

HUMOUR

- 1) What makes things funny?
- 2) Are there humour equivalents in non-human animals?
- 3) Why do we have a sense of humour?
- 4) What neural correlates of humour are there?

Creates:

- * Not laughter, can be humourless
 - ↳ Boss' joke phenomena

WHAT MAKES THINGS FUNNY?

Millenia of little study & bullshit theories

* **Greeks + Early Christians** disliked it
↳ no laughter in monasteries

↳ **Erasmus**: in praise of folly, Renaissance wit

* **SUPERIORITY THEORY** **Hobbes + Scruton**

↳ laughter as superiority

* **RELIEF THEORY** **Spencer + Freud**

↳ excess of spirit bubbles up as laughter

* **INCONGRUITY THEORY** **Kant**

↳ "transformation from strained expectation to nothing"

An Indian at the table of an Englishman in Surat, when he saw a bottle of ale opened and all the beer turned into froth and overflowing, testified his great astonishment with many exclamations. When the Englishman asked him, "What is there in this to astonish you so much?" he answered, "I am not at all astonished that it should flow out, but I do wonder how you ever got it in."

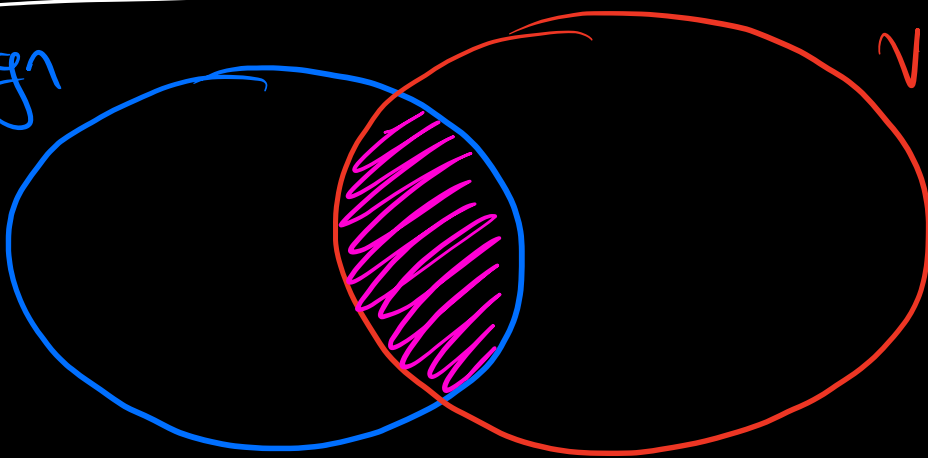
↑ joke Kant studied

BENIGN VIOLATION THEORY

McGraw + Warren
~2010

Benign

VIOLATION



Humor =

HUMOR

Simultaneous appreciation of the benign + violating features

Examples

• Ticking: Violation of personal space

BUT only funny if someone you trust is tickling you
∴ must be both violation and benign.

• Getting a joke, need both benign AND violation immediately, else you won't find it funny.

• Cultural effects. Muhammad cartoons not funny in Saudi, but sex jokes are funnier, they're a bigger violation!



Measured how funny this joke was

McGraw et al. 2014

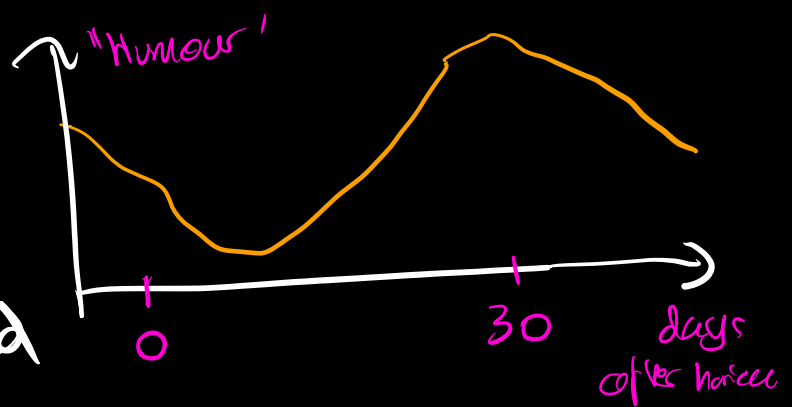


Varied over time!

At first "too soon", not benign

THEN (OLD)

Then not a violation, no-one cared



Spot the benign-violation below

- "I'm not a fan of the new £1 coin, then again, I hate all change"
- "My dad suggested I register for a doctor card, he's a man after my own heart"
- "I needed a password that was eight characters long, so I picked Snow White & the 7 dwarves"

MUMOUR IN NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

* Dolphins Blomqvist et al. 2005

↳ Acoustic whistles during play-fighting
characteristic, never seen in aggressive behaviour

* Monkeys Marsusama 2004

↳ vocalisations during wrestling, play chasing, or hickling

* Rats

↳ 50 kHz sounds during play fighting
though also during mating + heroine ... not laughter?

* Rats "whit is hard" ⇒ stone, work

↳ suspect interpretations, nipple fixation

Why Do We Have A SENSE OF HUMOUR?

⇒ Signaling that a potentially bad situation is fine
Ramachandran 2008

- * Reproductive advantage - Mithens
- * Making you rethink pre-existing structures
↳ chase pleasurable things, humor
- * Ostracism / In-group Out-group

Traditional Societies

* All have humor

* Many have ritual clowns

→ same topics
→ motif

→ ritual clowns

awfully, special
conflict

→ buffer in conflicts

→ mock authority

Big social role: Tanganyika laughter epidemic

* 3 → 95 pupils hours → 16 days School closed - month later

* passed to next village ⇒ 217 more

* 18 months later it died

* 1000 people & 10 schools closed

NEURAL CORRELATES OF HUMOUR?

fMRI

1) Incongruity resolution temporo-occipital-parietal junction

IN = multimodal, involved in self-related processing + theory of mind

2) Emotional valence amygdala + dopamine neurons

Reward related responses ↳ relevance detector!

Electrodes

• SMA electric shock ⇒ mirth + laughter!

• angular bundle ⇒ laughter ↓↓

stimulated with an electrode,
people started finding things in
the room funny!