

Editorial: Renewal through Humor and Laughter¹

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Just as shared beliefs and values are susceptible to decay, so are they capable of regeneration. Humans are not without talent in the creation and renewal of value systems. It may be their most distinctive activity. But in a world of swift change it calls for unrelenting effort.

-Hatem (2006)

As many of us transition from a brutally cold and long winter into hopefully a more temperate season, it feels appropriate to contemplate the coming year. Although there may be much in the world and in one's life to be optimistic about, in reflection, there is also much cause for concern. Tellingly, in a recent article published in *Diplomat & International Canada*, Wolfgang Depner (2014) discusses the world's ten most persistent problems for the coming year. On a population based level, these include global infrastructure issues (water, housing), international concerns surrounding deficit and debt (rich versus the poor), HIV/AIDS, demographic shifts, the plague of drug abuse, financial concerns (e.g., micro-credits, chit funds), the protection of arable land masses and human population growth debates, the continuing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, renewable energy troubles, and the gender equality problem. On an individual level and also with potential for negative impact, most of us must still cope with an array of social, environmental, and workplace stresses, the latter of which

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should be well known to those within the academy. Compounding this, the belief that time on the internet may compromise our very social fabric, which for some boosts personal resilience, adds to these concerns by distracting us from real human contact and support (see e.g., Antai-Otong, 2001). Given these macro and micro influences, one would be hard pressed not to experience what some researchers term a marker or triggering event; that is, an antecedent for the contemplation of self-renewal or self-reinvention (Bejian & Salomone, 1995). Put differently, at some point in our lives, we will experience a significant event or series of major life events, tragedies, dissatisfactions, or physical problems that may prompt us to reexamine our lives. When we do, we might ask ourselves, rhetorically speaking, *what's next for me in life* or, *what is most important to me*. How we respond may shape the direction we take in life. Thus, the issue of renewal begs further consideration.

But what is renewal? What does it refer to? Why is it important and how can we renew ourselves? What areas in our lives are in need of renewal? And for our present purpose, how might it relate to humor and laughter? Many or most of us in the academy and beyond, have often felt the need for renewal. For example, for those academics fortunate enough to experience it, renewal is a vital component of sabbatical. In relation to career renewal, Bejian and Salomone (1995) suggests that it involves self-appraisal, the reorganization of one's personal and career priorities, as well as a reorientation to both present and future states of personal planning. In this sense, renewal can be additionally construed as a transitional stage. However, renewal, in particular self-renewal, also encompasses physical, psychological, mental, social, and spiritual aspects of the self that when taken together, suggests a more arduous path to well-being (Antai-Otong, 2001). Like career renewal, self-renewal may entail assigning meaning to past decisions, making new decisions, and plotting a course of action to help implement new ones (Bejian & Salamone). According to Hatem (2006), who echoes a paralyzing honest yet obvious point, renewal begins with ourselves, and with the realization that *we are not limitless resources*. Reisser (2002) adds that we should strive for balance. For some, renewal is episodic, that is, we may renew when there is a pressing need for rest and

self-analysis. For others, it is the continuous involvement in all that life has to offer and the prioritization of that which matters most such as good health. These forms may or may not preclude struggle.

Despite a barren literature upon which to draw guidance, scholars generally suggest approaching renewal holistically. For example, according to Reisser (2002), to renew our *work life*, we could focus on developing collaborative moments with students and staff, building in laughter and humor throughout our work day, while constructing and following serious intellectual pursuits. Renewal can also be derived from an *external activity* such as one of many continuous learning opportunities, cultural events, and spending time with family and friends. In addition, we can gain a sense of renewal from *Inner Work*, or through balance and focus. Closely tied to our own academic milieu, there are more formal approaches or programs for scholars such as faculty development programs, instructional development programs, and organizational development programs (Howard, 1977). Similarly, for those with a sense of adventure and sensation seeking, Robitschek (1997) suggests that life/career renewal programs be based on a *deep* wilderness experience, which may entail the serious pursuit of fun and personal reflection. Furthermore, Bejian and Salomone (1995) discuss the implications of career development counseling programs and how some view career renewal as a sixth stage in career development; that is, instead of *fading off into the sunset*, we simply reinvent [and/or recycle] our careers. In relation to self-renewal, Antai-Otong (2001) suggests that wellness based programs, health promotion, disease prevention, lifestyle modification, and stress management are the keys to renewal. Despite this random menu of choices, we suspect that many or most would agree with Reisser that renewal is individual:

Self-renewal and personal development are essential for all of us if we are to continue to grow and enjoy our lives. But we are all different, and what might work for one person has little relevance for another. The important thing is to discover what works for each of us and act upon it.

So how is renewal relevant to our quest in understanding humor and laughter? In one seemingly obvious sense, humor helps us to cope with life's adversities, to give us perspective, and to make us feel better. After all, as Hatem (2006) aptly puts it, *To preserve ourselves and our profession, we must recognize the need to renew ourselves...* To be sure, there is a growing body of research attesting to the health promoting effects of humor, whether cognitive, emotional, social, or physiological in impact. This alludes to a second reason; that by studying and keeping up to date with the humor literature, we renew our understanding of it through the cumulative nature of research. In this fast paced and ever changing world, this is no small feat, although its rewards are great as it is when we share this knowledge with others. For those new to humor research, one will find a rich, multidisciplinary approach to understanding one of life's greatest treasures. By its sheer breadth, the present volume lends support to these ideas by forcing us to reconsider what we know about humor, to reaffirm our value in studying it, and to perhaps, apply what we know in order to aid us in the rejuvenation process. Taken together, these pieces each reflect a potential component that may guide renewal.

With this in mind, we are pleased to provide the readership with a broad range of papers that cover the historical, the political, the philosophical, the sociological, the psychological, and the physiological, each of which engages us with rich new insights for application aligned with renewal, and basic processes, while reinforcing the current state of research. The voluminous nature of these papers most certainly provides us with another platform to voice the benefits of humor that we alluded to above – that is, to renew our belief in its value and in its application to the human spirit. For example, in *Laughing All the Way to the Questionnaire Bank: A Mixed Methods Examination of Humor Appreciation after a Brief Communication*, Andrew Dix adeptly uses an array of approaches to help us more incisively understand humor appreciation and interpersonal communication or more specifically, how flattering and unflattering personality information impacts our liking of humor. For some of us, humor appreciation is clearly an important ingredient to good health, and hence, renewal. To help us understand our response to humor, Jean Askenasy's *Laughter* provides us with a fascinating overview

concerning some of the most important questions related to laughter; Is laughter a mere human experience or do animals laugh as well? What do we know about the mechanisms, genetics, and biochemistry of the laughter experience? What are some of the sexual implications linked to laughter? What does the literature say about the pathological nature of laughter? In extending our understanding of laughter, Askenasy further discusses how we can benefit from it therapeutically. Extrapolating from Askenasy, laughter may be viewed as paramount for physiological and psychological renewal. In the sociologically based article *Fun in Games: Employing Insights from Goffman's Sociology to an Understanding of Humour*, Mike Lloyd and Paul Jewell helps us to understand Goffman's view of humor and how some of his concepts are tied to humor related social encounters. In *Taking the History of Philosophy on Humor and Laughter Seriously*, Lydia Amir provides a much needed corrective (and renewed) account of how the attitudes and writings of key philosophical thinkers (e.g., Democritus) have been erroneously presented and perpetuated in humor research. We are also delighted to publish Teresa Serés and Amadeu Viana San Andrés' *Catalan Political Humor: Criticism and Self-Criticism*. In their research, the authors discuss how Catalan humor may function in relation to political television satire and in doing so, suggests that such satire promotes both communication and self/criticism. The ISJHR is also very pleased to present a fascinating article written by Joseph Dorinson, *Up From the Borscht Belt: Jerry Lewis, Jewish Genius – An Historical Review*. Through his research, Dorinson provides the reader with a *revisionist* study of renowned comedian, Jerry Lewis. According to Dorinson, Lewis is a ... *modern Renaissance Man*., counter to what many argue and believe. However, these contrarian points of view appear to be culturally and contextually determined. In a balanced though critical opinion of Christie Davies' review of Louis R. Franzini's *Just Kidding: Using Humour Effectively*, the text's author forcefully challenges and corrects Davies on several fronts, while remaining stoically fair. Arthur Asa Berger then follows this up with a review of Charles Schmidt's book, *Seriously Funny: Mexican Political Jokes as Social Resistance*. With sharp analytical

skill, Asa Berger ends by denoting the importance of humor through culture as conveyed by Schmidt:

It will be particularly interesting to political scientists and sociologists who deal with Mexican culture and society, but it is also of interest to humor scholars as an example of the way that humor can offer insights into the mindset of people in a country and of how humor differs from one region in Mexico with another region and from one country to another.

Lastly, M. Belén Alvarado Ortega offers up a similar critique of Leonor Ruiz Gurillo's *The Linguistics of Humor in Spanish*. As Ortega indicates,

In short, the monograph reviewed here is an ambitious and original project about the linguistic study of humor in Spanish. It additionally represents an obligatory reference for all scholars interested in discourse and pragmatics. This book consequently offers high content quality complemented by great expository clarity that contributes to an easy, straightforward and instructive reading.

In short, both texts add to a growing body of work by providing cutting edge contributions to the scholarly study of humor.

Overall, the articles in this current volume represent a highly relevant collection geared to supporting the multidisciplinary humor literature, a theme pertinent to our publishing agenda. That humor and laughter are relevant to all of us demonstrates that no one perspective can provide us with *the answer*. To live, to be alive, and to renew, we need to be holistic in our thinking, and to relish in the importance of our work.

Once again, we would like to thank the authors as well as the Board/reviewers for their continued scholarly support of the ISJHR. Further, our appreciation is extended to those who provided us with access to the two humor texts for review. We would like to once again encourage our faithful readership and future new contributors to submit their scholarly work to the ISJHR. Lastly, we once again and wholeheartedly thank all those

contributors who have helped us in understanding this significant human experience. Your contributions are gratefully acknowledged. We are excited and look forward to hearing from you once again in the near future.

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