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ONE

Introduction

> We rushed onto him with a shout, and threw our arms around him; but the old man had not forgotten his crafty ways. No, at first he turned into a bearded lion, and then into a snake, and a leopard, and a huge boar; then he turned into flowing water, and into a tree, high and leafy; but we held on unflinchingly with a resolute heart. But, when at last that old man, skilled in pernicious arts, grew weary, then he questioned me and spoke.[1]

Humour, just like Proteus, can take on many shapes, jumping erratically from one form into another, from parody into caricature, from puns into situation comedy. But if one struggles with it long enough, it will in the end, as Proteus did, deliver some truths and sometimes even insights into the human psyche. Most anthropologists and historians know that a writer, or indeed anyone who chooses to mock something or someone, reveals more about himself than about the object of his mockery. The visual jokes tell us something about rules of behaviour, about the differences between the public and the private sphere, about gender differences, ethnicity, politics, beauty and deformity, buying patterns, fashion, perceptions of religion and myth. It often tells us what people really thought and experienced. This book fits in the framework of the 'rediscovered' cultural historical trend in archaeology. Current theory is in its post-processual stage, where for many archaeologists, like Ian Morris, 'Archaeology is cultural history or it is nothing'.[2] Classical archaeologists have often been at odds with the radical theoretical changes in archaeology because of the vast amount of literary and epigraphic evidence available to us, and utterly absent from other forms of archaeology, which have had to formulate new theoretical models to tackle their lack of other forms of evidence than archaeological. Numerous scholars have discussed these prickly issues, and some, such as Shanks, have even tried in recent years to put together a 'social archaeology' adapted from its prehistoric model to classical archaeology. It is an exciting stage in theoretical archaeology,

[1] Hom. Od. 4.455–61: Menelaus recalling his encounter with Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea, the metamorphic seer.

[2] Morris, I. (2000) *Archaeology as Cultural History (Social Archaeology)*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing: 3. Shanks, M. (1996) *Classical Archaeology of Greece: Experiences of the Discipline*. London and New York: Routledge, ch. 5.

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and I for one am glad that we are back in the world of cultural history with a better anthropological grip on who we are to better understand what we observe.

This book concerns ancient Greek pottery production, visual and material culture in a set time and place. Aristophanes must have found his match among Greek vase-painters. Archaic and classical Greek art can no longer be solely considered for its beauty, its serious mythological or daily-life scenes. Painters used to mock every aspect of both ranges of representations. Painters were no censors, but they may have tried at times to improve the Polis, as Aristophanes claimed to do. This study focuses mainly on the social function of humour, in that it both includes and excludes people. Ultimately, even if humour is used to exclude some individuals, it promotes the social cohesion of society as a whole.

There are so many theories on laughter and verbal humour. This book is the first comprehensive study of visual humour in ancient Greece that encompasses mechanisms (surprise, incongruity, displacement), techniques (caricature, parody), and genres (visual puns, parody, situation comedy). I also show how literary evidence is not opposed to visual evidence: it is simply not sacrosanct. The need to compare images to images prior to comparing them to literary evidence is stressed in various parts of the book. When one encounters irregularities or eccentricities in vase-paintings, rather than turning for an explanation to literary evidence, it is crucial to rely on visual comparison and interpretation as one's first resource. They may need to be understood as humorous pictures. Vase-painting is made of complex visual codes, and these incongruous, surprising, and often comical pictures can only be properly understood through comparison to and contrast with the more 'usual' pictures.

I am particularly interested in humour's capacity to transgress and reassert iconographical and social norms. The study of humour illuminates aspects of social exclusion as well as inclusion. By observing humorous scenes depicted on hundreds of Greek vases, we are told what painters and customers from most social classes laughed about in ancient Greece and what the socially accepted rules of behaviour were at the time.

The reason for choosing specifically Greek vases as my dataset is the number of well-preserved artefacts, in the hundreds of thousands,[3] and the immense variety of representations in comparison to any other form of ancient art, and the fact that it was not commissioned art but a cheap product mainly produced for the market-place. This implies that artisans who painted vases exercised a greater freedom of expression, within the rules of fashion and market, than artists working for a patron in sculpture or wall-painting. Why study humour on vases? It would provide a better knowledge of visual humour in antiquity for scholars in humour studies, ancient art, and archaeology. Humour reveals a man's strengths and his weaknesses, his fears and his triumphs, his desires and his distastes, his obedience, his duties, and his unruly behaviour to society's rules. Adapt this principle to an entire society through a medium shared by most citizens and suddenly many social 'truths' may need to be reassessed.

[3] Undecorated vases and objects made of baked clay, from statuettes to beehives, are found in even greater numbers.

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INTRODUCTION

Athenian vases in the sixth and fifth centuries BC were ubiquitous throughout the Mediterranean. They were mass-produced in the hundreds of thousands, and often decorated with great care, with an amazing range of representations of every aspect of daily life and mythology. This was particular to Athens. Tens of thousands of Corinthian vases were produced in the seventh and sixth centuries but show very few instances of humour if any.[4] Why was Athens such a special centre for the production of vases? There were a number of circumstances that made this possible: an abundance of suitable clay, a specialised knowledge, built up over centuries, in competition with other cities such as Corinth. The reason why visual humour was particularly an Athenian tradition was because there was space for freedom of expression and unruliness in daily life only within democracy![5] The Athenians were independently minded people in a society where people could, to a certain extent, think for themselves: they produced the first fully democratic society.[6] Laconian (Spartan) vase-painting is a prolific medium, but it does not produce any visual humour. Spartans were not renowned for their sense of humour but more for their martial attitude to life, however much their society strived to attain a form of egalitarism. Humour, as in most places, was probably present in Spartans' words, gestures, and thoughts, but the absence of freedom of expression is enough to explain the lack of humour in Laconian visual culture but also in many others city-states.

The study of visual humour is also the study of painters, the different styles of caricature, the successful visual humorists and the dull ones. There are many critics of Beazley's methodology in the attribution of unsigned Greek vases to individual painters. Nevertheless, his system of attribution is still the best we have in order to classify the immense corpus of Athenian vase-painting. Interestingly, although I have studied the comedy of representations with a deliberate disregard to stylistic attribution, some of 'Beazley's painters', like the Nikoxenos Painter and the Pan Painter, were evidently more interested in producing humorous scenes than others.[7]

One must be prepared to set aside preconceptions and biases about ancient art and accept the possibility that a vase-painter in antiquity was capable of making a joke in his work! Once this 'fact' is accepted, it is only a small step to obtaining a simple, elegant, and satisfactory solution to the interpretation of a large number of pictures. In this light, many such pictures need to be reassessed and reinterpreted. For example, the 'apotropaic' interpretation of eye-cups should be abandoned. The representation of women in vase-painting (an art practised mainly by males in a male-dominated society) is, in many respects, more complex than previously thought: not only do we see women shopping or

[4] Among the few potential exceptions, see the late seventh, early sixth century BC Corinthian phiale mesomphalos found in Perachora and now at the British School in Athens showing Hephaistos's return (Seeberg 1965: pl. XXIIIa). See maybe the incongruous little ape (?) tied up in the lower frieze of the 'Macmillan Aryballos', Protocorinthian, London, British Museum, GR1889.4.18.1; Williams, D. (1999) *Greek Vases*. London. The British Museum Press: 41, fig. 29. From Greece, Thebes; 650–640 BC. Compare to Amasis's Schimmel Cup: Attic BF, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.281.62; (BA 350483); *Para* 67; (1987) *Papers on the Amasis Painter and his World*. Malibu: 71, fig. 10. From Italy, Etruria, Vulci; Amasis; 540–525 BC.

[5] See Chapter 6, 'Freedom of Expression'.

[6] There may have been earlier forms of democracies, or more precisely oligarchies, in Mesopotamia, but they have had no incidence on later inhabitants of this region.

[7] See further, Tables 6A–B.

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selling food and wine at the market, but respectable wives gulp wine as they walk from the cellar to their husband's symposium, and we see them gossiping at the fountain place instead of fetching water. On the other hand, it is sometimes simpler: 'sexist jokes' flourished in vase-painting, as they did in Aristophanes' writings and at the Agora. The comic treatment of foreigners reveals an Athenian-centrism, which we know quite well from textual evidence but is verified in visual representations. While satyr plays can broaden our knowledge of ancient humour, satyrs, and their uses in the Greek psyche, they are *not* useful to explain the presence of satyrs in unusual scenes in vase-paintings.

In 1874, Buss (Lambourne 1992: 9) wrote:

> Had caricature and photography existed in past centuries, how delighted should we be to behold an Alexander, a Nero, a Caesar, or any other be-praised blood-shedder of public liberty, transfixed by the etching-needle of a Gillray or a Cruikshank! Without civil and religious liberty, joined to an unshackled press, caricature cannot exist; thus it becomes, by its free exercise, a sure exponent of the degree of freedom enjoyed in any country.

There was no mass-media portraiture in archaic and classical Greece, and only coinage would fit the bill in the later Hellenistic and Roman period. We may not possess a caricature of Pericles or Alexander, but we find ancient Greek caricatures of every other unnamed men and women from slaves to aristocrats, athletes to priests and servants! We may not have a caricature of the great men of the time, but we have parodies of every god that was worshipped in Athens. Caricature did exist in ancient Greece and probably because of its 'civil' and 'religious' liberty: it was a free exercise to the extent that democracy and a cheap media such a clay vases made it possible. Even though vase-paintings are often exquisitely wrought, whether the finest Athenian or Theban vases, they were not considered to be great objects of art in antiquity.

The vases were much more common than we would like to think: if most people could afford them, the humour shows that Greeks believed in upholding as well as mocking their own values, and that vases could have the same function of exposure of the private life in public as the theatre. One is always in awe when imagining Aristophanes' *Frogs* in its original setting: Dionysos is ridiculed on stage, during the *Dionysia*, in the theatre of Dionysos, with the 'priests' of Dionysos in the front row. But the *Dionysia* was a special time, a religious feast and a time of carnival, during which everything could be turned upside-down. In contrast, the vases on which gods were ridiculed or gently mocked were artefacts of everyday life. The parody of hermaic pillars or of gods do not seem to have provoked censorship.

Most Greek visual humour, notwithstanding the numerous exceptions shown in this book, is eminently social: it is based on the loss of control, on the confusion between public and private view, and on the ridicule of exaggerated bodily needs: sexual humour, mocking men's and women's maddening desire for sex or greediness, mocking their huge appetite for food and wine. Satyrs go that extra mile, and when a man is shown looking desperately into an amphora to see if any wine is left, the satyr has already jumped head first into the krater. The centrality of satyrs in visual humour is dealt with at different stages of this book. They were used by painters to parody mythological

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topoi in vase-painting, but, in the realm of the Polis, they also mocked 'religion', politics, and ethical conduct. In a way, they were used as an escape mechanism from a conservative way of life and offered a world of fantasy where 'living is easy'. Satyrs were used by painters as an excuse for iconographical play. This is especially true in visual puns, where the objects of ridicule are none other than the rules and codes of imagery themselves.

The exaggeration that is mocked in humans is the satyr's nature. This mockery is intended to make the viewer laugh at series of representations of unbecoming behaviour: one can laugh because no one is personally accused – as far as I can observe – and it is in the realm of representation, like the theatre, a safe space that involves the viewer taking some distance from the subject of the representation and where one can laugh at practically anything. There is, in humour, a temporary loss of emotion and fear of society's rules. In a similar way, the reason why caricatured bodies are funny is, of course, because of their comparison to 'body-beautiful-conscious' Greeks. This mockery is possibly also based on their fear of decrepitude and death because of the Greek bleak view of the afterlife.

Athenian humour has an eminent position because we have more vases with a greater range of representations from Athens than from any other Greek city, and we have more archaeological, literary, and epigraphical evidence than any other city.[8] The Boeotian Kabirion is important for the study of a potential carnival in a specific context, to understand what may have happened in Dionysian rituals linked to agrarian festivities, for the study of caricature in ancient representations, and different styles of caricature, and to realise that every aspect of daily life, whether it is walking one's dog, transporting amphorae, sacrificing at the local hermaic pillar, attending a wedding ceremony, and many myths, local and Panhellenic, could be ruthlessly mocked. This caricaturing was probably produced for the 'greater good' and the purpose of carnival.

The gravest danger in the study of humour is to laugh from ignorance. We have at least two literary references to this problem already in antiquity: according to Semos of Delos, cited by Athenaeus (14.614a–b), a Parmeniskos of Metapontum stood laughing at the sight of an old wooden cult statue (*xoanon*) of the goddess Leto on the island of Delos (Bruneau 1970: 209, fn. 4). Centuries had passed since it had first been sculpted and, although it was still revered at the time of Parmeniskos, it must have been well-worn through the passage of time. Parmeniskos laughed because in his eyes the statue was grotesque. He felt superior to the former inhabitants of Delos who ridiculously worshipped an absurd representation of a god. Ignorance of another's culture can be the starting point of laughter.

The other reference is in Herodotus: 'and he [Cambyses] entered the temple of Hephaistos [in Egypt] and burst into laughter in front of the statue' (3.37). The same reasoning is applicable here: Herodotus goes on to explain in the same paragraph that Cambyses, the Persian conqueror, laughed at this statue because 'This image of Hephaistos is most like the Phoenician Pataikoi [the Egyptian god Ptah], which the Phoenicians carry on the prows of their triremes. I will describe it for anyone who has not seen these

[8] See, however, work on humour in Greek contexts other than Athens: Hansen (1976) on Pithecusan humour, Miralles (1987) on Sardonic laughter, and David (1989) on laughter in Spartan society.

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figures: it is in the likeness of a dwarf'. Cambyses laughed because the statue was grotesque in his eyes. This tells us that Cambyses did not know that these images were not produced to make people laugh: he laughs out of ignorance. It also tells us that dwarfs were ridiculous in his society in comparison to well-proportioned individuals. In his eyes, a cult statue should be bold and beautiful, awe-inspiring and dignified. So either a god was being degraded or the people of this land revered ridiculous gods. Either way, humour here is tied to a feeling of Persian superiority over 'ridiculous' Egyptians.[9]

In this investigation of humour in vase-painting, there is a genuine risk of over-interpreting objects. The memory of Greek culture has faded with time, and we possess only its vestiges. But we have some context and references in the remarkable plays of Aristophanes, which amount to an ancient Greek humour bible, and the gigantic literature on Aristophanes, which offers innumerable insights into ancient Greek humour. The famous *Philogelos*,[10] a book of ancient jokes, is also useful in that it gives us similar jokes to the ones one can buy from any newsagent or to those that we find in crackers at British Christmas dinners.

The social and religious taboos have changed since then. The reference points were different. The rules of behaviour were set in a shame-culture where the division between public and private life seems practically inflexible. Nevertheless, the genres, the techniques, and the mechanisms of visual humour appear to have changed very little. There are so many vases that have survived the ages that, through careful comparison, it is possible to differentiate an image intended to be comical from a 'serious' one.

The book is divided into six chapters. After a quick review of the various approaches to humour (terminology, general theories of humour), the current introductory chapter focuses on specific principles relevant to the study of visual humour in this book. It covers basic notions about Greek vases (connoisseurship, provenance, chronology), past scholarship on Greek visual humour, investigative methodology, and finally visual humour categories (visual puns, caricature, parody, and situation comedy).

Chapters 2 to 5 cover the material evidence and its analysis. Chapter 2 concerns the 'all-rounded' humour in the city space. I choose to analyse visual humour in a 'Greek way', gradually, from inanimate objects, to animals, women, foreigners, deformity, men's improper behaviour; Chapter 3 focuses on mocking heroes and gods, and Chapter 4 on how satyrs subvert citizen's values and actions, and how they parody heroes and gods in outrageous ways. Chapter 5 first discusses caricature in Athens and then a form of carnival in a religious setting, the Boeotian Kabirion Sanctuary. The second part on the Kabirion deals with traditional views, the site, an informed analysis of the caricatures found on vases at the site, and the identity of the god worshipped at the sanctuary.

Finally, Chapter 6 on Vases, Humour, and Society is a concluding chapter including further discussions on Greek vases (iconography, market, visual humour) and theoretical discussions on the power of humour as a means of social cohesion.

[9] On humour in Herodotus, see Powell 1937 and Lateiner 1977. On this specific story: Munson, R. V. (1991) "The Madness of Cambyses (Herodotus 3.16–38)". *Arethusa* **24.1**: 43–65; Depuydt, L. (1995) "Murder in Memphis: The Story of Cambyses's Mortal Wounding of the Apis Bull (ca. 523 BCE)". *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* **54.2**: 119–26; Selden, D. L. (1999) "Cambyses' Madness or the Reason of History". *MD* **42**: 33–63.

[10] Baldwin, B. (1983). trans. with commentary, *The Philogelos or Laughter-Lover*. Amsterdam.

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1. Theoretical Approaches

Terminology

The problems one encounters with humour theory begin with terminology. Humour is not the only way to 'arouse laughter': it can be brought about by many other stimuli than humour alone (Table 1). According to *The Oxford Dictionary*, humour is 'the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocose imagination or treatment of a subject'. I use the word *humour* in relation to laughter as a general term for any intellectual construction produced in order to arouse laughter. The word *humour* has a complex etymology, as it derives from the Latin *humores*, which corresponded to the four flows of humours in the body. This medical concept of *humor* was perpetuated throughout the Middle Ages and is still present in expressions such as 'bad humour' (bad temper). However, since the late seventeenth century, humour has come to embody all forms of the comic (Leacock 1937: 16). Later, in the eighteenth century, it was distinguished from 'wit' as being less purely intellectual (Morris 1744: 12). Wit belongs more to the German (*Witz*) and French traditions (*l'esprit*). The word *comic*, when used in the same sense as my definition of humour, is used predominantly in French (*le comique*). But it is a confusing term in English, as it is too close to words related to drama, such as 'a comic', a comic actor or stand-up comedian, or comedy, the performance of drama. This is why, although comedy or the comic can be used as comprehensive terms, and the words themselves come from the Greek *kōmos,* the revels associated with Dionysos, I prefer using the term humour. When I analyse visual humour, I use English words that convey a precise meaning, such as 'visual puns', 'situation comedy', 'caricature', and 'parody'. I develop each of these terms at the end of this chapter. Many words define the different kinds of laughter in Greek. There is a whole range of vocabulary from laughing (*gelaō*: I laugh), smiling (*meidiaō*: I smile), to bursting with laughter (*kagkazō*). The best review of Greek terms relating to laughter is by Eire (Desclos 2000: 13–43). According to Halliwell (1991b: 280), some sixty word-groups are directly pertinent. I will discuss some of these in context. As far as 'humour' was concerned in archaic and classical Greece, it seems that *to geloion* was commonly used to mean 'that which arouses laughter' or 'the laughable', as in a famous passage by Aristotle (*Poet.* 1449a 33) 'that which arouses laughter [*to geloion*] is a mistake and a deformity'. In conclusion, let us define humour as the intellectual stimuli that provoke laughter because they have been intentionally prepared to this effect and perceived consciously to this effect.

General Theories on Humour and General Confusion[11]

Every researcher who tries 'seriously' to analyse humour is confronted by the same obstacle: it resists being theorised. I used the comparison with Proteus in the general introduction because all one can do in the study of humour is set a few flexible notions and

[11] See Table 2.

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Table 1. Laughter and humour

Laughter	Humour
Physiological effect	
Non euphoric laughter Conventional laughter, politeness, benevolence, disdain, provocation, rebellion, etc.	
Euphoric laughter A feeling of intense excitement and joy	
1. *Spontaneous* Euphoric state (laughter of joy) Pathological state (e.g. hysteria)	
2. *Provoked by a stimulus* a. Toxin (e.g. alcohol, drugs) b. Physical (e.g. tickling)	
c. Intellectual (laughter from humour)	Intellectual stimuli that provoke laughter because they have been intentionally designed for this effect and are perceived consciously.

categories and paradoxically use humour to understand something else than humour. As many have remarked since the time of Cicero, who wrote (*De or.* 2.235) 'let Democritus see what it is' (*viderit Democritus*), the quest to understand the *nature* of humour has been the domain of philosophers. If it is in the nature of scholars to order the objects of their study into neatly arranged categories, it is in the nature of humour to resist this, to produce disorder, to play with categories, to jump from one level of understanding to another. But even humour has its limitations as a disruptive process. Humour is a form of transgression, which also reveals the norms it has transgressed. As a general principle, the focus should be on what humour *reveals* rather than on attempting to define tidy categories. This book endeavours to understand the techniques of humour in ancient Greek visual art and its various social constructs.

Stimuli and physiological reaction seem to be confused by everyone even when we are aware of the fact. The simple fact of calling humour 'the laughable' should be sufficient proof. Humour is an intellectual construction whereas laughter is a physiological response. Often humour does not arouse laughter, and laughter is not necessarily provoked by humour: there are many possible causes for laughter.

A unanimous definition of the laughable does not exist among theorists on laughter, nor can they find even a tacit agreement on what arouses laughter. The general tendency in French and Italian scholarship is to define each type of humour, to divide and subdivide.[12] But the margins of each type are unclear, and one would think that, in some cases, several types of humour are so similar that they could fit into more than one category. British scholarship seems more pragmatic in its approach. The focus is not the nature of humour or laughter but what can be deduced from them: on power theories and social

[12] Escarpit 1987; Mauron 1964; Olbrechts-Tyteca 1974; Blondel 1988; Jardon 1988; Santarcangeli 1989; Emelina 1991; Smadja 1993; and Sangsue 1994.

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Table 2. Theories on humour and laughter

Theories on Laughter and Humour	Anthropology of Humour and Laughter
Physiological theory on laughter: tickling from Aristotle to Darwin	Social Laughter (Bergson 1905)
Psychology: Relief theory (Freud)	Joking relationships (Moreau 1944; Sykes 1966; Driessen 1997)
Linguistic theory	Ethnic stereotyping (Zenner 1970)
Therapeutic theory	Carnival and popular culture (Bakhtin 1970)
Didactic theory	The context of jokes (Castell 1977)
Philosophical theories *Superiority* Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Baudelaire *Surprise* Hobbes *Incongruity* Kant	Rituals of welcome or exclusion (Dupréel 1985) and Theatrical rituals of laughter (Leclercq 1995)

dynamics for example (Paton 1988; Paton, Powell, and Wagg 1996), all of which deepen our understanding of society but not of humour as such.[13]

Freud and others have put forward 'psychological' reasons for laughing, such as the incongruous or the inversion of the expected, or overlapping heterodox ideas or images. But these psychological reasons are really revealing some *mechanisms* of humour that provoke laughter, such as surprise or the unexpected, or the relief and resolution in laughter of an impossible choice between two overlapping ideas: they do not explain laughter.

Another 'unavoidable' confusion is between comic *genre*, *technique*, and *mechanisms*. Although the theoretical discussion on humour is a battlefield of varied opinions, it is likely that such generic things as genre, techniques, and mechanisms do not change over the course of centuries or from one culture to the next. 'Bathos' is a literary and a visual *genre*. In comparison to 'pathos', it is a form of the burlesque in which gods or heroes (powerful men) are ridiculed and comically debased in a multiplicity of ways. It often uses the *technique* of parody to do so. But parody is a *genre* in itself, so it can permeate two levels: *genre* and *technique*. The *technique* of 'caricature' is quite clearly an exaggeration of facial or bodily features. This can be used to enhance a parody or to mock a certain type of behaviour or physical defect, such as ugliness. A *genre* might include bathos and situation comedy, and a *technique*, such as caricature. Even then, some will consider caricature as a *genre*, not only a *technique*.[14] One can also find a mixture of both *genre* and *technique* in parody and visual puns. Comic *mechanisms* are something different altogether: surprise, paradox, inversion, and simultaneity. They also give the impetus to jokes, whether verbal, written, or visual. It would be too repetitive to analyse visual representations on all three levels of *genres* (bathos, situation comedy, parody, visual puns), *technique* (caricature, parody, visual puns), and comic *mechanisms* (surprise, inversion,

[13] On the psychology of laughter, see Tottenham 1927; Piddington 1933; Swabey 1961; and Orellana 1985.
[14] See further in this chapter, under the heading 'Caricature'.

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and simultaneity): but the reader must have some idea of the distinction between these various levels of understanding.

A distanciation from the object of one's study is a necessity in serious scholarship, including the search for humour. Yet the total absence of humour in the search for it would also be an error. It is one of those unusual subjects that cannot be observed with the same detachment as others. The object itself of the discussion – humour – would simply be overlooked.

Even if one puts aside for the moment the layout of each theory on humour, it is still difficult to organise the general theories satisfactorily among each other. Is Aristotle a physiologist because he discusses laughter produced by tickling, or is he a drama specialist who unravels some of the dramatic principles of humour in *Poetics*? Does one place him within the ancient world and chronologically before Cicero, Quintilian, and Kant, or with Darwin who discusses similar tickling problems? A number of humour and laughter specialists list chronologically four different kinds of theories on laughter: the moral, the intellectual, the psycho-physiological, and the social current. From a philosophical point, Defays (1996: 15–18) lists four philosophical theories on humour: first, the theory of the feeling of superiority (Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, Hobbes, Bain, and Bergson). The second theory consists in dangerous laughter (Plato). The third approach is the theory of exalted, regenerating, and triumphant laughter (Rabelais, Montaigne, Erasmus, Voltaire, Nietzsche, Bataille, Kierkegaard, and Jankelevitch). The fourth theory resides in contrast, in the incongruous and contradiction, which can be subdivided into three different forms: in the unexpected, the absurd, and in what Bergson called 'something mechanical encrusted upon the living' (Kant, Freud, Schopenhauer, Baudelaire, and Bergson). No need to say that this list of authors is overly artificial and, apart from Freud and Bergson, none of these authors have pondered methodically on humour.

There are three truths about this situation: the first is that all this chaos is engineered by humour itself, as it refuses to be pinned down; the second is that none of these theories are all-encompassing; and the third is that they are all useful in various ways. I will give first an overview of various theories that I will not draw upon directly but only here and there throughout the book. I will then lay out the principles that are useful for the current study.

The first theory on the physiological reasons for laughing is discussed by Aristotle. Some of the principles can be adapted to theories on humour. The distinction between physiological laughter and intellectual laughter based on humour was defined by Aristotle, who was interested in both aspects. Physiologically, Aristotle (*Pr.* 35.2) wondered: 'Why are we ticklish under the armpits and the soles? Is it not because the skin is thinner and because we are ticklish where we are not used to being touched?' He also wrote: 'man is the only animal capable of laughter' (*Part. an.* 673a8). These were two important observations, which were dealt with by Darwin in the late nineteenth century (1872: 131–2).[15] We laugh when we are tickled in places where we are not used to being

[15] There has been a huge amount of scientific research in physiological laughter since Darwin, of course. First and foremost, Provine, R. R. (2000) *Laughter, A Scientific Investigation*. New York: Penguin, especially 99–127. See also Claxton, G. (1975) "Why Can't We Tickle Ourselves?". *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 41: 335–8;

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