

## Humor Studies as a Social Network

### Objectives

Through this project, students will:

- Synthesize multiple positions on the course topic of humor.
- Identify major strands of thought within the humanities.
- Visualize a scholarly conversation to position their own research projects within it.
- Develop a working familiarity of example of network analysis as a sample Digital Humanities method.
- Generate, parse, and interpret citation data.

### Assignment Description

One of the skills we will practice in LST 302 is the ability to construct the scholarly “conversation” around a topic, question, or problem—in this case, humor. Although you will select a research subtopic that is more manageable in scope for your own literature review, as a class we will be examining the larger multidisciplinary field of humor studies.

One way to map the contours of this conversation is by visualizing the different writers we will read as a social network. In our unit on the Digital Humanities near the end of the semester, we will use NodeXL to map out this network, but first we will need to prepare our data set as we move through the readings. Each of you will be assigned one reading and asked to create a Google sheet that maps out everyone mentioned by the author of the article.

### Instructions

1. Sign up for one of the assigned readings on the topic of humor (listed below). Plan to do this reading a week before it is due, since it will take time to create an exhaustive network map of it.
2. Read your article once to make sure you understand it and its argument.
3. Read the article again and circle the names of anyone to whom the author refers. Consider as an example the excerpt from Mary Douglas’s “Jokes” pasted below:

Both Bergson and Freud assume that it is possible to identify a structure of ideas characteristic of humour. If this were a valid assumption, all that would be necessary here would be to identify this joke form in the African joke rite. But in practice, it is a very elusive form to nail down. We face the dilemma either of finding that all utterances are capable of being jokes, or that many of those which pass for jokes in Africa do not conform to the laid-down requirements. My argument will be that the joke form rarely lies in the utterance alone, but that it can be identified in the total social situation.

4. Using the Google sheet for your essay, enter the name of the author of your assigned reading in one column and the name of the author he or she cites in the adjacent “Author Cited” column. The Douglas example (above) would look like this:

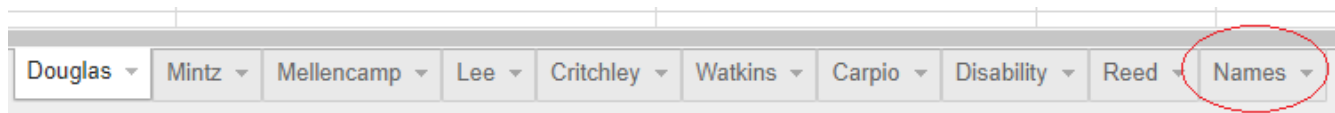
Citer	Cited	Citation Type	Page
Douglas Mary	Freud Sigmund	Refers	293
Douglas Mary	Bergson Henri	Refers	293

Please note: Each row of the Google sheet refers to a single “mention” of an author on a single page of the reading assigned to you. Take the example of Freud above: If Douglas were to mention Freud again on page 293, you would not need to create a new row. But if she mentions him (as she does) on page 294, you should. Your database would then look like this:

Citer	Cited	Citation Type	Page
Douglas Mary	Freud Sigmund	Refers	293
Douglas Mary	Bergson Henri	Refers	293
Douglas Mary	Freud Sigmund	Refers	294

### Important Notes

1. Be sure to follow the name format given above when entering your names: LastName [no comma] FirstName.
2. There are two citation types: "Cites" indicates that the Citer actually includes an in-text and/or end-of-text citation of the Cited (a footnote, parenthetical citation, or bibliography entry). "Refers" indicates that the Citer mentions the Cited without a formal citation. This could be because the source has already been cited elsewhere in the article, or because the Citer simply does not feel that a formal citation is necessary.
3. The Google sheet will verify whether the name you are entering in the "Cited" column is one that has been entered in one of the other sheets. If it has previously been entered, the name will appear in a drop-down menu and you can click to insert it. If it has not, then the cell will be shaded red.
4. When you finish entering your "Cited" column, you can remove the red shading from the new names by entering them to the "Names" sheet, which you can access by clicking the far-right tab on the Google sheet:



Enter any new names for your reading here. This will help to expand the drop-down menu offered to your peers.

### **Readings on Humor (Pick One)**

9/11 (T): Henri Bergson, "Laughter"; Freud, "Humor":

9/13 (Th): Mary Douglas, "Jokes"

9/20 (Th): Lawrence Mintz, "The Ideology of the Sitcom"

9/25 (T): Patricia Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy"

9/27 (Th): Janet Lee, "Subversive Sitcoms: Roseanne as Inspiration for Feminist Resistance"

10/2 (T): Simon Critchley, "Foreigners are Funny: The Ethnicity and Ethnicity of Humour"

10/9 (T): Mel Watkins, from *On the Real Side: A History of African American Comedy*

10/11 (Th): Glenda Carpio, from *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery*

10/30 (T): Alan Shain, "Perspectives on Comedy and Performance as Radical Disability Activism"

11/6 (T): Jennifer Reed, "Sexual Outlaws: Queer in a Funny Way"