

Academic event report

25th annual conference of Australasian Humour Studies Network, 6–8 February 2019, Melbourne, Australia

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (Melbourne, Australia) welcomed over 70 delegates at the 25th annual Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) conference from 6–8 February 2019. The delegates came from five Australian states and from Canada, France, Japan, Jordan, New Zealand, Pakistan, and the UK. Given the special silver anniversary edition anniversary of the AHSN, it was decided that the theme of this year's conference should be all encompassing: *Humour in all its forms: on screen, on the page, on stage, on air, online...* This enabled a broad disciplinary engagement in recognition of the fact that humour manifests itself – and is studied – from a range of different disciplines and in a myriad of ways. The call for papers attracted a varied and interesting array of activities. Not forgetting the traditional AHSN welcome and farewell drinks and the conference dinner, these included:

- Three pre-conference workshops for postgraduates and early career researchers: *Approaches to studying humour, methodologies for humour research, and Planning and pitching your publication*
- Two keynote speeches: the first by Dr Jessica Milner Davis, University of Sydney, founder of the Australasian Humour Studies Network, and the 2018 recipient of the ISHS's Lifetime Achievement Award for humour research. Jessica presented an overview of humour studies and the AHSN (and its connection with the IHSH), entitled *What is humour studies? 25 years of interdisciplinarity and the AHSN*. The second keynote, *What 200 classic Jewish jokes can tell us about humour in all its forms*, was delivered by comedian Rodney Marks, masquerading as Jesse Carr, from the Davies Milliner Institute for Transdisciplinary Studies, Jerusalem. Astute readers will recognise the name and institution as a hoax, in tribute to Jessica Milner Davis.
- Opening talks and viewing of *THE OTHER MANGA: IT BITES! Japanese Newspaper Cartoon Satire* exhibition (at RMIT University until 11 March 2019). The exhibition comprised two parts: *Part 1: Kyodo News Cartoons: the year 2018 in review*; and *Part 2: Fukushima's 3.11 Disaster Picture Diary: eight years of recovery*, and was curated by Jim Bridges, Director of the Australian Cartoon Museum, in collaboration with Prof. Ronald Stewart from Daito Bunka University. We were thrilled to welcome Tokoko Sasaki, Head of Illustration Dept. Kyodo News, and cartoonists Yoshiaki Yokota and No-rio to talk about their work, as well as Dr Kayo Onozuka from the Kyoto University of Art and

- Design who gave a brief sketch of the path taken in post-war Japanese political cartooning and its current state.
- Three comedy workshops: (1) *Finding the funny: What improvisers do to immediately jump on the first unusual behaviour, then heighten and explore it to make it a game of the scene*; (2) *Can academics be funny?*; and (3) *Australians, future-thinkers who fight funny*.
- Two pre-organised panels of three presentations each: (1) *Metapragmatic labels and commentary on humorous practices: An (inter-)cultural perspective*; and (2) *Perspectives on Japanese political cartooning past and present: censorship, freedom and expression*.
- Forty-eight presentations (including twelve by postgraduate students) with a display of World War 1 Australian trench magazine, *Aussie Magazine* to accompany one of the presentations.
- An Australian Research Council research project discussion session on *The history of Australian editorial cartooning*.
- The inaugural AHSN conference comedy debate *Is political correctness killing comedy?* – with a special trophy presented to the winning team. The debate was won first by the negative team, then by the affirmative team, and then again by the negative team!
- The closing ceremony included: a launch of the latest book by Jessica Milner Davis and Sharyn Roach Anleu (eds.), entitled *Judges, Judging and Humour* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); the unveiling of a new AHSN logo; and the presentation of the inaugural annual *Order of the Jess-ters Award* to the well-deserving Dr Jessica Milner Davis and Dr Bruce Findlay for their outstanding and longstanding contributions to the AHSN.

It was wonderful to see so many people attending the 25th AHSN conference in Melbourne this year, both meeting old friends and colleagues and making new ones. Our thanks go particularly to everyone who came from interstate and overseas, some of whom travelled a very long way. (Please contact ahsnconference@gmail.com for the full program or look up the photographs taken at the conference at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/QBdibWsfYYPQqGy5Z9>.)

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