholly enamoured with what Bill O'Reilly presented would not accept Colbert's criticism, and so not allow themselves as an audience to be so-constructed. The second is a moral reason: the sort of influencing I suggest is possible is less than fully honest. It happens below the level of argument, and tricks the audience into believing that they already believed something. Colbert does not directly make the argument that Bill O'Reilly are to be held as equivalent, but rather indirectly implies it in how both are made satiric targets.

#### 4. Enconced Satire

Mock news only makes up a small part of satire. There are songs, cartoons, novels, shows, and films. In this section I will focus on what I call enconced satires, which are narrative works of satire. I call these satires "enconced" because the satire sits comfortably within a larger work. While the argumentative points of mock news satire are often made directly, and the point of the show is to receive the argument, the satire of enconced satire is part of a larger work. Even in wholly satirical works where the satire is the foremost point of the work – I think here of a satirical allegory like the film *Snowpiercer* (2013) – it nevertheless exists within a greater narrative. The satire is delivered through the narrative.

This section is dedicated to analyzing enconced satires in light of the analysis of mass media given in the first section. The industrial context of mass media dampens a work's value by making it less clear, since mass media makes it harder for the audience to trust the making intentions of a work. I will argue that this effect is pronounced in the case of satire, since many putative satiric criticisms run counter to the ideas and values that animate both media industry in general and particular media companies. If the mass media context limits the clarity of a satiric criticism, then the critical capacity of satire must be considered to be limited by the mass media context. My argument for this section is that the mass media context muddles satiric criticisms. If the criticisms are muddled, then they should be expected to be less effective. If a satire's criticisms are less

effective, then its political potential is lessened. To elaborate this point I will recur arguments from chapter 1, concerning meaning, intention, and trust, and my analysis of mass media. I will use them to show how mass media inhibits audience trust, and that this lack of trust in turn reduces a work's clarity.

In chapter 1 I provided an analysis of the James Bond movie *Skyfall* (2012) which did well to draw out some of the issues I would like to discuss here. The film is the 25<sup>th</sup> James Bond film<sup>411</sup> and so provides a sort of retrospective on the character. It examines what the character is, what the character can be, and whether the character is a hopeless anachronism. One interaction involves Bond and the character Sévérine who he meets in Monaco. Sévérine announces herself as an escaped child sex slave, and that she is under the control of the villain Raul Silva. Later, Bond approaches Sévérine in the shower, and notes that she does not have her gun for protection. One way to read this scene is as a criticism of the Bond character as presenting a predatory masculinity, which would be consistent with other criticisms of Bond as outdated which occur throughout the film. However, the film is also a standard James Bond film. The character navigates a glamorized world of violence, sex, and luxury. Importantly, *Skyfall* is a Bond film produced and promoted by a major studio and rich producers who are invested in the continuation of the Bond franchise, which means both the protection of the Bond brand and the affirmation of Bond fans. These latter two points make it difficult for the audience to trust the film. They cannot be sure that the film is fully critical of Bond because there is doubt that the intentions behind the filmmaking could be fully committed to a criticism of Bond. Using the language that I established in chapter 4, the work is unclear.

My analysis of mass media helps explain the distrust in the Bond example. *Skyfall* is a media product designed and distributed for consumption, and to be consumed in such a way that is profitable for the people making and distributing it. While the particular people who are concerned with the film's profitability might not be conventional artistic participants — they are not actors or directors

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<sup>411</sup> As per the official lineage. There are other, less official James Bond films like the 1967 Peter Sellers *Casino Royale*.

or editors – they may nevertheless make or otherwise influence decisions that determine the content of the film. These unconventional artistic participants are likely to have interests orthogonal to those of the conventional artistic participants – specifically oriented towards the film being designed and distributed for consumption – and so may be suspected of acting with intentions quite different from usual art-making intentions. In the particular case of *Skyfall*, these intentions centre on the profitability both of the film and the companies and producers behind it. Recurring my analysis from chapter 1, whether or not the actual producers and managers have these intentions, and whether or not the producers and managers actually intervene in the film, from the perspective of the audience these intentions are still candidate intentions and must be considered. As the audience engages *Skyfall*, they are engaging a mass media product that is the result of a certain industrial process, and that process promotes interests concerning marketability and consumability. These interests militate away from seriously challenging what makes the product attractive, so the audience has reason to doubt that something that seems seriously critical of the product's key attraction – Bond's aggressive masculinity in the case of *Skyfall* – is in fact a criticism.

This analysis of Bond and *Skyfall* generalizes comfortably to satire, with the key difference being that the unclarity in the case of satire is more pronounced. The unclarity is more pronounced because satiric criticisms are often moderately unclear already, due to working through misrepresentation. Again, satiric criticism is conducted through the humorous misrepresentation of the model in the intentional object. Misrepresentation is used to add features or characteristics to the intentional object that the model does not have. These misrepresentative features or characteristics either embody or direct the criticisms against the model. For this criticism through misrepresentation to succeed these misrepresentative features have to be understood as misrepresentative features (as opposed to features of stylistic design or mere incompetence), and they have to be understood as either embodying or directing criticisms against the models. Both the misrepresentation itself and the criticism through misrepresentation are often at least a little unclear just on account of the indirectness of criticism

through misrepresentation and how fine grained the distinction may be between misrepresentation and representation within a style. Accordingly, mass media satire might be thought to be doubly unclear: it is unclear because of the ambiguity inherent in criticism-through-misrepresentation and it is unclear because of the distrust of the work for being a piece of mass media.

This double unclarity comes to the fore in case of criticisms that run counter to the values that inform the industrial production of mass media. There are two particular ways in which satirical criticisms suffer that I want to draw out. The first is when the criticism picks out a satiric target that is valuable to some participant in the industrial production process, similar to the *Skyfall* case discussed above. The second is when the criticism relies on values that seem to contradict the values associated with mass media and industrial production. As I noted in the *Skyfall* case, there is reason to doubt that a company would put out a mass media product that makes a serious criticism of that exact mass media product, or at least the sort of product that it is. The industrial production context means that the people involved in the work's production are strongly incentivized to affirm and retain an audience, which means not undoing what draws the audience to the work. This does not mean that such auto-critical works cannot be produced, but just that when a putatively auto-critical work is created it is less clear because the audience cannot fully trust the intentions behind that work's creation. I want to examine this in two cases. The first, *Cabin in the Woods* (2012) is an example of a film that suffered because it took as its satiric target something that was essential to its own success. The second, *Sucker Punch* (2011) work as a sort of correlative case: a film that suffered because it took as its target something that the (real) audience considered to be essential to that film's financial success. These two failures are similar, and may be thought of as film-side and audience-side failures. *CitW* is a film-side failure because it is the content of the film that is muddled and uneven. *Sucker Punch* is an audience-side failure because the unclarity is specifically a result of the film contradicting audience expectations.

*Cabin in the Woods: CitW* is an attempt at a horror film that is a satire of horror films. This is easy to deduce as the film's framing

narrative is of two middle manager types covertly manipulating teenagers into a conventional horror film scenario. Once there the teenagers are faced with a sort-of-but-sort-of-not randomly-selected classical horror villain, and those teenagers being killed is recorded for the satisfaction of some ambiguous elder gods. Throughout, the film attempts to render satirical criticisms of horror films like that those films are sexist, derivative, and contrived. The contrived criticism is mainly demonstrated through the framing device, that the teenagers are manipulated by a corporate entity to act differently to how regular humans would act. An example of the derivative criticism is a scene where the corporate manipulators bet on which horror villain will be summoned, and comment that some version of zombies has been chosen yet again. The most straightforward instance of the criticism that horror movies are sexist, by way of being exploitative, is where the corporate manipulators use chemicals to manipulate one of the female teenagers into taking her top off and showing her breasts to the camera.

The problem that all of these criticisms run into is that the film nevertheless attempts to hew close to a horror movie formula, and appease horror movie fans. This means that the film embodies what it is putatively criticizing, thus making it less clear exactly what its critical point is. Consider the sexist-criticism instance, where the corporate manipulators force the woman to take her top off. This scene is preceded by a conversation between the manipulators where they discuss that what they are doing is sexist and exploitative. The ordering of the scenes undercuts the putative criticism: this feature of the film is exploitative but it is happening anyway because the diegetic viewers like it. Even if the scenes were oppositely ordered, however, there would still be the issue that the exploitative scene would still have been presented to the audience on the basis that the audience enjoys it. It is difficult to accept that the intentions behind the film are truly critical given that the film embodies what it is

putatively criticizing. Similar analyses can be given of the putative criticisms that horror films are derivative and contrived, as film presents a derivative and contrived film for the audience's enjoyment. The scenes of the zombies stalking and killing the teenagers are filmed as conventional horror scenes, with the standard-for-horror prescribed response of fear. What is worth remarking is that in each case, it is still reasonably clear that what the film is putting forward is that horror movies are sexist, derivative, and contrived. What is getting particularly muddled is to what degree the film is taking a critical attitude towards these features, and to what degree. The film is not rendered completely unintelligible, but it is less clear. And to the extent that it is less clear, it is worse.

*Sucker Punch*: *Sucker Punch* is a satire that, I argue, was largely not received as a satire because it took as its target the attitudes and preferences of its target audience. The plot centres on a woman who is imprisoned at a reformatory for "wayward" women, and the reformatory sells the women as prostitutes. The core conceit of the movie is that any time one of the women is forced to perform a sexualized dance, the film changes to a fantasy sequence where the women enact some portion of their plan to escape. Each fantasy sequence draws from a different genre of popular media aimed towards males aged 12-25: there is a high fantasy sequence, a war sequence, and an action-heist sequence. Each sequence is theoretically hyper-violent and features theoretically highly-sexualized actresses, but is staged and shot as to deny the enjoyment of violence and titillation. The criticism that the film offers is of what might be considered nerd media contemporaneous to the film (2011). The content of the criticism is that nerd media is connected by exploitative and misogynist attitudes that stem from a desire to own and control women. The targets of the criticism, in other words, are the fans of titillating violence who paid to watch *Sucker Punch* in

cinema. That's the basis of the film's title: the viewer is drawn in and sucker punched.

The film was not well-received. According to *Cinemascore*, which tracks audience responses immediately after seeing films in theatre, *Sucker Punch* received a B-, which is very low for a major release.<sup>412</sup> *Rotten Tomatoes*, which aggregates responses to films, registers a mere 23% of professional critic reviews of *Sucker Punch* as positive, and 47% of audience reviews as positive.<sup>413</sup> I take this as evidence that the film did successfully make the audience feel attacked, but was not understood as purposefully critical. This is evident in the professional reviews, archived on *Rotten Tomatoes*, which rarely make mention of it being satirical. Prominent articles that do note it as satirical, such as the one found in *Slant Magazine*, pointedly do so against the critical consensus. I argue that my analysis of mass media makes sense as to why *Sucker Punch* was largely not recognized as satire. The practices of industrial production are centred around affirming and retaining an audience. Audiences are familiar with these practices, and so they expect the works with which they interact to affirm and seek to retain them. Familiarity with the practices of production inform practices of interpretation. Targeting the audience for serious criticism runs counter to standard mass media practice, especially criticism that targets the audience's consumption of media similar to the work in question. Accordingly, critical intentions are not readily interpreted. This is well-understood as a lack of trust, specifically a lack of trust of participants in the industrial film-making process to intend criticisms of the consumption of industrially-produced films.

Together, *CitW* and *Sucker Punch* provide examples of how the context of industrial production in mass media inhibits satiric clarity and, accordingly,

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<sup>412</sup> Cinemascore ratings are accessed directly through its main website: <https://www.cinemascore.com/>.

<sup>413</sup> Rotten Tomatoes, "Sucker Punch (2011)." Last accessed January 27, 2019. [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/sucker\\_punch\\_2011/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/sucker_punch_2011/).



dampens work value. The process of industrial production is determined, in part, by concerns surrounding audience retention and profitability. The process, in turn, possibly involves participants who are primarily motivated by those same concerns. To the extent that they may be involved in the art-making process, their intentions have to be considered as candidate intentions behind a work. To the extent that those candidate intentions exist, it is more difficult for the audience to conclude that any given feature of a work that appears to contradict or criticize the interests of industrial production does in fact contradict or criticize those features. This renders the work less clear, and if the work is less clear then it is of lower quality. Similarly, if a work is less clear then it should be expected to be less critically effective, and if it is less critically effective then it should be expected to be less politically effective.

## **5. Conclusion**

My goal for this chapter has been to apply my theory of satire from the first five chapters and show it has some explanatory value. I chose the area of mass media because for most people, that is the location and origin of most satire which they encounter. I have given two different arguments as to why satire should not be expected to be particularly effective as a means of political influence. The political potential of mock news shows is limited because the audience should be expected to already agree with the critical thrust of the show which they are watching by virtue of being the audience for that show. Narrative satires have the political potency of their messages dampened by the fact that the context of their creation: the industrial creation process suggests that any work created within that process is unlikely to have been created with intentions that substantively criticize and advocate action against that system.

Abstracted to their most basic points, I do not think that my arguments in this section are very radical. The culture industry comprises some of the richest and most powerful institutions on the planet right now. There is really no reason for executives from Fox and Marvel and Disney (who are increasingly the same people, as the companies merge) to be the locus of meaningful political change.

They sit on top of vast, powerful networks and would presumably like to maintain their positions. These networks confer real power that does not meaningfully depend on esteem or respectability. That is not the sort of power that is challenged by watching television.

## Conclusion

I have decided to present this section as an epilogue rather than a conclusion, as current events prevent me from reasonably saying that this topic is concluded. This is not to say that I do not believe I have shown anything – I am confident that I have – but just that I do not believe that my dissertation ends at any point of finality. And, I suppose, this is to be expected. In the introduction, I wrote that my goal was to present an account of satire that would help to make sense of people's expectations of satire, and the role of satire in contemporary politics. That is not the sort of project that lends itself to saying "I have shown such-and-such to be the case." I have aimed to provide the tools to start a discussion, not finish one.

The central thing which I have provided is an account of satire, which I gave in chapter four: A work of art is satirical, in part or in whole, insofar as it makes a criticism by way of a funny misrepresentation. The first three chapters built up the components of this account: The first chapter established a way of understanding works of art that gave a prominent role to trust, and the relation between the audience and the work makers. The second chapter provided an account of misrepresentation and showed how it is essential to satire. Lastly, the third chapter gave an account of humour and discussed the various ways that satire made use of humour. The final two chapters began to apply my account of satire, to show what it could do to be useful. In chapter five I engaged the ethical evaluation of humour, and used that to discuss how a work could fail to be satirical because the humour was unethical. The sixth and final chapter focused on mass media satire, the sort that is most frequently engaged, and I show that there is not much reason to expect it to be a politically potent force.

Many of the component arguments are interesting in their own right. I believe that trust is a particularly valuable way for thinking about work meaning, and the importance of the uncertain relationship the audience has to the artwork, artist, and art-making process. I believe that approaching humour as a social practice allows for a greater understanding of why humour is so important to people – it is not just a sensation or release, but a way that we manage our

relations to the world around us and the people in it. The social account helps explain why people can be so defensive about what they find funny – if humour is how we manage our friendships, then having a “good” sense of humour can be understood as meaning we have good friends, and are socially valuable, whereas a “bad” sense of humour may be taken to indicate inferior friends, and social disvalue. I do not believe that this is a logical entailment of the social account, but I believe people do think like this, and the social account helps to understand why that sort of thinking happens. And then there is the argument about the ethical evaluation of humour in chapter five, and this is where current events intervene.

In a passage in chapter five I refer to “for the lulz” as a slogan that is used to justify a wide range of internet trolling, associated primarily with the websites 4chan and Kiwifarms. The term “lulz” is a bastardization of “LOL,” early internet slang for “laughing out loud.” To say that trolling is done “for the lulz” is to say that trolling is a humour practice, with the laughter of the trolls as the goal. As I am first writing this section, about a week ago a member of the websites Kiwifarms and 8chan (a 4chan spinoff), Brandon Tarrant, was part of a group that murdered 49 Muslims in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Before the attack, he uploaded a manifesto to 8chan, which was itself an act of trolling. It was full of catchphrases and memetic jokes, and justified his actions as being “for the lulz.”

I believe that the social account of humour and the argument for ethical evaluation under the social account can help understand and discuss both the manifesto and the violence. Tarrant, and the cadre of racists and aspirant fascists like him on Kiwifarms and the Chan websites, are using humour to negotiate their place in modern society. They have identified themselves with a form of humour centred around the targeting or provocation of an unwilling target, and use that to exercise power. Since they understand the social divisions that racism wishes to create through humour, and those divisions are the boundaries across which power is exercised through humour, the humour and the fascist politics are inseparable. As Adam Serwer writes, “Ultimately... every joke, every pithy reference, every pretend gesture toward the standards of liberal democracy has the same

punchline: *we are going to kill you.*"<sup>414</sup> The joke is violence, but violence is a joke. The social account of humour helps to understand this.

The Serwer article represents something else, which is a change in attitudes from when I began my project. I wrote in the introduction that as recently as four years ago there was a real euphoria around the power of satire. Political humour was a great defence of democracy, exposing the hypocrisy and hubris of ruling-class incompetence. An article like Serwer's, in a major publication like *The Atlantic*, would be unthinkable then. Now pieces like Serwer's, or Jeet Heer's in *The New Republic*, will excerpt Jean-Paul Sartre's "Anti-Semite and Jew" as if the content has always been obvious.<sup>415</sup> The roles of humour and irony (and with irony, satire) are being reconsidered.

This reconsideration of humour, irony, and satire is why I believe it is best to present this final section as an epilogue rather than a conclusion. I have tried to provide the conceptual tools to have a discussion that is only just kicking into gear, and so my dissertation does not provide the final words on a subject, but rather it provides the words that someone else will hopefully use to say something worthwhile.

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<sup>414</sup> Adam Serwer, "Nazis Have Always Been Trolls," *The Atlantic*, March 21, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/03/mosque-shooter-troll-like-original-nazis/585415/> (accessed March 27, 2019).

<sup>415</sup> The particular passage being:

Never believe that anti-Semites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. They know that their remarks are frivolous, open to challenge. But they are amusing themselves, for it is their adversary who is obliged to use words responsibly, since he believes in words. The anti-Semites have the *right* to play.

They even like to play with discourse for, by giving ridiculous reasons, they discredit the seriousness of their interlocutors. They delight in acting in bad faith, since they seek not to persuade by sound argument but to intimidate and disconcert. If you press them too closely, they will abruptly fall silent, loftily indicating by some phrase that the time for argument is past.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946), quoted in Serwer; and Jeet Heer, "Ironic Nazis are Still Nazis," *The New Republic*, November 25, 2016,

<https://newrepublic.com/article/139004/ironic-nazis-still-nazis>, (accessed March 27, 2019).

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