

Australasian Modernist Studies Network presents

AMSN 4:
**Modernist
Comedy
& Humour**

University of Melbourne
October 26–28, 2018

General information

We acknowledge that this event takes place on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, that sovereignty was never ceded and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

Venue

All sessions of the conference will be held in the Old Arts Building. Theatres B, C & D are all located on the ground floor. Registration, tea & coffee, lunch, the opening reception and our Saturday reading by poet Bella Li will all take place upstairs in the Arts Hall. The venue is wheelchair accessible.



Conference Wifi

"Visitor Wireless"

Username: australasianmoderniststudiesnetworkiv

Password: 7&Cczg

Many thanks to our wonderful volunteers, the School of Culture and Communication and the Centre for the History of Emotions.

Friday 26 October

9:45am-10:00am

Registration and tea/coffee:
Old Arts, Arts Hall

10:00am-10:30am

Conference opening
Old Arts, Arts Hall

10:30am-12:00pm

Block 1

Bad Jokes
Location: Theatre B
Chair: Ronan McDonald, University of Melbourne
Peter Korotaev, University of Melbourne Andrey Bely's Crimson Dream of Ironic Contempt
Beci Carver, University of Exeter Modernism's Bad Jokes
Justin Clemens, University of Melbourne On Limericks

12:00pm-1:00pm

Lunch
Old Arts, Arts Hall

1:00pm-2:30pm

Block 2

Modernist Performance 1
Location: Theatre B
Chair: Paul Rae, University of Melbourne
Sarah Balkin, University of Melbourne Comedy Theory and Deadpan's Pre-history
Jonathan Bollen, University of New South Wales Encounter comedy: Les Allen's photographs of entertainers and their audience at the Central Coast Leagues Club, Gosford, 1964-1976
Todd Herzog, University of Cincinnati The Situation is Hopeless, but Not Serious: Tiny Amusements and Their Big Impact on German Modernism

2:30pm-2:45pm: Break

2:45pm-4:05pm

Block 3

Modernist Performance 2	Middlebrow/Camp/Kitsch
Location: Theatre B Chair: James Jiang, University of Melbourne	Location: Theatre C Chair: Tom Ford, University of Melbourne
Antonio Rivas, Dickinson College Homages to the Clown: Modernist Approaches to Circus Comedy	Aaron Nyerger, University of Sydney Willia Cather, Dream Kitsch
Skye Wagner, University of New South Wales Visual puns, doppelgangers, mimesis: the mediated sight-gag	Eliza Murphy, University of Tasmania Stella Gibbons, the Party, and Late Modernist Comedy
Noa Saunders, Boston University Subversive Sentimentality and the Comic Body in Chaplin's Monsieur Verdoux	Alex Howard, University of Sydney Modernist Humour, Camp Modernism

4:30pm-6:00pm

Keynote: Nick Salvato, Cornell University,
Old Arts, Theatre D

6:00pm-8:00pm

Opening Night Reception
Old Arts, Arts Hall

Saturday 27 October

10:00am-11:30am

Block 4

Modernism, Gender, Parody
Location: Theatre B Chair: Elizabeth McLean, University of Melbourne
Daisy Ferris, Nottingham Trent University Laughter and Trauma in Katherine Mansfield's New Age Contributions (1910-1917)
Jessica Marian, University of Melbourne No Junk Mail, Please: Frances Steloff's humorous book catalogue
Sue Thomas, La Trobe University "[T]he horrible laughter of the world": reading the humour of Jean Rhys's Good Morning Midnight

11:30am-11:45am

Break

11:45am-1:15pm

Block 5

Dada, Irony and Seriousness	Misanthropic Modernism
Location: Theatre B Chair: Sarah Fantini, University of Melbourne	Location: Theatre C Chair: Sarah Balkin, University of Melbourne
Tara Heffernan, University of Melbourne The Plain White Expanse: Piero Manzoni's Parodic Achromes and the existential ethics of humour	Paul Sheehan, Macquarie University Being Thomas Bernhard: Madness, Suicide, Comedy
Ioana Eliza Deac, Babeş-Bolyai University Tristan Tzara's Dadaist Humour: The Parodied Manifesto	Mark Byron, University of Sydney A Theory of the Rant in Beckett and Bernhard
Tomasz Cieslak-Sokolowski, Jagiellonian University The Moment of Serious Laughter: Dada Genealogy of the Late Modernism Poetics	Russell Smith, Australian National University The Dead Pan: Nathanael West's Unfunny Jokes and Modernist Anti-sentimentalism

1:15pm-2:00pm

Lunch

Old Arts, Arts Hall

2:00pm-2:30pm

Reading: Bella Li

Old Arts, Arts Hall

2:30pm-3:30pm

Block 6

Humour and Melancholy	Cartoons
Location: Theatre B Chair: John Attridge, UNSW	Location: Theatre C Chair: Russell Smith, ANU
Sarah Fantini, University of Melbourne 'In gravebed stretched I – laughing dead!': The Baroness Elsa's Profane Comedy	Estrella Yambon Dacillo, Central Mindanao University Detachment and Commitment Between Comics Characters in Australian Newspapers
Ashleigh Synnott, University of Sydney The Bull at the Gate: Flannery O'Connor's 'Greenleaf' through the lens of "dark ecology"	Ashley Maher, University of Sydney Architectural Humor: Osbert Lancaster's Pseudo-Educational Guides

3:30pm-3:45pm

Break

3:45pm-5:00pm

Block 7

Colonialism/Nation	Theory and Aesthetics of Humour
Location: Theatre B Chair: Paul Sheehan, Macquarie University	Location: Theatre C Chair: Jessica Marian, University of Melbourne
Erin Carlston, University of Auckland Making Fun of Football: Sport and Colonial Masculinities in Finnegans Wake	Scott Robinson, Monash University The Unbearable Irony of Reading Kierkegaard
Michael Stuart Lynch, Western Sydney University Is this a Modernist Joke? Pinter and 'Late' Twentieth Century Britain	Michael Rodgers, Open University Modernism and Formal Funniness
Ronan McDonald, University of Melbourne Beckett's Irish Joke	

Sunday 28 October

10:00-11:30

Block 8

Henry James/Vocation/William James
Location: Theatre B Chair: Clara Tuite, University of Melbourne
James Jiang, University of Melbourne Tragicomic Characters: Habit, Automation, Vocation
Elizabeth McLean, University of Melbourne Not Safe for Work: Henry James, Parody and Disidentification
John Attridge, University of New South Wales "Oh, oh, oh!": badinage, seriousness and representation in Henry James

11:30-12:30

Early Lunch

Old Arts, Arts Hall

12:30-1:30pm

Keynote: Gillian Arrighi, University of Newcastle
Old Arts, Theatre D

1:30pm-2:00pm – Conference wrap-up
Old Arts, Arts Hall

Keynote: Nick Salvato, Cornell

On Crisping: The Queer Modernity of *The Naked Civil Servant*

Examining the life and work of queer icon Quentin Crisp, I draw a distinction between the modern form of humor we recognize as camping and what by way of departure I dub, “crisping.” In his globally popular and commercially successful autobiography *The Naked Civil Servant*, Crisp paints a harsh picture of what he takes to be camp’s limitations and circumscriptions—even as he could be comprehended by any number of the book’s readers as himself inhabiting a set of very camp tones and tenors. By contrast, I take seriously Crisp’s distancing of his self-fashioning from camp; indeed, one route through which to think with care and nuance about that self-fashioning comes from likewise taking seriously the denotations and connotations of the name, Quentin Crisp, that the eponymous naked civil servant, called Denis Pratt by his parents, fashioned for himself. Doing so, we may see that, in crisping rather than camping, Crisp accomplishes something more astringent and absurdist than camp tends to yield; something more Beckettian than Wildean, though nonetheless queer; something implied by such interleaved significations of the word *crisping* as curling, crimping, folding, making brittle—or crushing firm but brittle substance. I trace Crisp’s crisping as both a theatricalized artistic mode and a performative life practice that has rich implications for how we think about the relations among modernity, queerness, humor, survival, and ageing.

Nick Salvato is professor and chair of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University. He is the author of the books *Uncloseting Drama: American Modernism and Queer Performance* (Yale UP, 2010), *Knots Landing* (Wayne State UP, TV Milestones series, 2015), and *Obstruction* (Duke UP, 2016). His articles have appeared in such venues as *Critical Inquiry*, *Criticism*, *Discourse*, *Modern Drama*, and *Reading Modern Drama*.

Keynote: Gillian Arrighi, University of Newcastle

Funny Kids: how theatrical impresarios and clever children created kid comedy at the turn of the twentieth century

Child actors have been nurtured throughout several centuries of theatre production, but it is from the early 1880s that children proliferated on professional stages in the United States, Britain, and Australia. Impresarios of urban vaudeville in the United States (Tony Pastor and B. F. Keith) and Australia (Harry Rickards) nurtured clever children in their fast-paced programs, at times brokering children's future careers through their own network of entertainment industry connections. J. C. Williamson, the leading theatrical entrepreneur of the Australasia region, also maintained a significant space for clever and talented children in his firm's annual spectacular pantomimes. The unprecedented increase of professional child actors 1880-1910 coincided with social policies that steadily reshaped attitudes to children, giving rise to industrial and education reforms that eventually determined children ought to enjoy that special time of life we now identify as 'childhood'. Within this social context it is paradoxical therefore that theatrical producers, parents and popular audiences invested in child actors on an unprecedented scale, giving rise to their commodification in popular culture and underlining children's capacity for both comedy and agency. For it was the comic genres of variety/vaudeville, pantomime, and musical comedy where child actors of this era primarily featured as singers, dancers, orators, and comedians.

Directing attention to the entertainment industries in Australia, the US and the UK, this paper brings to light the various forms of comedy child actors were valued for on popular stages at the turn of the twentieth century. Their appearances in comic genres were a counterpoint to romantic ideas of childhood that characterised earlier sentimental dramatic roles for children. Bringing to light cases drawn from professional stages in North America, Britain, and Australia, this paper argues that the theatrical impresarios of this era colluded with clever children to create a unique form of humour, kid comedy. This form would find global expression in later films of the 1930s and '40s and can be seen today in global television formats such as Simon Cowell's *Got Talent*.

Dr Gillian Arrighi is Senior Lecturer in Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her research on historical and contemporary circus, performing animals, actor training, and child performers has been published in edited scholarly collections and in leading scholarly journals (*Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Research International*, *Journal of Early Popular Visual Culture*, *Theatre Dance and Performance Training*, *Australasian Drama Studies*). She is co-founder and editor of the scholarly journal, *Popular Entertainment Studies* (now in its 9th year of publication), author of the monograph *The FitzGerald Brothers' Circus: spectacle, identity and nationhood at the Australian circus* (2015), and co-editor of the collections *Entertaining Children* (Palgrave, 2014) and *A World of Popular Entertainments* (Cambridge Scholars 2012). Her current book project examines the contribution of children to the entertainment industries in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom at the turn of the twentieth century. To support this research, she has been awarded visiting fellowships at the Ransom Center for the Humanities at the University of Texas (2015), the Harvard Theatre Collection (2018), and in 2017 she held a three-month research fellowship at the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

Poetry reading and talk by Bella Li, University of Melbourne

In wide usage today, the term ‘black humour’ was originally coined in the early twentieth century by Surrealist Andre Bréton, who saw ‘*this kind of humour*’ as an essential component of any ‘poetic, artistic, or scientific work, any philosophical or social system’ that sought to address and satisfy the ‘specific requirements of the modern sensibility’. In his *Anthology of Black Humour* (1940)—which locates the original expression of black humour in the writing of Jonathan Swift, and traces its course through the work of various other writers, philosophers and artists—Bréton singles out for high praise contemporary visual artist Max Ernst, stating that: ‘If we limit ourselves to books, there is in this regard nothing more accomplished, more exemplary than [Ernst’s] three “collage” novels: *The Hundred Headless Woman*, *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil*, and *Une Semaine de bonté ou les Sept Eléments capitaux*.’

This paper will consist of two parts: a reading and presentation of a sequence of prose poetry and collage from *Argosy* (2017), titled ‘Pérouse, ou, Une semaine de disparitions’; and a discussion of Ernst’s third collage novel, *Une Semaine de bonté* (originally published in 1934)—from which ‘Pérouse’ draws its structure and style—with regard to Bréton’s conception of black humour and its relation to the technique of Surrealist collage, pioneered by Ernst.

Bella Li is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of *Argosy* (Vagabond Press, 2017)—a book of poetry, collage and photography—which won the 2018 Victorian Premier’s Literary Award for Poetry and the 2018 NSW Premier’s Literary Award for Poetry. Her most recent book is *Lost Lake* (Vagabond Press, 2018), which was shortlisted for the 2018 QLD Literary Awards. Her writing and artwork has been published or is forthcoming in journals and anthologies including *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Cordite*, *NGV Magazine*, *Best Australian Poems*, *The Kenyon Review* (US), *Archives of American Art Journal* (US) and *Western Humanities Review* (US).

John Attridge, University of New South Wales

“Oh, oh, oh!”: badinage, seriousness and representation in Henry James

This paper explores the formal importance of chaffing, badinage and ironic speech in James’s fiction. The capacity to engage in playful or facetious conversation is at once a morally significant quality in James’s novels and one of the linguistic features that we are inclined to think of as characteristically “Jamesian”. An inability to engage in repartee, conversely, or a deficient sense of the absurd, are often the signs of more serious failings, whether moral or intellectual. The archetypal example of this dichotomy is the duo of Ralph Touchett and Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady*, but the sensibility that Ralph personifies in *Portrait* recurs in different forms in other charming young men in James’s novels. An instructive instance is Hyacinth Robinson in *The Princess Casamassima*, whose precociously “ironical” wit is one of the manifestations of his “aristocratic manner”. Hyacinth’s charming facetiousness—his ability to make female interlocutors “die of laughing”—is coded as a signifier of class, a mark of innate gentility.

As an identifier of class, irony serves to distance Hyacinth, not only from cockney vulgarity and socialist zeal, but also from bourgeois seriousness. In *The Bourgeois*, Franco Moretti suggests that “seriousness” was one of the “keywords” of the nineteenth-century European bourgeoisie, structuring, not only its social and economic outlook, but also its signature literary genre: realism. This paper aims to read the tropes of banter and ironic speech in James’s novels as a form of resistance to the norms of bourgeois realism. It will argue that the style of facetiousness that distinguishes characters like Ralph and Hyacinth evolves, in a novel like *The Awkward Age*, into a radically anti-mimetic practice of speech, where irony and oblique allusion make unambiguous communication impossible. The apogee of this kind of non-referential speech might be the “Oh, oh, oh!” emitted by sophisticates like Lord Petherton, in *The Awkward Age*, or Miss Barrace, in *The Ambassadors*, who seem able, at moments like these, to abandon verbal communication altogether.

I am a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. I am co-editor, with Rod Rosenquist, of *Incredible Modernism: Literature, Trust and Deception* (Ashgate, 2013) and my essays have appeared in journals such *ELH*, *Modernism/modernity*, *Modern Fiction Studies* and *The Henry James Review*.

Sarah Balkin, University of Melbourne
Comedy Theory and Deadpan's Pre-history

Deadpan is a stylistic register of modern theatre and performance that invites us to reconsider comedy's relationship to social and aesthetic norms. Deadpan is a flat or neutral mode of performance that produces non-neutral responses, such as laughter. The first recorded use of the term was in a November 1927 issue of *Vanity Fair*, which explained that "poker-face" and "dead-pan" both mean "a lifeless facial expression." But the gap between subject matter and style of delivery as a central aspect of comedy developed about a century earlier in a transatlantic context. This paper presents examples of the nineteenth and early twentieth century's unconscious, earnest, and understated styles of comic delivery, which suggest an alternative to conventional narratives of the shift from melodramatic to realist acting styles.

In their 2017 special issue of the journal *Critical Inquiry* on comedy, Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai reject the structuralism of earlier comedy theory from Sigmund Freud to Simon Critchley that assumes comedy's significance lies in "who is up and who is down; what's repressed and expressed; known and disavowed; hidden and surprising; free and unfree." This tendency suggests that comedy theory itself has inherited and must refuse melodrama's Manichean logic and expressive imperative. Deadpan, in which apparent normalcy is part of the performance, can help us with this problem because it complicates the idea that comedy is normative without asserting its radicalism. Rather, deadpan helps us see the serious work of maintaining norms, and therefore their plasticity. I suggest that tracing the emergence of a low-key style that emerged as melodrama began to recede can test and generate new theories of comedy grounded in histories of genre, culture, and performance.

Sarah Balkin is a Lecturer in English and Theatre Studies at the University of Melbourne, where she teaches courses on theatre and performance, modernism, and genre fiction. Her monograph, *Spectral Characters: Genre and Materiality on the Modern Stage* is forthcoming from Michigan University Press. Her work appears in *Modern Drama*, *Genre*, *Theatre Journal*, *TDR*, *Public Books*, and *The Conversation*. She is the Assistant Editor of *Theatre Research International*.

Jonathan Bollen, University of New South Wales

Encounter comedy: Les Allen's photographs of entertainers and their audience at the Central Coast Leagues Club, Gosford, 1964-1976

A desire to blur the boundaries between performer and spectator, whether by confrontation, persuasion or physical invitation, became characteristic of modernism in theatre. It is not that intimacy and interaction were new experiences in modernity. Aesthetic distance had always been as characteristic of performance as audience engagement. Rather, in modern theatre, as Jacques Rancière recognises, it was 'the desire to abolish the distance that creates it'. The desire to mobilise spectators not only generated the assumption of spectatorial passivity and detachment. It also engendered the appeal of interactive encounter.

In mid-twentieth century Australia, these were distinctions of developmental consequence. Surveying Sydney entertainment in 1951, *Pix* magazine observed 'how entertainers today call more and more on the audience to help them with their acts'. That vogue for 'audience-participation shows' in the 1950s anticipates the way Australian governments adopted policies distinguishing the 'arts' from 'entertainment'. By the 1970s, classical arts and high-modernist culture, appreciated from a distance, were deemed worthy of subsidy and investment. By contrast, middle-to-low-brow entertainment, distributed on a commercial basis, became more intimate and interactive.

This paper takes up these distinctions in analysing Les Allen's photographs of entertainers at the Central Coast Leagues Club in Gosford, NSW. Between 1964 and 1976, Allen photographed over 560 artists and acts as they entertained club members and their guests. The artists were from Australia and the Asia-Pacific region, ranging from the well-known (Winifred Atwell, Barry Crocker, Jimmy Little, Maria Venuti, Marcia Hines) to the well-traveled (Pete Cruzado of the Philippines, the Sitompul Sisters of Indonesia, the Aloha's of Hawai'i and many more). Beyond their documentary value, the photographs record the physical interactions and emotional connections of audience participation. Analysed as artefacts of 'encounter comedy', they reveal how entertainers transformed the club into a 'contact zone' between the world and white Australia.

Jonathan Bollen is Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of New South Wales. His research interests include the repertoire of Australian plays in theatre production and the history of entertainers touring between Australia and Asia in the 1950s and 1960s. He is the co-author of two books: *Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s* (Rodopi, 2008) and *A Global Doll's House: Ibsen and Distant Visions* (Palgrave, 2016). He also has experience in the digital humanities, developing collaborative methodologies for theatre research and analytical techniques for visualising artistic networks and tours.

Mark Byron, University of Sydney
A Theory of the Rant in Beckett and Bernhard

Samuel Beckett's and Thomas Bernhard's narrators and characters are well known for their extended rants and disquisitions, ranging from blunt incursions (Arsene's rant in Part I of *Watt*; Lucky's uncontrolled glossolalia in Part I of *Waiting for Godot*) to entire narratives (*Wittgenstein's Nephew*, *Old Masters*). These episodes or narratives resemble barbed comedy, invective or satire, but they often operate as physiological modes of cathartic relief or as rhetorical modes of critique. Typologies of unrestrained discursive outpourings function significantly in the history of rhetoric: the philippic was a genre of sustained critique (describing Demosthenes' speeches against Philip II of Macedon, and emulated by Cicero against Mark Antony); the harangue developed in the later Middle Ages as a rhetorical mode of martial invigoration; and the diatribe, as a strategy of speaking with a real or imagined interlocutor, features in classical pedagogy, especially that of the Sophists, Cynics and Stoics, and in biblical texts such as the New Testament letters of Paul. The timing and function of the diatribe in the novels and drama of Beckett and Bernhard illuminates the motivations of speakers and narrators: bestowing their dogmatic assertions to a necessary but acquiescent audience, these speakers shape their continuous outpourings not merely as modes of invective, but as a means to think through particular themes or problems. The diatribe becomes a form of meditation, comic in its rhetorical and narratological textures, but deeply significant in its ability to extend a mode of thinking that might otherwise remain latent. By a deft recalibration of this powerful, underrated rhetorical form, Beckett's and Bernhard's diatribes perform the estrangements of ideation, identity and sociality that motivate their narrators and characters into a rhetoric of defence. At the same stroke they cast a critical eye on the rhetorical and literary efforts of their contemporaries.

Mark Byron is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Sydney and an Australian Research Council Future Fellow. His current project, *Modernism and the Early Middle Ages*, has thus far produced the monograph *Ezra Pound's Eriugena* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) and a dossier 'Samuel Beckett and the Middle Ages' co-edited with Stefano Rosignoli in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*.

Erin Carlston, University of Auckland

Making Fun of Football: Sport and Colonial Masculinities in *Finnegans Wake*

This paper builds on Richard Corballis's 2006 claim that a passage of *Finnegans Wake* borrows from the haka composition "Ko Niu Tireni," performed by the New Zealand All Blacks during their 1924-5 European tour. There are specific connections Joyce might have drawn between the rugby test match he himself attended in Paris in 1925 and his own thematic interests that would explain his use of the haka. For instance, the repetition of variations on the Māori word "haruru" ("rumble" or "roar") in this passage evokes the thunderclaps that punctuate the *Wake*; references to Wellington conflate the capital of New Zealand with the general who won the Battle of Waterloo; the All Blacks were nicknamed "the Invincibles" during their tour, recalling the Irish revolutionaries responsible for the Phoenix Park murders. Such linguistic and historical connections point to the wider ways "Ko Niu Tireni" reverberates through this passage: Joyce's interpolation of the haka furthers the satirical critique of nationalism, sport, and political violence that we find throughout his oeuvre. Furthermore, the haka's significance as an aspect of indigenous culture widely incorporated into global displays of New Zealand's national identity, and the visibility of Māori players as stars of an English sport, resonate with Joyce's abiding interest in both cultural hybridity and the vexed relation of male colonised subjects to imperial gender politics as they attempt to adopt, adapt, evade or reject their colonisers' gender norms. By weaving together the haka, rugby imagery, and allusions to military conflicts, Joyce both underlines their rhetorical and ideological continuity, and pokes fun at aggressive displays of hyper-masculinity.

Erin Carlston teaches English at the University of Auckland. Before coming to Auckland, she was a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of *Thinking Fascism* (1998) and *Double Agents* (2013), as well as articles on Wyndham Lewis, Alfredo Véa, Marcel Proust, Paul Celan, Mary Renault, and Audre Lorde, among others. Her current research project is on race and masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Carlston is co-organizer of the New Zealand Modernist Studies Consortium.

Beci Carver
Modernism's Bad Jokes

Glancing back at a poem he'd written in his twenties at Cambridge, William Empson laments: 'I failed to make a pun on *focus* and its original sense *hearth*.' The context is what is supposed to have been a 'quite jolly poem' – 'Dissatisfaction with Metaphysics' (originally, 'Disillusion with Metaphysics') – about the death of Muhammed; but the jolliness never takes off, not just because of the failed pun but because of the gloom of Empson's topic. It is difficult to be amusing about homelessness, which, Empson explains, is the prophet's posthumous destiny; he writes: 'High over Mecca Allah's prophet's corpse/(The empty focus opposite the sun)/Receives homage, centre of the universe.' Empson quips that Muhammed gets '*homage*' instead of a resting place, with the forlorn pun in 'home-' perhaps making up for the lost pun in 'forlorn', though without improving the comedy. Modernism is full of bad jokes. Ezra Pound foresaw a career in comic poetry for Eliot before he found himself editing the messy bundle of caricatures that later became *The Waste Land*. And the naughtiness of the Bloomsburyans could seem altogether as dull and knee-jerk as the sexual conservatism it set out to replace; Virginia Woolf writes wearily of a conversation between herself and the usual gang: "Lytton [Strachey] at different points exclaimed *Penis*.' This conference paper will consider the merit of the view that modernism was a circus of failed comedians.

Dr Beci Carver is a lecturer in Twentieth-century Literature at the University of Exeter. Her monograph, *Granular Modernism*, was published in 2014 by OUP, and her work in general focuses on modernist literature and its contexts. She is currently finishing a book entitled *High Flats: Modernism and the Surface*.

Tomasz Cieslak-Sokolowski, Jagiellonian University

The Moment of Serious Laughter: Dada Genealogy of the Late Modernism Poetics

My paper is based on three main assumptions which are connected with crucial categories of my title. Firstly, the figure of “serious laughter” is closely related to the dada economy of art practice. A poem as artifact turns out to be the moment of arrangement (or lack of it), in which both poet and reader establish the concept of a “poem”. And this is the moment of serious laughter – a reaction against rigidity and the way on which dadaist poem is able to practice anti-art (Tzara’s recipe: “The poem will resemble you”).

Secondly, the genealogical prospect provokes me to consider the difference between the rhetoric of the radical break (“modernism was finished”) and some concepts trying to demonstrate a continuum of avant-garde poetics from the beginning of the last century to the present time. The consequences of dada gestures lasted until the present day, making the suggestion of possible key to approaching late modernist poetry. I would like to compare poems that was published in two excellent anthologies: “Dadaglobe.

Reconstructed” (Zurich 2016) and Adam Pendleton’s “Black Dada Reader” (London 2017). Thirdly, the late modernism poetics means that “long twentieth century is finally behind us” and perhaps we can begin to see the embryonic phase of modernism with new eyes, we can reconsider the avant-garde revolutionary poetic impulse. And therefore, Dada must be seen as the nodal point of late modernist poetics. As Frank Kermode for example saw, Dadaism is the most decisive break with the conservative assumptions, especially with the concomitant conviction that there is the distinction between “high” and “low”. These artistic gestures seem to me worth to describe, because they turn out to be the “prototype dream” of the long twentieth century.

I am affiliated with Jagiellonian University in Poland (I work at The Department of Contemporary Criticism: <http://www.krytyka.polonistyka.uj.edu.pl/tomasz-cieslak-sokolowski>). I’m the author of monographic book “My Acted Universe. Janusz Szuber’s Poetry” (Krakow: Universitas, 2004), “The Linguistic Moment. Polish Language Poetry” (Krakow: Universitas, 2011) and co-editor of the book entitled “Critical Discourses on the Threshold of 21st-Century” (Krakow: Universitas, 2007). I’m also a member of an editorial staff of the literary magazine “The New Decade” (<http://nowadekada.pl/>), and the president of Krakow Foundation of Literature. I have participated in many international conferences (for example EAM 2010, MSA 13-19 2012-2017, the National Poetry Foundation’s Poetry of the 1980s Conference 2012). I am currently ensconced in the work of pondering the conception of my book about Polish, late modernist poetry in the 80s and 90s (in the light of early modernist, avant-garde poetics).

Justin Clemens, University of Melbourne
On Limericks

The limerick is a surprisingly recent verse development. Although its precursors evidently reach back much further, the canonical form of the limerick only really crystallizes in the 19th century – and seems not to have received its canonical name until very late in that century. As Cyril Bibby writes: ‘the earliest known publications consisting exclusively of limericks, in quite recognisably modern form, appeared in London between 1820 and 1823.’ The limerick, moreover, seems to be an exemplarily English-language form. Again, even if attempts have been made in a number of other European languages, the limerick never seems to have taken off in non-Anglophone cultures as a near-universally recognisable form of nonsense verse. Yet the limerick also seems to have gone everywhere that the English language has, along all the command-routes of Empire. Very often vulgar, anonymous, highly-ritualized, mutable, moving rapidly and unpredictably between print and oral media, it is due to their brevity, lively metre, simple rhyming and risqué content, that limericks become a kind of mnemonic Velcro, exceptionally easy to remember and to recite. It is further noteworthy how often – despite two hundred years of public experimentation on a planetary scale – the extraordinarily narrow and familiar limerickal locutions recur: ‘There was a young man from Torquay...’, ‘There was a young lady of Riga,’ ‘There was a small boy of Quebec’... And although often identified with children’s literature, the limerick also suggests that, as Gershon Legman (one of the most important anthologists of the form) asserts, ‘under the mask of humour, all men are enemies.’ One can still also be surprised by how many famous writers seem to have been obsessed (the word is not too strong) with the form: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, James Joyce, and Isaac Asimov would be among these. This paper accordingly takes up the challenge of rereading the limerick form with a close attentiveness that it very rarely receives, to suggest how its lame humour accompanies a certain form of empire as its shadow underlining.

Justin Clemens is Associate Professor in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. He has published extensively on psychoanalysis, contemporary European philosophy, and contemporary Australian art and literature. His recent books include *Lacan Deleuze Badiou* (Edinburgh UP 2014), with A.J. Bartlett and Jon Roffe; *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy* (Edinburgh UP 2013); and *Minimal Domination* (Surplus 2011). He was founding Secretary of the Lacan Circle of Melbourne (2004-2009), and was the art critic for the Australian magazine *The Monthly* (2004-2009). In addition to his scholarly work, he is well-known nationally as a commentator on Australian art and literature, and his essays and reviews have appeared in *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Monthly*, *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Arena Magazine*, *TEXT*, *Un Magazine*, *Discipline*, *The Sydney Review of Books*, and many others.

Ioana-Eliza Deac, Babeş-Bolyai University

Tristan Tzara's Dadaist Humour: The Parodied Manifesto

In an interview given in 1950 – *Incompatibilité d'humour* – Tristan Tzara explained that the dadaist humour consisted in associating each statement with its subsequent negation and went on to define humour in general as a means of compensating for the flaws of judgment as well as of undermining its fixity. In other words, the use of humour has, paradoxically, a more serious stake.

The dadaist type of humour is particularly visible in the collection of manifestos published in 1924. Manifestos are by definition texts that want to be taken seriously as they are supposed to explain the aims of an artistic movement in no ambiguous terms. Tristan Tzara's dadaist manifestos are obvious parodies of this established form, which have been read, nevertheless, in a literal manner by authors of literary histories. A case in point is the famous recipe for writing a dadaist poem which, far from representing Tzara's way of writing, is actually an erudite joke referring to the reception of the French Symbolist author Stéphane Mallarmé by some contemporaries, who described his poetry as a collection of words randomly taken out of a hat (Suter, 2010). The contradictory formulations in these texts suggest that their author is having a laugh at the expense of his readers and at their attempts to read according to some pre-defined rules. A question still unanswered one hundred years later is how the reader can find meaning in texts that deliberately go against meaning and order and how s/he can decide what must be taken seriously in this shifting land of significations. Last but not least, it would be no less interesting to study the humorous strategies of an author whose chosen pseudonym, which figures prominently in the manifestos, derives from the word “sad” in both Romanian (“trist”) and French (“triste”).

Ioana-Eliza Deac earned a PhD in philology in 2016 at the Faculty of Letters of Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, where she presented a thesis on the transformations of the poetic language in response to the development of new media in the 20th and 21st centuries. The first part has been recently published under the title *Le Maître du Livre : Stéphane Mallarmé et les sorts d'Un coup de Dés* (Cluj-Napoca, Școala Ardeleană, 2018). She owns a Certificate of Specialisation in “Literature and Aesthetics” awarded by the University of Geneva in 2011. Her published work also includes contributions to various literary journals and magazines, such as *Transylvanian Review*, *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai*, *Philologia*, *Études Stéphane Mallarmé*, *Screen Bodies*. An *Interdisciplinary Journal of Experience, Perception, and Display* and to various collective volumes. Member of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies and of The Australian Modernist Studies Network.

Sarah Fantini, University of Melbourne

'In gravebed stretched I – laughing dead!': The Baroness Elsa's Profane Comedy

From her arrival in America in 1910 to the year of her death in 1927, the German-born expatriate and New York Dadaist, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, wrote a number of poems in English that could easily elicit a giggle. With explicit references to her sexual appetites and indelicate body, and by poking fun at God, death, and propriety, the Baroness repudiates conventional decorum and instead opts for the vulgar, sacrilegious and bawdy. In so doing, she calls into question cultural practices which aim to sanitise and order, and depicts life as disorderly, irrational, and grimy. The Baroness's comedy is often simultaneously playful and melancholic; in her poetry, the deeply serious is almost always also a little bit funny. I will demonstrate how the Baroness used poetic techniques such as rhyme, archaisms, emphasis and timing to treat human life as tragicomedy, and I will consider what the Baroness's humour brought to New York Dada.

Sarah Fantini is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. Her thesis is titled 'Urban Ecologies in the Radical Modernist Poetry of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Mina Loy, and Gertrude Stein', and examines the ways their poetry registers ecological connections within early twentieth century Euro-American cities.

Daisy Ferris, Nottingham Trent University

'The Modern Woman with a Sense of Humour: Katherine Mansfield's Comedic Contributions to *The New Age* (1910-1917)' to 'Laughter and Trauma in Katherine Mansfield's *New Age* Contributions (1910-1917)'.

In a journal entry dated 1922, Katherine Mansfield makes the claim that 'To be wildly enthusiastic, or deadly serious — both are wrong. Both pass. One must keep ever present a sense of humour.' Often mislabelled as a sentimental writer, Katherine Mansfield's work is seldom thought of as "funny". And yet throughout her career, Mansfield demonstrates a profound commitment to the comic. In addition to the satirical elements observable in her best-known works, Mansfield also published a body of lesser-known works of parody, demonstrating her abilities in literary ventriloquism, as well as her acerbic wit. Offering a reading of the sense of humour as being central to Mansfield's life and work, this paper will address her comic contributions to British magazine *The New Age*.

Mansfield's use of comedy is often overlooked if not outwardly denigrated by scholars, and, in fact, the author herself would later go on to describe her pension sketches as 'positively juvenile'. This paper, however, seeks to redefine and explore Mansfield's ambivalent relationship with the comic by looking at the medium in which Mansfield's sense of humour is arguably most pronounced: her magazine contributions. It will examine these in order to demonstrate how Mansfield's comedic writing is not just limited to the dark humour present in her pension sketches, but instead takes various forms; situating Mansfield within a wider network of female humourists operating within the periodical communities of the early twentieth century. As well as developing a greater understanding of the role of comedy in the works of a single author, this paper will engage with broader debates concerning the relationship between humour, gender and the avant-garde in modernist periodical culture, and will consider the rejection of earnestness as an integral facet of the identity of the Modern Woman.

Daisy Ferris is a Midlands 3 Cities funded doctoral candidate at Nottingham Trent University, England, whose research addresses women's use of humour and parody in the modernist magazine. She completed her undergraduate degree in 2016, also at Nottingham Trent University, for which she was awarded the English Prize, the Michael Klein Prize and the Eland Books Travel Writing Prize. In 2017 she completed an Mres at the same institution, receiving the Postgraduate Outstanding Achievement Award. Her wider research interests include queer modernism, modernist use of parody, and modernist periodical culture.

Tara Heffernan, University of Melbourne

The Plain White Expanse: Piero Manzoni's Parodic Achromes and the existential ethics of humour

Driven by the fervent desire to transform art into life, and relinquish the representational, spiritual, and subliminal dimensions of the art object, post-war Italian artist Piero Manzoni is often regarded as a neo-dadaist. Bent as he was on a characteristically avant-gardist antagonism toward traditional art and its commodification, Manzoni's humorous gestures — such as canning his shit in *Merda d'artista* (1961) or signing peoples' bodies and declaring them 'art' — are commonly read as evidence of this alignment. Though theorists like Jacopo Galimberti and Jean-Pierre Criqui have revised the discourse on Manzoni's humour by aligning it with medieval carnival and collective laughter, beyond this, Manzoni's use of humour is rarely afforded serious academic attention. One of the most notable oversights is the unacknowledged connection between Manzoni's humour and that of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, whom the Italian artist considered the 'philosopher of freedom' and declared his 'putative father'. Kierkegaard saw humour as more than aesthetic: he believed it to be a characteristic of the genius, and essential in the path to truth and thus freedom, able to reconcile the tragic contradictions of lived experience. There is a similar reverence for humour as a purportedly freeing, liberating way of being in Manzoni's practice that is deserving of more critical attention. Through analysis of Manzoni's Achromes, a series of white, sometimes sculptural paintings that transmuted the modernist trope of the monochrome, this paper will explore how Manzoni employed parodic devices to undermine the modernist painting style, revealing its inherent contradictions through humorous, exaggerated and distorted applications of its conventions. More than just deconstructive, Manzoni's Achromes signal the artist's broader interest in the Kierkegaardian existentialist approaches to humour as a means of revealing contradiction and exposing truth.

Tara Heffernan is a PhD student in art history at the University of Melbourne interested in political art, and modern art and its lineages. Her current research concerns Italian artist Piero Manzoni and, more broadly, the role of humour and irony in art. She has written for numerous Australian art magazines including *Eyeline*, *Artlink* and *Un* magazine.

Todd Herzog, University of Cincinnati

The Situation is Hopeless, but Not Serious: Tiny Amusements and Their Big Impact on German Modernism

German modernism has been defined by its large-scale works—Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Brecht's epic theater, Benjamin's Arcades project. In my paper, I concentrate on its small-scale works. The German term for these works—*Kleinkunst*—is usually translated as *cabaret*. However, it literally means “small art” and applies to performances that are considered humorous and frivolous. By examining two early 20th-century comic artists who are not usually included in studies of German modernism, I show how these small works had a large impact on the German modernist project.

Karl Valentin was a successful performer and filmmaker, whom Brecht credited as the inspiration for epic theater. His humor revolves around his characters' awkward and unsuccessful attempts to achieve normalcy and stability in impossibly chaotic situations. His performances are comparable to Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd—but without the underlying sense of repressed elegance or the possibility that order could be restored.

The Bohemian Dadaist Walter Serner wrote hundreds of micro crime stories set in uncertain philosophical and geographical spaces in which the laws of logic and causality are suspended. His narratives pick up *in medias res* and end *in medias res*. In contrast to classical detective stories, the solution to the mystery withheld and order is never restored. Nor is it seen as restorable.

The characters in these tiny amusements find themselves always already in a state of disorder, chaos, and undecidability. This condition is treated with humor that refuses the ironic evocation of an alternative or the release of nervous tension that is often described in theories of comedy. The situation is, as the old Viennese quip puts it, “hopeless, but not serious.” My paper illuminates the sober modernism hidden in these tiny amusements, as well as the concrete comedy hidden in high modernist art.

Todd Herzog is Professor and Head of German Studies at the University of Cincinnati, where he also directs the Center for Film & Media Studies. He is author or editor of five books, most recently *East, West, and Centre: Reframing Post-1989 European Cinema* (Edinburgh, 2014, with Michael Gott) and *Tatort Germany* (Camden House, 2014, with Lynn Kutch). He is currently working on a book about art and life after the death of privacy.

Alex Howard, University of Sydney
Modernist Humour, Camp Modernism

I want in this paper first to locate the historical origins and then trace the conceptual developments of what I want to describe as a humorous and discernibly ‘camp’ type of modernist cultural production. We begin by venturing back into the historical ether. Specifically, this paper starts in nineteenth century – as it was during this period when this most nebulous and contested of critical and cultural terms first appeared (in a late-nineteenth century dictionary of Victorian slang, no less!). We open with a discussion of the historical and cultural milieu into which camp was born because such a conversation furnishes us with a solid base from which to understand – and then recalibrate our understanding of – modernist humour. Having done so, this paper then turns to the early decades of the twentieth century. Arguing first through a series of case studies that the satirical and pointed works and projects of ever-so manly modernist men such as Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, and Ernest Hemingway function in a very specific capacity to suppress anything approaching a non-normative literary and aesthetic sensibility, this paper moves to suggest that a host of later modernists sought in various ways to slyly deflate and undercut – or, if you will, camp – the models of modernism privileged by their forebears. Foregrounding the ways in which diverse writers such as Charles Henri Ford, Parker Tyler, and Djuna Barnes sought to wittily undermine the heteronormative versions and pretensions of the sorts of artistic production privileged by the often remarkably po-faced high modernists that we all know and love, this paper closes by gesturing to some of the concrete ways in which these and other assorted camp moderns paved the way for the subsequent emergence of avowedly camp and downright funny work of proto-postmodern writers such as Frank O’Hara and Josh Ashbery.

Dr Alexander Howard is a Lecturer in Writing Studies at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *Charles Henri Ford: Between Modernism and Postmodernism* (2017). His recent research features in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 23.1 (2018).

James Jiang, University of Melbourne
Tragicomic Characters: Habit, Automation, Vocation

Max Weber was probably not thinking of Henri Bergson when in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) he compared the pursuit of a calling under modern economic conditions to being “encased in steel” (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*, translated by Talcott Parsons as “iron cage”). And yet, this image bears a suggestive resemblance to the image deployed in *Le Rire* (1900) where Bergson identifies the comic with the sense of incongruity elicited by the spectacle of “the mechanical encrusted upon the living”. Tellingly, Bergson’s essay is strewn with professional types—doctors, judges, teachers—so much so that these types emerge as the exemplary products of a social process in which action and thought are comically automated. Weber and Bergson, then, provide two possible responses to the spectacle of routinization that professional activity affords: tragedy and/or farce.

In this paper, I will explore this characteristically modernist ambivalence about the professionalized self. Where modernist scholarship has engaged with the rise of the professions, it has tended to focus almost exclusively on the professionalization of literature. Here, however, I will examine the significance of the tragicomic mode to the literature on the professions, drawing primarily on William James’ psychological writings. James was caught in the cross-currents of professionalization: he was trained as a doctor at a time when American medicine was split by sectarian quarrels and began teaching psychology when it had yet to be disengaged from neurology and philosophy. Indeed, the chapters on “Habit” and “The Consciousness of Self” in James’ *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) are as revealing about the psychology of vocational choice as they are about psychology as a vocation. The epitome of a tragic moment of self-attenuation, vocational choice is nevertheless repeatedly staged in James’ writings as a comic scenario of divine election. In seeking to reconstruct James’ vocational psychology as tragicomic drama, this paper will ultimately reconfigure our understanding of Jamesian pragmatism not as an incipient form of American posthumanist thought, but rather as a continuation of a literary (and European) tradition of humanist comedy.

James Jiang teaches in the English and Theatre Studies program at the University of Melbourne. He is currently completing a monograph on the forensic imagination in modernist writing from Poe to Moore.

Peter Korotaev, University of Melbourne
Andrey Bely's Crimson Dream of Ironic Contempt

The work of the Russian modernist writer Andrey Bely is often characterized as tragically polarized. One critical approach to his work has been to enumerate his favourite antinomies – state repression/revolution, father/son, Apollo/Dionysus, worldly determinism/artistic freedom, and so on. Indeed, Bely is usually stuck in an eschatological problematic, alternating between blindly affirming his apocalyptic desires in the form of the Symbolist artist-God (himself), then painfully parodying his own failed messianism the next year. His 1913 novel *Petersburg* thinks through another dualism, a mathematical one – that between measurable, discrete units and the 'immeasurable' continuity of a line segment. Following recent mathematical readings of *Petersburg*, the claim of this paper is that the intrusion of the discrete/continuous couple profoundly complicates Bely's usual configuration of art's relation to its time. In short, *Petersburg* tries to materialize comedic quasi-exceptions to its mathematized universe. The novel supplements the aporia of the mathematical discrete/continuous couple with stuttering, interrupted, bad jokes. Neither Zarathustra's triumphant mirth, nor a wry, auto-parodic snicker, these stammering jokes singularize literature's relation to its Pythagorean world using novel literary techniques, particularly the liberal use of line segments – dashes. A uniquely artistic comedy appears to be the consequence of the artwork's invasion by the paradigmatically non-artistic form of thought – mathematics. The paper proceeds by (a) situating *Petersburg*'s Pythagoreanism in terms of the politically reactionary Pythagoreanism of Bely and his milieu (b) relating the conceptual importance of Georg Cantor's mathematical revolution regarding the discrete/continuous couple, of which Bely and his mathematician father were intimately conscious (c) explicating the techniques *Petersburg* uses to construct its comedic stammering and their relation to the novel's mathematical obsession (d) proposing some conceptual consequences of this encounter between mathematics and literature.

I am finishing my English major at the University of Melbourne. I gave a paper on Maurice Blanchot's political romanticism in 2017 at UNSW's 'Reform, Revolution, and Crisis in European History, Culture and Political Thought' conference. I am interested in writing about what relation literature can have to politics in the wake of Romanticism's failure to think either a meaningful politics or a literature without messianism. I am also interested in tracing the 20th century attempts to create a politics predicated on neither biopolitical 'human rights' nor the vitality of life. These interests are then implicated in the question of what relation literature and politics are to have to science. Russia, from Pushkin to Stalin, singularly manifests these problematics, and as such I am trying to push my investigations further in examining this site. I also manage the sometimes popular 'younger Hegelian reading group', where we read the Phenomenology of Spirit every Monday.

Michael Stuart Lynch, Western Sydney University
Is this a Modernist Joke? Pinter and 'Late' Twentieth Century Britain

Jameson in *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic* writes: "given the traditional valorization of the 'New' and of innovation in all the modernisms, in effect such an aesthetic assimilates all 'genuine art' to what had hitherto been considered a single period within artistic history" (163). Pinter's jokes refer to the early and 'classic' modernist canon; he promotes a self conscious genealogy ending with Beckett and himself; he is the quintessential cool at the end of history dabbling in movies from the strength of authentic, theatre art that authentically (artistically) lose the attention of the populace. Billington's biography of Pinter is the conclusion to his (Lyotard-esque post-dated precursor) summation of the scene: *State of the Nation*. It can be argued that there is a Picasso-esque reference to a European fantasy version of the primitive 'Other' that permeates one of Pinter's major motifs: who is going to remain and who is going to be excluded from the group? Everyone fights with different types of British wit (genteel or cockney; artistic, gutter or bourgeois bully boy; lady or whore), discourses seeking to gain a grip on the episteme of those concerned (and these are often to have unforeseen and uncontrollable affects on the characters' situation). The jokes are both after a clearly Modernist period, and difficult, obscure and in a number of ways alien to the pop culture, mass media world that is accepted to have replaced it. Both of the 'post-modern' and anachronistic to it, Pinter's plays are particularly telling in the ongoing periodizing of Late and Post Modernism, and Post-post Modernism, and Late Capitalism and so 'Late' Britain. I will discuss all this and connect Pinter's oeuvre to Foucault, Levi-Strauss and Jameson.

Michael Stuart Lynch has taught writing, literature and 'Contemporary Society' at Western Sydney University since 2010. Most recently he was coordinator of Analytical Reading and Writing (Summer A 2018). He was awarded his PhD from Sydney University in 2001 and was an Assistant Professor at The United Arab Emirates University from 2003 to 2007. He first published on Pinter in 1994 in *Sydney Studies in English*, and most recently with a chapter in Craig N. Owens's *Pinter Et Cetera* (2009).

Ashley Maher, University of Sydney
Architectural Humor: Osbert Lancaster's Pseudo-Educational Guides

Can architecture be funny? In J. G. Ballard's manuscript of *High-Rise*, architect Anthony Royal observes that "the absence of humour...had always struck [him] as the single most damning feature" of planned high-rise communities. Modernist architect Maxwell Fry pronounced the jokey John Betjeman, poet and one-time assistant editor of a modernist architectural journal, "the enemy to Modernism": "I knew he would draw a facetious veil over our earnestness and that at the end he would find himself in some other camp." Throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, the earnestness and authority with which architectural experts dispensed their advice in exhibitions, documentaries, books, and journals made these proposals subject to parody. This paper analyzes the cultural function of satirical architectural guides through examining the work of illustrator and author Osbert Lancaster. As assistant editor at the *Architectural Review*, Lancaster played a key role in serious architectural education, yet he undermined the very expert authority he helped establish through cartoons that mocked design pretensions. Moreover, he parodied the genres used to disseminate architectural knowledge, most notably through his pseudo-town study *Progress at Pelvis Bay* (1936) and his pseudo-architectural guidebook *Drayneflete Revealed* (1949). Yet his cartoon send-ups of English architecture over the ages—*Pillar to Post* (1938) and *Home Sweet Homes* (1939)—were so informative that critics praised them for providing accessible introductions to design history. This paper argues that, by presenting a more skeptical and contextualized view of the English home, Lancaster's humorous publications gave citizens the tools to become critics as well as consumers of innovative home design. Lancaster's guides provided an alternative, light-handed architectural education—one that took the "expert" off view while also imparting a vocabulary for evaluating architecture.

Ashley Maher is a lecturer in English at the University of Sydney. Before that, she was a Junior Research Fellow at University College, Oxford. She specializes in twentieth-century British literature, with longstanding research interests in modernism and late modernism, politics, literature and the visual arts, war, dystopian fiction, and the relationships between authors and institutions. Her first book, forthcoming from Oxford University Press, establishes the centrality of modernist buildings and architectural periodicals to British midcentury literature. Work from this project has already appeared in *ELH*. Her next project explores how new methods for monitoring and preserving animal populations allowed British novelists to develop new literary strategies for representing human behavior within large, delicately balanced communities.

Jessica Marian, University of Melbourne

No Junk Mail, Please: Frances Steloff's humorous book catalogue

In 1940, Frances Steloff released an 87-page catalogue to mark the twentieth anniversary of her bookshop, Gotham Book Mart. The catalogue, titled "We Moderns", records the bookstore's offering of books and magazines by the era's "so-called experimental writers" (813), listing titles and prices, and also including, most interestingly, short introductory appreciations of a selection of modernist writers written by other modernist writers. The catalogue functions at once as advertising material with an obvious and highly practical commercial purpose, and, as Andrew Thacker has described it, as "an intriguing collaborative text of modernist publishing" (446). Intervening in existing approaches to considering the institutions and networks that supported and enabled modernism, and developing upon the new attention directed specifically at bookstores by Thacker (2016) and Hugh Osborne (2015, ed.), this paper will closely consider the precarious manner in which the catalogue mediates a position between commerce and culture. I argue that the catalogue and its contributors rely upon humour to diffuse this uncomfortable and ambivalent boundary. Numerous of the catalogue's author-introductions are written in a highly ironic and frequently self-deprecating tone. Included on the back cover of the catalogue is a cartoon depicting a middle-aged man sitting for an eye-test who confuses the optometrist's eye chart for an Ezra Pound poem. Through a close analysis of these features of the catalogue, I seek to demonstrate that humour here operates as the mediating force between the banal advertisement of commodities and the project of avant-garde writing.

Jessica Marian is a PhD candidate in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. Her thesis considers the role of style in twentieth century French theory and philosophy. Secondary research interests are modernist women's memoir, and the function of the modernist bookstore. She is co-convenor of the Feminist Theory Reading Group.

Ronan McDonald, University of Melbourne
Samuel Beckett's Irish Joke

The paper seeks to offer some provocations about Beckett's depictions of Irish caricatures and stereotypes, not least to question the ever-expanding hagiography that surrounds his politics. More than any other major modernist, Beckett seems politically pristine. Pound and Eliot are tainted with anti-semitism, Lawrence and Yeats had their head turned by Mussolini, Woolf and her Bloomsbury set by snobbery. But Beckett, a hero of the French resistance, lived and created, it seems, with impeccable ethical and artistic integrity. Emilie Morin's recent, enthusiastically received *Beckett and Politics* has reinforced that impression. This book is the culmination of a generation of politicizing and historicizing Beckett. In the 1990s, the Irish critic David Lloyd presented a pathbreaking reading of Beckett as a post-colonial writer, an image built upon by David Bixby, Declan Kiberd and others in more recent years. The 'greening' of Beckett in the last generation has presented him on the side of the angels. There has been a tenacious auratic around Beckett, both in the academic and the popular spheres, that makes him saint-like, un-impugnable. Looking at depictions of the Irish, mainly in his mid-career prose, this paper seeks to take a more critical and skeptical view. It assesses Beckett's use of recognizable and much precedented topoi of the Irish peasantry, within the class and caste configurations of the time. It will locate it within a genealogy going back to Maria Edgeworth's 'Essay on Irish Bulls' (1802) and taking in the simian depictions of the Irish in *Punch* magazine. It ponders the mordant bite of Beckett's Irish joke, and whether his satire is punching up – at the new Philistine power in independent Ireland – or down, to the much traduced and ridiculed 'mere' Irish.

Ronan McDonald holds the Gerry Higgins Chair in Irish Studies at the University of Melbourne. Between 2010 and 2015 he held the Australian Ireland Fund Chair in Modern Irish Studies at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. He is widely published in Irish literary studies, with a particular interest in Irish modernism. He also has a research interest in the history of criticism approaches to literary value. His books include *Tragedy and Irish Literature* (2002), *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (2007) and *The Death of the Critic* (2008). Recent edited collections include *The Values of Literary Studies: Critical Institutions, Scholarly Agendas* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and *Flann O'Brien and Modernism* (2014). His next book is *The Irish Revival, Modernism and the Making of Literary Value* in under contract with Cambridge University Press.

Elizabeth McLean, University of Melbourne
Not Safe for Work: Henry James, Parody and Disidentification

Thus, in the published and stage-performed humor of the stigmatized is to be found a special kind of irony. Cartoons, jokes, and folk tales display unseriously the weakness of a stereotypical member of a category, even while this half-hero is made to guilelessly outwit a normal of imposing status. The serious presentations of the representatives can exhibit a similar ambivalence, telling of a similar self-alienation.

--Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963)

In 2013, Paul La Farge wrote a blog post for *The Paris Review*, entitled “Scenes Not Included in Henry James’s *The Ambassadors* (NSFW).” “...Apologies to Henry James,” La Farge tweeted, adding, “Prior knowledge of *The Ambassadors* is not required, or even, on some level, recommended.” Audaciously lewd, the article imagines a series of frustrated erotic subplots and fixations that, by their explicitness, name and shame the queer “not included-ness” that characterises James’s fiction. In this process of amplification and exposure, La Farge contributes to a parodic tradition that continually takes aim at James’s indirection. Drawing on Erving Goffman’s formulation of stigma and disidentification, this paper considers parody’s participation in James’s own circuit of shame, identification and negation.

Beth McLean is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. Engaging with feminist and queer analytical frameworks, her thesis, “The Topographical Parenthesis,” considers Henry James’s articulation of space as a method of intertextual and intratextual relation.

Eliza Murphy, University of Tasmania
Stella Gibbons, the Party, and Late Modernist Comedy

In Stella Gibbons's interwar novels, parties appear centrally and frequently: serving as both a narrative device and an opportunity for comic relief. A keen and witty observer of modern sociability, many of the laughs in Gibbons's party scenes come from her recurrent deployment of two comic figures: the rural resident, and the highbrow intellectual. In her debut and most successful novel *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932), the behaviour of the Sussex Starkadder family and the Lawrentian-influenced Mr Mybug are frequently mocked. Similarly, in *Nightingale Wood* (1938), comic figures are found in the troublesome Falger (known as "the Hermit") and Hetty Franklin, a young woman who wishes to be a starving artist in Bloomsbury.

This paper seeks to investigate the role of these figures in the party scenes of *Cold Comfort Farm* and *Nightingale Wood*. Comedy – as a mode concerned with observing and policing behaviour – finds itself at home with the party: an event outside of the everyday that brings the manners and mores of its participants directly into the spotlight. By sending up two extremes – being culturally ignorant and being a snob – Gibbons advocates for a common-sense and pragmatic approach to navigating the complexities of party-going and modern sociability.

Through this reading, I take up Sophie Blanch's call for scholars to address the "comic potential of a generation of women writers" (112). The "vertical expansion" of new modernist studies, as identified by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (738), yields the opportunity to reconfigure Gibbons's position in the literary field of the early twentieth century. Frequently parsed as a middlebrow writer, this paper argues that the comic qualities of Gibbons's works mean she also finds much in common with late modernism: a movement very much concerned with using laughter to challenge the form of its high modernist predecessor.

Eliza Murphy is a PhD candidate in the School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania. Her doctoral research explores the role and representation of parties in comic novels of the interwar period, with a focus on the works of E. F. Benson, Stella Gibbons, Nancy Mitford, and Evelyn Waugh. More broadly, Eliza is interested in early twentieth-century literary culture, literary taste, and the relationship between modernist and middlebrow literature. She will be appearing on an upcoming episode of the Modernist Podcast in late 2018.

Aaron Nyerges, University of Sydney
Willa Cather, Dream Kitsch

For decades Willa Cather's readers have been deprived of her wackiness. As a public figure, she posed as a no-nonsense aesthetic conservative – stern in her tastes, anti-modern in her worldview, ever opposed to the tawdriness of mass culture. However, when her personal correspondence—long kept from print by her final will—was first published in 2013, it revealed a softer, even campier side of Cather. Her letters disclose, among other things, her infatuation with Rin Tin Tin, Hollywood's greatest canine celebrity.

Though the myth of Cather's anti-modernism has been largely dispelled by a series of scholarly readers – such as Phyllis Rose, Hermione Lee and Janice Stout – much work remains to be done toward complicating and reassessing her relationship with the funnier forms of mass culture.

This paper exhumes a number of kitsch artefacts from what is perhaps her deepest reflection on America's commercial modernity, *The Professor's House* (1925), a book published the same year that, in a fragment called "Dream Kitsch," Walter Benjamin diagnosed the banal advance of everyday objects into the psyche of the modern artist. Cather's appreciation for the everyday goofiness of the gossip column was the type of thing she supposedly bracketed from her fiction, which made an argument for its timelessness out of its seriousness. But the private Cather of silly pleasure now vies for visibility in the fiction, as the totemic items of her vivid modernist Western, *The Professor's House*, could just as well be inventoried by the slapstick Hollywood Western *Clash of the Wolves* (1925), starring Rin Tin Tin.

This is a reading that suggests the zany, and even surreal, compatibility between a project of modernist fiction zealously opposed to the entertainment industry and the fullest, lightest examples of that commercial sphere.

Aaron Nyerges is a Lecturer in American Studies at the US Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. He holds a PhD in English from the University of Sydney and a BA in Creative Writing from the State University of New York. His articles have appeared in *Textual Practice*, *Sound Studies*, the *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, and *The Journal of Popular Culture*. He is writing his first book on American modernism, multimedia, and geography.

Antonio Rivas, Dickinson College

“Homages to the Clown: Modernist Approaches to Circus Comedy”

One of the most recognizable trends of Modernist Art is the assumption of popular culture as a way to reshape 20th-century aesthetics and among the characters that drew attention stands the figure of the clown out. The representation and recreation of clowns was pervasive in paintings, stories, and cinema. Critics have noticed the persistence of the romantic cliché around the clown or the avant-garde artistic recreation of the cinematic version of the clown. But the appearances of the circus clown manifest other concerns in Modernist culture. As the Greatest Show on Earth starts its decline, some coeval accounts, such as Sebastià Gasch, *El circo y sus figuras*, Pierre Mariel's *Historie de trois clowns*, Pierre Bost's *Le cirque et le musique hall*, Ramón Gómez de la Serna's *El circo*, strive to preserve “the actuality” of the circus, as named by e.e. cummings, as well as offer homage to past and present clown celebrities. The analysis of these texts will demonstrate a pervasive admiration for the figure of the circus clown establishing the resultant canonization of certain acts and artists from past and present, such as Adrian Wettach “Grock”, Aristodemo Frediani “Beby”, and the Fratellini Brothers, among others. These essays also provide keen observations about the dexterities involved in the clown's craft. Furthermore, these texts constitute re-enactments of the acts showing nostalgia for the live spectacle and the close contact between performers and spectators.

Antonio Rivas holds a Ph.D. from the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland). His scholarship has mainly focused on Ramón Gómez de la Serna's literature, especially his short-story. He has also dealt with other aspects of this authors' literature and of Spanish Modernism, such the emergence of city guides within the context of Madrid's urban growth and planning at the beginning of the 20th century. He has also developed an interest in Post Franco Spanish literature. In that regard, he has co-edited and contributed to five published volumes on emerging figures in contemporary Spanish fiction (Javier Tomeo, Bernardo Atxaga, Andrés Neuman, Luis Landero, and Almudena Grandes). He has taught in Switzerland and in the United States on Catalan, Spanish and Spanish American literatures and cultures. Currently he is visiting assistant professor at the Spanish and Portuguese department of Dickinson College.

Scott Robinson, Monash University
The Unbearable Irony of Reading Kierkegaard (No Relation)

In the trajectory of modern thinking about humour, there is none more scathingly ironic, nor more funny than Søren Kierkegaard. If this was not immediately evident to Kierkegaard himself in his search for true Christianity, it has become intelligible in light of twentieth-century readings of his work, especially in the context of aesthetics. In this paper, I aim to locate Kierkegaard's significance for thinking a modern aesthetics of irony. To do so, I examine how the earnest literalism of Kant's innocuous laughter is transformed at various stages into an irony whose character is not always explicit in the text itself. Rather, like nonsense (as Winfried Menninghaus notes), irony appears in the form of the text, which reveals the gaps in the dream of a systematic and total idealism. Literalists attempt to distil content from form, but irony works only at the level of the form. It is the scaffold for an idea that is supposed to transcend its incarnation, as Kierkegaard's texts are supposed to achieve the revelation of Christianity by their revocation of the preceding text (hence 'No Relation'). But, as Susan Mitchell imagined, the scaffold becomes the thing (art) itself. Irony displays a power to overtake sense, reversing Kant's humourless maxim that laughter is 'an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing.' The expectation of sense is transformed into an experience of nonsense that becomes the meaning of the text. In this paper I read the readings of Kierkegaard's *Johannes Climacus* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* by the likes of Theodore Adorno and James Conant, in search of the sensitivity to irony that might come to represent a genuinely modern aesthetics. I conclude with a reflection on the implications of this irony for making sense of humour in different contexts, particularly 'subversive' ones.

Scott Robinson is a PhD Candidate at Monash University, Melbourne in the Department of Philosophy. His research focuses on aesthetic experience in modern philosophy from Kant to Rancière as egalitarian phenomenon that includes any material at all. He maintains current research interests in art, history and colonialism. His writing has also appeared in *Overland*.

Michael Rodgers, Open University
'Modernism and Formal Funniness'

Taking its lead from a critical consensus that characterizes modernist writing as *unfeeling*, as well as Henri Bergson's claim that comedy derives from 'something mechanical encrusted on the living', the paper explores modernist writing's reaction against staid expression and its unconventional engagement with difficult subject matter. Looking at the work of writers such as Lewis, Celine, Parker, Beckett, Nabokov, and Burgess, for example, it argues that the combination of transgressive style when describing topics such as death, ignorance, violence, morbidity, and tragedy facilitates uncomfortable 'literary laughter'. In essence, the paper specifically explores how *form* facilitates funniness; the function, for example, of the *bon mot* in the context of what might be called 'black' or 'gallows' humour. As Humbert Humbert tells us in *Lolita*, for example, 'my very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three' (2000 [1955], p.10). Alongside Bergson and traditional theories of humour (superiority, incongruity, relief), I will be harnessing the theoretical work of Breton (black humour), Nietzsche ('learn how to laugh'; the 'transvaluation of all values') and Kristeva (abjection) in my analysis.

Dr Michael Rodgers is Honorary Associate and Associate Lecturer in English Literature at The Open University and Lecturer in English at West College Scotland. His research interests include twentieth-century literature, theory, and film; the intersection between literature and philosophy; and humour. He is the author of *Nabokov and Nietzsche: Problems and Perspectives* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and co-editor of *Nabokov and the Question of Morality: Aesthetics, Metaphysics, and the Ethics of Fiction* (Palgrave, 2016). His current research focuses on the interplay between style and uncomfortable laughter – he has given humour-related talks in Newry (2017), Edinburgh (2017), Antwerp (2016), London (2014), Manchester (2014), Glasgow (2013), and Durham (2013). He was asked to be a reviewer by Bloomsbury for Magda Romanska's *Reader in Comedy: An Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2016), describing it as 'a much-needed compendium on comedy tracking the narrative arc of the funny bone from Plato to the present day' (<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/reader-in-comedy-9781474247894/>).

Noa Saunders, Boston University

Subversive Sentimentality and the Comic Body in Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*

My paper analyzes the sentimentality in Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) in order to demonstrate Chaplin's comedy as a modern mode of sentimentality. While all critics credit Chaplin as a sentimental entertainer, most neglect the modernist aspects of his sentimentality. I claim in *Monsieur Verdoux* we see Chaplin employs sentimentality with a modern conviction. Chaplin's modernism notoriously exemplifies the fragmentation of gesture and the mechanization of the body, but in *Verdoux* Chaplin epitomizes the mechanization of seduction, charm, and sentiment. In the "business" of marrying and killing rich women to provide for his beloved wife and son, Verdoux abuses the sentiment his previous work respects. Chaplin's sentimentality associated with *City Lights* (1931) sours into a motivation for murder in *Verdoux*. Not only does sentimentality for creating the idyllic family motivate Verdoux's business of killing, but it also serves as an interruption to his advancements when a derelict "corrupts" him with a philosophy of hope. Sentimentality affects both Verdoux's actions and the spectator's sympathy. Witnessing Verdoux dance to corner women, test poisons, and try to drown fellow comic Martha Raye, the spectator struggles with a distorted feeling of wanting him to succeed. This feeling, I claim, comes from the way the spectator expects Chaplin's comic body to perform, which, until *Verdoux*, has only appeared as the recognizable Tramp. Chaplin uses sentimentality to subvert the spectator's expectations for his performing body as he falls out of windows and swirl between women he mistakes for his wife. Chaplin's choice to deliberately cloud the spectator's sense of Verdoux's ethos involves a pointed critique of both war's destructive power and the power of sentiment.

Noa Saunders is earning a doctorate at Boston University, where she works on 20th and 21st century poetry and film. She attended the Ohio State University for her bachelor's degree, and received an M.F.A. from the University of Maryland. Recent poems may be found in *Ninth Letter*. She's given presentations on Brenda Hillman's *Death Tractates*, Vladimir Nabokov's *The Original of Laura*, and Anne Frank's diary.

Paul Sheehan, Macquarie University
Theatre of Hate: Thomas Bernhard's *Comédie Inhumaine*

Locating the finer points of misanthropy on the literary spectrum is not an easy task. On the one hand, it is a term all too easily applied to writers with an animus (apparent or actual) against the world; on the other, it is often denied the analytical finesse accorded *nihilism*, *cynicism*, *pessimism* or even the much more esoteric *antinatalism*. Despite this, and as Andrew Gibson (*Misanthropy: The Critique of Humanity*, 2017) has shown, misanthropic thought possesses a considerable amplitude, both historical and philosophical. This fertile but under-examined 'tradition' has given impetus to writers both modernist (Knut Hamsun, Wyndham Lewis, Louis-Ferdinand Céline) and anti-modernist (Evelyn Waugh, Philip Larkin, Michel Houellebecq). What separates the two, I suggest, is the streak of comedy that runs through modernist misanthropy: bitter, bleak, unrelenting and often destructive, yet also uniquely insightful and formally inventive. This paper seeks to establish a theoretical basis for these (antithetical) qualities, insofar as they are instantiated in the work of the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard (1931-1989).

Taking his cues from Dostoevsky's Underground Man, Bernhard's late-modernist perorations contain their own dramaturgical exuberance. The focal point of this paper, then, is the performative aspects of Bernhardian comedy. Although the writer is notorious for what might be termed his *thespiophobic* declamations, in which actors and acting are subjected to insults and ridicule, his monological virtuosity takes shape as performance – a comedy of invective that is reliant on gruelling yet cogent repetitions and carefully modulated tonal variations. Concentrating on the last novelistic works of Bernhard's career, *Old Masters* (1985) and *Extinction* (1986), I show how the writer's comic intelligence is crucial to his art of excess and exaggeration, and how the hyperbolic, yet precisely controlled pronouncements that result might have other than satirical ends.

Paul Sheehan is Associate Professor in the English Department at Macquarie University, Sydney Australia. He is the author of *Modernism and the Aesthetics of Violence* (Cambridge UP, 2013) and the editor of 'Post-Archival Beckett: Genre, Process, Value' (2017), a special issue of the *Journal of Beckett Studies*. His recent work includes essays on zoopoetics, posthuman bodies, and cryptographic modernism.

Russell Smith, Australian National University

The Dead Pan: Nathanael West's Unfunny Jokes and Modernist Anti-sentimentalism

Though Nathanael West's novels are often read in terms of an ancient and revered mode of misanthropic humour—satire—in this paper I want to draw on recent work that seeks to situate his work in relation to distinctly modern comic modes—slapstick, burlesque, black humour, and especially, dead pan. In *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), we read of the constantly-joking newspaper editor Shrike:

Although his gestures were elaborate, his face was blank. He practiced a trick much used by moving-picture comedians—the dead pan. No matter how fantastic or excited his speech, he never changed his expression. Under the shining white globe of his brow, his features huddled together in a dead, gray triangle.

Drawing on Michael North's *Machine-Age Comedy*, and recent readings of West by Jonathan Greenberg and Justus Nieland, I want to draw out the inhuman aspects of West's anti-sentimental modernist comedy. In particular, where for other modernists the mechanical aspects of human behaviour are a source of comedy, and laughter itself the most mechanical of human behaviours, West's 'strange and unfunny jokes' (as he called them) depict these human mechanisms of collective emotion in breakdown, pulling out the rug of *sensus communis* on which satirical humour traditionally rests. The result is a comedy which may not, in fact, be funny.

Russell Smith is Lecturer in English at the Australian National University, Canberra. He has published widely on Samuel Beckett, including the edited volume *Beckett and Ethics* (Continuum 2009) and the forthcoming *Beckett's Sensibility*. To honour the 200th anniversary of the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, he is organising a conference *Frankenstein 2018: Two Hundred Years of Monsters* at the Humanities Research Centre, ANU, in September 2018.

Ashleigh Synnott, University of Sydney

The Bull at the Gate: Flannery O'Connor's 'Greenleaf' through the lens of "dark ecology"

Flannery O'Connor's short fiction is well known for its humour and in this paper I offer a creative reading of her short story 'Greenleaf' through the lens of contemporary philosopher Timothy Morton's theory of "dark ecology". With its roots in Gothic culture and poetry, dark ecology proposes a way to think through the relationship between humans and non-humans in the Anthropocene and suggests that ecological awareness has both melancholic and comedic characteristics. I will read O'Connor's 'Greenleaf' for the ways in which it registers the melancholy and anxiety, panic and uncanniness of Morton's dark ecology, as well for the ways in which it explores how the story embodies Morton's idea of "ecognosis". In doing this, I draw the fiction writer and the philosopher together for the purposes of exploring the intersection of comedy, ecological awareness and fiction today.

Ashleigh Synnott is a writer living in Sydney and a DCA Candidate at the University of Sydney. Her stories and essays have won various prizes and appeared in various Australian anthologies and journals such as *Meanjin*, *Overland*, and *Award Winning Australian Stories* and *Antipodes*. She is represented by the Jane Novak Literary Agency.

Sue Thomas, La Trobe University

“[T]he horrible laughter of the world”: reading the humour of Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning Midnight*

In *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), protagonist Sasha Jansen remembers from an English lesson she gave in Paris in the mid-1920s some of Mrs Erlynne’s lines from Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan*: “The laughter, the horrible laughter of the world—a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed.” Mrs Erlynne is railing against the social treatment of the “outcast” woman, “fall[en] into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at.” Sasha, rather, images her at times suicidal despair as “drowning” in “the deep, dark river,” “sink[ing] to the accompaniment of loud laughter.” Yet, as Katherine Streip, Elaine Savory and Laura Wainwright, among other critics, have noted, *Good Morning, Midnight* is Rhys’s most humorous novel. Streip observes: “Conventional definitions of humor do not work when discussing Rhys.” In this paper I discuss the narrating Sasha’s humorous plays on repetition and their stakes in Rhys’s modernist interest in the temporality of the past in the present and in the implication of the reader in “the horrible laughter of the world.”

Sue Thomas is Professor of English at La Trobe University, Melbourne and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. She has published extensively on Jean Rhys (*The Worlding of Jean Rhys* and over twenty essays and chapters). Her books also include, among others, *Imperialism, Reform and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* and *Telling West Indian Lives: Life Narrative and the Reform of Plantation Slavery Cultures, 1804-1834*. The proposed paper for the conference Modernist Comedy and Humour is drawn from an Australian Research Council-funded project DP140103817 Jean Rhys: Her Literary Career.

Skye Wagner, University of New South Wales

Comic Visions: How perceptual dissonance is staged in films works by Hito Steyerl and Jacques Tati.

Perception is political: the capacity to see, to be seen, and to see through, is facilitated through social and technical apparatuses. This paper brings together two contextually different film works, *Playtime* (1967), a feature film comedy by French director Jacques Tati and *How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.MOV File* (2013), a satirical moving image artwork by German artist and media theorist Hito Steyerl. These films were produced in different political and social climates but what connects them is their examination of visual systems that both enable and restrict visibility. Systems that are embedded in visualisation technologies, film, modern architecture and consumer culture.

Deception and *transparency* are staged and performed in these films, each of which is presented as a complex tool, process and ideology. Tactics that are used by governing bodies to regulate individuals through mediation and supervision. Simultaneously, these films foreground how deception and transparency can be co-opted as tools of tactical resistance against perceptual regimes of control.

Playtime reflects the totalizing and controlling effects of capitalist modernization, whilst offering an alternative viewing experience that challenges the prescriptive methods of traditional narrative cinema. *How Not To Be Seen* is a subversive instructional montage that highlights the power relations that exist in being visible and invisible in mass surveillance society, where industrialised and militarised vision has impacted representational agency. *How Not To Be Seen* is thematically political whereas, the composition of *Playtime* presents a transgressive social critique. Both films attempt to affect and affront the spectator by baring the methods of representation. This transparent use of artifice to stage, screen and mediate is seen in both films' mise-en-scene, image composition and performances. Through formal analysis of these aesthetic and organizational devices, the two films present a dissonant and humorous perceptual agenda.

Skye Wagner is a visual artist and academic based in Sydney. Working predominantly with photography, but also with moving image, performance and installation. Her current research interest is in the contemporary conditions of photographic image and the staged and minor aesthetics of commodity culture. She has a working and education background in film and theatre in Australia, the UK, and the USA. As an artist, she has exhibited at spaces including MOP, Firstdraft, Carriageworks, Cockatoo Island, Sydney Non Objective (SNO) and the Slade Research Centre London. Her work is held in public and private collections in both Australia and the UK. Since 2012 she has been a lecturer in Photomedia at National Art School Sydney and has held teaching appointments at the University of Technology Sydney.

Estrella Yambon Dacillo, Central Mindanao University

Detachment and Commitment Between Comics Characters in Australian Newspapers

This quantitative study focuses on the detachment and commitment revealed through the hedges and boosters in the conversations between characters in Australian comics published by Auspac Media: The Feature People. This descriptive study involves 20 comics characters in comics featured from 1930 to 2010. Conversation lines will be identified from the discourses and will be categorized according to their types. These will be coded, analyzed and tabulated.

Abbreviations and convention used by Wang, et al. (2006) will be used in coding and labeling the words in the sentences. Specific types of hedges will be categorized according to Type 1- Modals (Probabilities), Type 2 – Semi-Auxiliaries (Epistemic Hedges), Type 3- Grammatical (Stylistic Means), and Type 4- Fillers/Intensifiers. Specific epistemic hedges will be adopted from Bayyyurt's (in Algi, 2012) which categories include: Epistemic verbs, epistemic modals and adverbials.

This study further examines the applicability of Superiority Theory (2016) originally proposed by Roger Scruton who analyses amusement as an “attentive demolition” of a person or something connected with person. It treats laughter as an expression of superiority over other people or over a former state of ourselves. Following this tenet, this study will likely distinguish the changes in commitment and detachment of men and women comics characters in several decades. It will also reveal how men downplay their authority, commitment, rapport, connections and harmonious relationships with women. It is also interesting to know if women openly express confidence, conviction and certainty in their claims and assert a proposition with confidence.

Estrella Yambon Dacillo is an Associate Professor II at Central Mindanao University (CMU), Musuan, Maramag, Bukidnon. She took her Doctor of Philosophy in Language Studies at Mindanao State University- Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT), Iligan City. She also finished her Doctor of Philosophy in Instructional Systems Design and M.A in English Language Teaching at Bukidnon State University (BUKSU), Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. Her Bachelor of Science in Education major in English and minor in Filipino was taken at Mindanao State University (MSU)-Marawi City. She also had teaching stints at several universities like Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City; Caraga State University, Butuan City; and Central Mindanao University, Maramag, Bukidnon where she is presently connected. She is also involved in the CMU extension and research activities since 2005. Her paper on “The Tropes of Philippine Myths” is published by the Mindanao Forum, an official publication of MSU-IIT.

