

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?

Answers:

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

WHAT MAKES THINGS FUNNY ?

Millenia of little shady & bullshit theories

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

Erasmus : in praise of folly , readersone will

- * SUPERIORITY THEORY Hobbes + Sartre

↳ laughter as superiority

- * RELIEF THEORY Spencer + Freud

↳ excess of spirit bubbles up as laughter

- * INCONGRUITY THEORY Kant

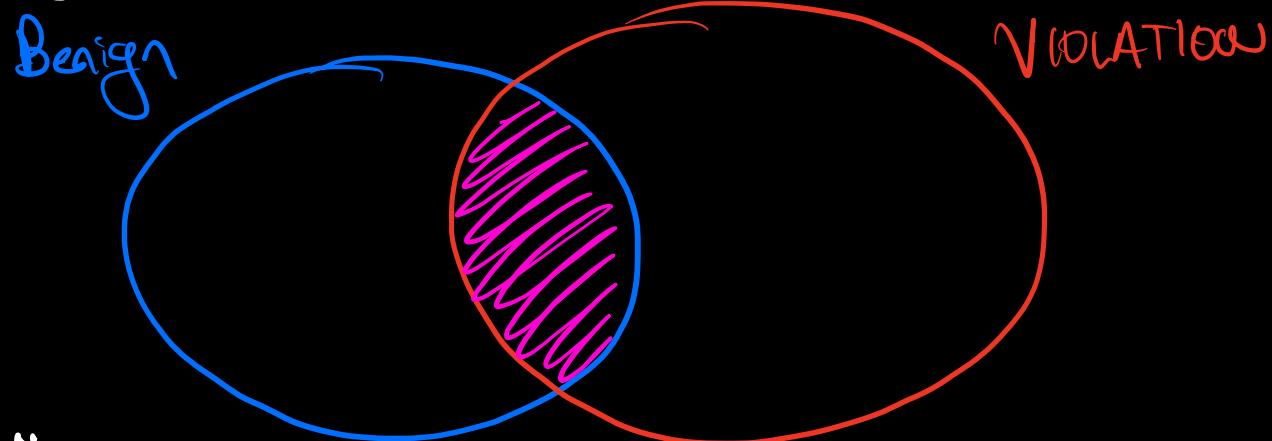
↳ " transformation from strained expectation to nothing "

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."

↑ John Brank studied

BENIGN VIOLATION THEORY

McGraw + Wozniak
~2010



HUMOUR =

HUMOUR

Simultaneous appreciation of the benign + violating features

Examples

- Tickling: 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

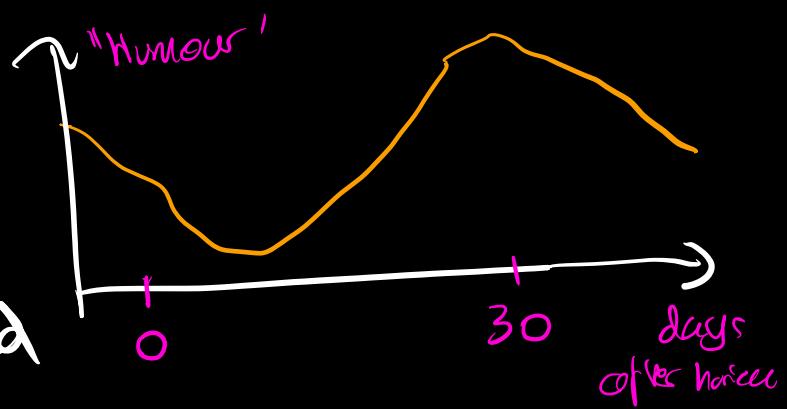
McGraw et al. 2014

Variety over time!

At first "too soon", not benign

Then word

Then not a violation, no-one cared



Spot the benign-violation below

- "I'm not a fan of the new SI com, then again,
I hate all change"
- "My dad suggested I register for a donor 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"

HUMOUR IN NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

- * Dolphins Blomqvist et al. 2005
 - ↳ Acoustic whistles during play-fighting
 - ↳ characteristic, never seen in aggressive behaviour
- * Monkeys Matsuzawa 2004
 - ↳ Vocalisations during wrestling, play chasing, or tickling
- * Rats
 - ↳ 50 Hz sounds during play fighting
 - ↳ though also during mating + heroine ∴ not laughter?
- * Frodo "whur is hard" → stone, water
 - ↳ suspect interpretations, nipple fixation

Why Do we HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR?

→ Signalling that a potentially bad situation
is fine Ramachandran 2008

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

Traditional Societies

- * All have humor
 - * Many have ritual clowns
- save hopes & confuse authority, social
→ invert
→ buffer conflicts
→ mock authority

Big social role: Tanganyika laughter epidemic

- * 3 → 95 pupils howls → 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 + dopaminergic projections
(relevance detection)

Reward related responses

Electrodes

• SMA activation \Rightarrow mirth + laughter!

• angular bundle \Rightarrow laughter \downarrow

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