Review of *Humor, Psyche, and Society: A Socio-Semiotic Analysis*. **Arthur Asa Berger. Vernon Press, 2020, pp. 146; $42.**

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Arthur Asa Berger has written this book to create a single repository for and provide further insights on his articles published at different stages throughout his career and intended for both the academia and the general public. At the core of Berger's research is the perspective on humor as a tool liberating from both external and internal constraints. It is therefore no surprise that the twelve chapters of the book stem from a broad scholarly paradigm, spanning over semiotics, linguistics, and sociology, as the title directly suggests. In the Introduction, the Author reflects upon the scope the presents the main argument of his long-standing explorations: the distinction and workings of 45 techniques of humor. Berger classifies these techniques into four categories––*Language*, *Logic*, *Identity*, and *Action*, capturing the overt expression, framing, or the underlying motifs of humor manifestations.

In Chapter 1, *Writing Li'l Abner*, Berger immerses the reader into an academic autobiography, where he hints on the perception of the field of humor research among the academia at the time. It is already in his PhD that Berger highlights the systematicity of humor manifestations in comic strips. Further implications of this research are revealed in the concluding sections of the chapter: paving his way into the study of the media and popular culture, Berger contributes to the emerging field of critical multimodal discourse analysis.

Chapter 2, *Anatomy of the Joke,* immediately takes a medical perspective on the mechanisms of humor. Showing the relation of his approach to other dichotomous analyses of humor, Berger perceives humor as a code with an incongruous resolution, the opposite of which––a congruous resolution—is the code for tragedy. The Author distinguishes *jokemes*, the smallest units of the humorous code constructing the surface scenario, which is then replaced unexpectedly with an alternative scenario, the latter initially remaining in the background.

Chapter 3, *How Jokes Work: Six Humor Theorists in Search of a Jewish Joke (A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective on a Humorous Jewish Text)*, turns to ethnic humor. Berger discusses a selected Jewish joke from a number of perspectives: the rhetorical, the semiotic, the communicational, the psychological and psychoanalytic, the sociological, the philosophical and

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the political, highlighting the differences between the approaches. Thus, for instance, the rhetorical perspective is discussed in light of the 45 humor techniques; the semiotic model in light of the Saussurean binary oppositions; Jakobson's model of communication is adopted for the communicative perspective. The psychological and the sociological perspectives get manifested through the people appreciating the joke, thereby collectively overcoming their superego and acknowledging the liberating power of the joke through laughter. The philosophical perspective shows how the reader is made to feel superior relative to the characters of the joke, while the political perspective associates the appeal of the joke with a certain political culture.

Chapter 4, *Professor Ferdinand de Saussure Goes to a Bar*, employs Saussure's theory of the sign as composed of the signifier and the signified. The chapter focuses on the culture-specific features of humor as manifested in episodes of the American sitcom *Cheers*. Berger applies the binary opposition analysis to various components, ranging from character, gender, to continent profiles. He unveils the correlation between the audience's perception and the duration of following the series and perceives stereotyping as both the outcome of the conventional use of symbols and codes and the adjustment necessitated by initiated audiences.

Chapter 5 *Laugh and the World Laughs With You: A Global Perspective on Humor*, elaborates on the frequently culture-specific nature of humor. While humor techniques account for how text is made funny, the joke itself may or may not be perceived as funny by representatives of a given culture, as Berger demonstrates. The Author explains why jokes based on logic, action, or identity have better chances to entertain the target audience than language-based humor, which faces just the opposite prospects: it is common human relations and behavioral patterns that have a global outreach, while humor on culturally-specific phenomena will be appreciated only within the respective community.

In Chapter 6, *The Triple Threat: Arthur as a Writer, Artist, and Secret Agent or Humor and the Creative Process*, Berger reflects upon his professional experience as a cartoonist and illustrator, offering semiotic insights on selected drawings. He also touches upon genre differences between various types of drawings, including visual puns, article and book illustrations. Viewing the image as a code with the authorial style developed through consistent use of identifiable features, Berger discusses the connection between the comical image and the text it is created for as a chain of semiotic codes, generated by the 45 humor techniques.

Chapter 7, *An Anatomical Perspective: How Humor Heals*, Berger examines humor through the prism of its therapeutic effects. Humor is argued to have healing powers, and its workings are then discussed as manifested at the biological, intrapersonal, social and interpersonal, and cultural levels. Manifestations at each of the levels, Berger argues, is made possible through the application of his humor techniques, which may combine in various ways and act in parallel with, rather than as part of, the content.

Chapter 8, *Mediated Mirth: A Study of "The Good Son", the Pilot Episode of Frasier*, carries on with the illustration of the application of the humor techniques, but here is concerned with the role of the medium in generating laughter, focusing on the specific techniques employed in television. Berger discusses camera shots and movements in terms of their use for humor and then focuses on the mechanisms of creation of humor in *The Good Son.*

In Chapters 9 through 11, Berger explores ethnic humor. Characteristic features of Jewish humor and its manifestations in popular American culture as well as the Internet, form the core of Chapter 9, *Notes on Jewish Humor*. Berger points out the perceived historical marginality of the people, and, while seeking to identify traces of this estrangement in the various components of the joke, develops a more general perspective on "the other". Linguistic humor is of particular interest to him, as evidenced by culture-specific pun definitions and the cultural hybrid - Jewish haiku.

In Chapter 10, *Deconstructing a Russian Joke*, Berger examines the techniques and mechanism of a Radio Erevan Joke, the latter constituting a famous joke genre in Russian. Berger considers humor as a significant social phenomenon, telling, in addition, of both cultural and political dimensions. By incorporating these dimensions, Berger aims to disclose the underlying reasons that make people laugh.

In Chapter 11, *Little Britain: An American Perspective*, Berger compares the British sitcom with the American genres of comic strip and situational comedy. After a discussion of humorous techniques employed in the sitcom, Berger constructs his critique of the sitcom in light of the theories of humor, sexuality, humaneness and spirituality.

Chapter 12, *I Laughed and I Lasted (But I Took Some Blows Along the Way)*, is Berger's autobiographical account. Berger reflects upon the place of the humorist in the professional field and the oft-needed perseverance in the face of a multitude of challenges and misconceptions, his own acquaintance with Umberto Eco, and the creative process of combining the incompatible of the time: literary and semiotic theories on the one hand and popular culture on the other.

Berger provides engaging self-reflections throughout his book and constructs a lively dialogue with the reader. Every chapter is preceded by one or two epigraphs—citations from historians, semioticians, philosophers and linguists among them, including Berger himself, but also a Wikipedia entry—and is built around many illustrative examples. Theoretical notions appear every now and then, but the narration is very comprehensible and can be effectively followed by a reader uninitiated in the semiotics and/or language of humor. The book may also appeal to those already with some experience in humor matters and be enjoyed as an informal interaction with a true intellectual, with Berger generously sharing his apt insights on the subtleties of the multifaceted phenomenon of humor.