

How Not to Kill the Joke: The ‘Frame Problem’ and Multiadicity

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ABSTRACT

This paper will expand on the so-called “Frame Problem” (FP), as presented by Gee (2011a, p. 67; 2011b:31). For Gee, investigations of context in the field of Discourse Analysis demonstrate that the widening of interpretive frames of reference obtains an opportunity for further discursive insights and textual readings. However, Gee (2011a) also argues that this widening presents the problem of an open-endedness of interpretation with proportionately minimal return (p. 68). While conceding that “Context...is indefinitely large” (Gee, 2011b, p. 31), and that “balancing frames is an extra cognitive burden” (Tannen & Wallat, 1987, pp. 205-216), this paper argues that the concept of the FP itself warrants further investigation. Indeed, this paper makes the assertion that the FP should be viewed as a “rich point” (Agar, 1995:587), or as an opportunity to explore the potential for ways of meaning-making which respond to and which inform ever-fluid contextual conditions. The multidisciplinary framework utilised in this paper offers a new lens with which to view the almost infinite ways in which participants produce meaning from texts and from contexts. This paper originates the term ‘multiadicity’ to suggest a certain textual autonomy which invites, and is derived from, these contextual readings, but which ultimately eludes participant control. Multiadicity also suggests that participant knowledge can be ranked into a hierarchy of cultural literacies. A higher literacy, or capacity for multiadicity, presupposes the ability to move beyond a final, binary reading choice which predicts the unitary ‘solution’, to the point where textual enjoyment is actually derived from a combination of multiple, competing and seemingly irreconcilable potentialities.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, Literary theory, Multiadicity, Intertextuality, Context.

INTRODUCTION

This paper takes the position that viewing meaning making and shifting context as problematic tends to diminish the essential role of literacy in producing meaning. While not oppositional to Gee’s (2011) description of the FP, it is nevertheless possible to see that Gee’s (2011) position is limiting because it entails a binary capping of textual potential. This paper will not only argue against any idea of necessary limitation of context, but will also present an argument for the very real possibility of measuring textual and contextual potential.

Using an historical textual example this paper will present a case for the concept of the discursive and semiotic variegated readings of texts. I will firstly present a theoretical discussion which addresses the documented, contested reading of a specific, historical humorous text, in order to introduce the concept of multiple, competing and simultaneous responses to an identical text across different contexts. I will

then compare relevant concepts from strands of theory, including Literary Theory and Discourse Analysis, in order to establish a new theoretical framework for the discussion of contested textual readings. Indeed, rather than being intimidated by the almost limitless possibilities of context and interpretive frames, I argue that it is possible to move beyond the position of a highly binary capping of textual potential. In the case of humorous texts, for instance, I suggest that we need to accept the increasingly sophisticated cultural literacy of interlocutors who operate as expert users of English. Indeed, it is possible that virtually any text can exhibit high levels of intertextuality, heteroglossia, creativity and originality, when either or both the text producer and reader are highly literate. It is also feasible that a text may be contextualised, decontextualised, recontextualised, and recontextualised again, ad infinitum, such that the text can survive indefinitely.

It is even possible that the potential for multilayered pragmatic readings of a text can be seen as central appeals of the text itself, and thus that this unlimited potentiality can, ultimately, be seen as generative of a certain textual autonomy which exceeds the Barthesian brief of reader centrality. I offer the term *multiadicty* to denote this textual set of potentialities. This paper will utilise a cross-disciplinary approach bridging some gaps between Discourse Analysis, Literary theory, and Pragmatics. It will advance the view that any text resists both authorial and reader control for a variety of reasons. The text can be meaningfully described as an open-ended linguistic transaction which is representative of diverse social and personal dynamics, both constructed and locally negotiated.

THE 'FRAME PROBLEM'

The term "Frame Problem" (FP), as presented by Gee (2011a, p. 67; 2011b, p. 31), is derivative of the usage of the term which developed in theories of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the 1960s (Raredon & Blais, 1998). In AI theory, the sorting of information at the semantic and syntactic levels requires a sifting of "facts" for relevance. During this processing of information the subject:

...must introduce facts that are relevant to a particular moment. That is, a (subject must) examine its current situation, and then look up the facts that will be beneficial to choosing its subsequent action (which includes) a search for any changeable facts... There are two basic types of change: Relevant Change: inspect the changes made by an action (and) Irrelevant Change: do not inspect facts that are not related to the task at hand (Raredon & Blais, 1998).

Similarly, the AI theorist Minsky (1975) explained frame theory as a "way of representing knowledge...where one selects from memory a structure called a *Frame*...a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary" (as cited in Brown & Yule, 1993, p. 238; italics in original). It was developed into "representational" and "inferential" axioms, such that only *relevant* information for the immediate proposition is considered by computational designers (Steedman, 2002, pp. 726-730). The subsequent application of frame theory to Linguistics was undertaken by Heidegger (1962), Charniak (1979) and Fillmore (1976), but a more precise connection to Discourse Analysis was made more recently. For Gee, the application of such theory to discursive frames of reference is clear. That is, an addressee-subject makes meaning of a text by applying known frames of reference, under the heading of background knowledge, to its decoding, in order to identify the text's "information saliency" and "relevance" (Gee, 2011b, p. 27). In this information sifting process, Gee argues, a narrowing of potential meanings is essential. This is because contexts are "actively create(d) or manipulate(d)" (ibid), and the potential for meaning is thus, simply, and potentially, too variable. Indeed, it is asserted that "Context...is indefinitely large...context is, in a sense, infinite" (Gee, 2011b, p. 31).

In this sifting of potentialities for meaning the selective narrowing of frames requires, quite frequently, a significant mental effort from the decoder. This is because an expert user of any language possesses an enormous amount of background information/knowledge: “we amass colossal amounts of ‘knowledge’ and ‘experience’ in our lives” (Brown & Yule, 1993, p. 235). The Frame Problem then arises, it is argued, because such potentiality for meaning is not manageable. Quite simply, the complexities of contextual possibility require too much, cognitively, of the decoder: “balancing frames is an extra cognitive burden” (Tannen & Wallat, 1987, pp. 205-16). In the interests of communicative economy, where language use must satisfy and balance the competing needs “of speed and clarity” (Gee, 2011b, p. 4), it is logical that the addressee will target the most likely interpretation. Such a decision predicated on ‘necessary’ relevance means that all other, alternative solutions must be necessarily discarded. This is the case, theoretically, because undecidability in interpretation presents a difficult, and unsustainable, tension and cognitive demand. Or, to put it another way, the very limitlessness of contextual potential presents the addressee with a problem of an open-endedness of interpretation with what is, ultimately, a proportionately minimal return (Gee, 2011a, p. 68). This is a position consistent with the concept of interpretive confidence, where, not only is the propositional content assumed as understood correctly, intention is also positively ascribed to the utterance:

In all interaction, the parties assume that each person means what he or she says and is speaking with a purpose...people impute intentions to others...they positively seek out intentions in what others say and do. What people assume is another’s intention colors the meaning they get from messages (Clark et al, 1994, p. 467).

This intentional assumption certainly applies to the situation of humour, where the ideal linguistic transaction would require an initial, overt understanding, or contextualisation between interlocutors, that the instance of humour is *deliberate*. In the case of intentional humour such as a visual joke, this theoretical position would warrant the conclusion that the producer of a humorous text which is successfully received, has positioned the decoder *towards* the text in such a way that the linguistic transaction is seamless. Or, just as likely, the textual producer has contextualised and framed the text so that the decoder has no option but to decode the text in accordance with authorial intention. The alternative is that the textual reception at the perlocutionary level is completely missed and the linguistic transaction utterly fails. This theoretical position is well-established in studies of humour (Holmes, 2000; Attardo, 2001, 2005; Eisterhold et al, 2006; Bell, 2009). What is absent in this all-or nothing theoretical position, however, is the concept of *nuance* in the perlocutionary act itself. That is, some people get more from a joke than others; and some people get more (or less) from the joke than the author intended. It does not seem to be entirely necessary for the decoder to ‘exactly’ match or even to discern authorial intention in order to get the most from a joke. This gives the joke a certain textual autonomy. In addition, it is also certain that some jokes have an ‘afterlife’: they are retold in variant or intact forms, mutate through alternative contexts and undergo multimodal transformations, including translation between language varieties.

While the aspects of frame, literacies, background knowledge and context offer support for, and help to explain these nuances, they also seem to point to deficiencies in the idea that the decoder cannot manage, synchronically, competing interpretive frames. This is not the same as saying that a reading of a text cannot be the product of a synthesised heteroglossia. Indeed, such a reading is most certainly the real product of high cultural-linguistic literacy and background knowledge, where context derives a maximum benefit from prior linguistic transactions and overall language competence. It is, still, however, a single solution, however complex in its formulation, because it resolves the tension of competing interpretations in favour of a satisfying singular reading, and it is, ultimately an object of decidability.

If, then, the highly literate decoder of a text can manage to synthesise complex frames into a unitary solution, or reading, it is logical that the 'discarded' frame solutions which independently and cumulatively contributed towards that product, can be consciously retained in some sort of a hierarchical system of ranking according to plausibility. It would be these alternative frames which would be consulted in the event of the primary perlocutionary act being proven inadequate, or wrong. It is also feasible that the decoder could manage to retain a set of these alternatives in some sort of rough equivalence. Indeed, it is even possible that the decoder who invokes a pluralistic undecidability is actually *enjoying* the extra cognitive burden for an intrinsic motivation of hermeneutic 'impossibility'. In the case of a humorous text, its potential for constant contextual mutability is not only part of its appeal, it is *central* to that appeal. The autonomy of a text, which never stays still, and which cannot be contained in a unitary decoding, also suggests that ultimately it eludes participant control. Of course, if this is the case, textual enjoyment is actually derived from a combination of multiple, competing and seemingly irreconcilable potentialities. And, if this is the case, then the Frame Problem is more of an asset to the enjoyment of a text, than a problem, if the decoder can manage the cognitive demand.

To test this premise, this paper will apply aspects of theory relating to the Frame Problem to a visual joke by the French artist Rene Magritte. This text is relevant because it has documented, contested 'readings' in the literature. Two of these variant decodings of the text will be reconciled, where that is possible, as being justifiable readings according to diverse frames of reference, which cumulatively offer a depth which is not possible independently. Further readings will then be offered, to suggest that this particular joke has enjoyed a textual autonomy beyond anything contained within authorial intention.

MAGRITTE AND SEMIOTICS

The Dyadic and Triadic reading of 'This is not a Pipe'

In her discussion of semiology, Berthoff (1999) takes Foucault to task over his failure to adequately understand the plurality of levels of humour intended by Magritte in the French artist's 1928-9 satirical painting entitled *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (figure 1). It is an illustrative example of contested readings of the same humorous text by two theorists. Foucault claims that the artist's 'joke' is intentionally subversive of social mediation of knowledge. The "childish" script accompanying the depiction of a pipe, Foucault says, is a "calligram...which challenges the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name...to imitate and to signify" (Foucault, 1973, pp. 31-37, cited in Berthoff, 1999, pp. 44-46). Berthoff responds by undermining Foucault's usage of the term calligram, which the text plainly is not (1999, p. 45; see also Shrigley, 2004, p. 11). She then indicates, quite correctly, that the Magritte text utilizes "schoolish script...a very legible script...the script which youngsters learning to read must read" (Berthoff, 1999, p. 45). This alters the interpretive frame for Berthoff to what can be characterised as a semantic, or context-free reading in which a structural ambiguity is deliberately employed:

Words, not habits, are ambiguous. *Ceci* in its ambiguity creates a paradox of the sort which can be resolved: if the *this* is taken as a reference to the image, the statement is a...positivist slogan...In dyadic terms the label is a tiresome reminder of the self-evident (Berthoff, 1999, p. 45).



Figure 1. Ceci n'est pas une pipe by René Magritte, 1928-9.
More formally known as La trahison des images.

Further, Berthoff argues that the artist is parodying the very logicians and theorists such as Foucault, who claim to be 'in' on this type of sophistry-joke in the first place. For this reason, Berthoff wryly comments that "Of course, to explain a joke is to kill it, but Foucault manages to kill the joke twice over: he explains it, but then he gets the explanation wrong; he doesn't get the joke" (Berthoff, 1999, p. 45). To paraphrase Berthoff, Foucault is seeing what he wants to see. He is imposing a "positivist" (Berthoff, 1999, p. 45) reading on the text which the producer of that text did not intend. Not only is this reading characterised as a misreading of authorial intention, it is also, according to Berthoff, severely limited by its purely semantic scope. That is, it is a textual reading which is faulty because it is limited by its "dyadicity", which in semiology refers to a very limited semantic association between sign and signified (Berthoff, 1999, p. 4). By comparison, Berthoff suggests a "triadic" reading, which adds conscious "recognition of the logic of signification, of the social character of semiosis" (Berthoff, 1999, p. 5). This more complex level of 'reading' of the text can be meaningfully compared to a pragmatic, or context-based, interpretation which goes beyond signification, or denotation, to socially constructed connotation. But it is more than that, since Berthoff ultimately offers a reading in which Magritte reflects, via his text, on its own constructedness as a work of art, as defined under contemporary privileging of specific aesthetic norms. In this reading, the text thus operates as an instance of authorially intended generic subversion and social commentary.

Beyond the Triadic reading

Of course, we can go further and question the validity of Berthoff's reading in turn, or we can accept elements of both theorists' readings, and invoke more criteria for further, and potentially more complex, readings. One of these criteria is to invoke authorial intention, as far as it can be established. Effectively, this is to extend Berthoff's aesthetic reading by comparing a synchronic versus a diachronic reading. So, for instance, we can contextualise the text as part of early 20th century artistic movements which Magritte participated in: Dada/Neo-Dadaism, Modernism and Surrealism (Franck & Liebow, 2003; Magritte et al, 2006). Such a reading responds to the diachronic benefit of hindsight; such that Magritte's once *avant-garde* act of subversion becomes rather dated, even quaint, in the context of almost 100 years of subversive artistic tradition. Indeed, it requires some explanation, or contextualisation, in order to even 'get' the joke as it was intended, contemporarily. This diachronic 'problem' is evidenced by the 26 year discrepancy in readings between Foucault and Berthoff. Still, this

discrepancy warrants further investigation, especially if the readings of Berthoff and Foucault can be reconciled somewhat.

For instance, it can be evidenced that the text's juxtapositioning of the mundane with gallery art employs, as a referent, the pipe modelled on that used by Magritte himself (Magritte et al, 2006). Additionally, the didactic 'framing' of the text is literal *and* metaphorical *and* discursive (Gee, 2011a). This is substantially consistent with Foucault's assessment. It is also particularly relevant since Magritte and Foucault corresponded regularly on this very topic of representation (Magritte et al, 2006; Robbe-Grillet et al, 1995). Indeed, Magritte himself explained his text in highly 'positivist' terms:

Who would dare pretend that the REPRESENTATION of a pipe IS a pipe? Who would smoke the pipe in my picture? Nobody. Therefore it IS NOT A PIPE (Robbe-Grillet et al, 1995, p. 197; capitalisation in the original).

It is clear, therefore, that the 'framing' of the text can be better understood if reconciled with authorial intention, where additional, synchronic contextual information enhances this reading. It is also clear that the text itself, read in a way that is consistent with authorial intention, operates on at least three levels. Firstly, the painting is framed as an early childhood educational model: a didactic text. Its reference is, quite explicitly, to the classroom where cultural models of representation are normalised, and where orthography is a vehicle (and function) of literacy linking phonetic values with specific morpheme referents. Beyond this is the second level of framing, where, quite self-consciously and deliberately, Magritte is indicating the hidden normalisation of such referentiality. This is more recognisable as a basic tenet of semiotics: a theory that was in its primary stages of development at the time of the textual production (Crystal, 1994; Sapir, 1929). That is, the pictorial representation of a concrete object is not the same as the object itself. Then there is the third, social layer of intended meaning, which is a subversion of normative aesthetic values and definitions of what constituted art objects. To juxtapose and present the mundane (or seemingly mundane) everyday 'pipe' as an art object is to undermine the idea of *significance* itself, in all its potential senses. For instance, apart from the conceptual questioning of semiotic signification, there is also the foregrounding of the mundane subject as significant art, at a time when the monumental was highly prized by the bourgeoisie and art "establishment" (Molesworth et al, 2003; Hindley, 1979). Thus, beyond this theoretical subversion of conventional significance, lies the intensity of political agitation. Indeed, "behind the wit" of the seemingly 'harmless' joke, is a token of "an avowedly revolutionary movement (whose) objective was, in words taken from Karl Marx... to... transform the world" (Hindley, 1979, p. 294). The Magritte 'joke' thus becomes a text which employs humour to present at the triadic level, a message of political *significance*.

The 'joke', therefore, it could be argued, benefits from this multilayered synchronic reading for the contemporary reader. It is certainly possible to not only avoid 'killing' the joke through explaining it, but rather, to enhance its textual reception through a study of its original meaning and cleverness. Even more importantly, there is a principle established by this potentiality, which is that background knowledge can provide a type of pragmatic pluralism which responds to the literacy levels of the reader. Or, in other words, that the contextual reception of a text can be manipulated for semiotic layers, so that the reader can enjoy a humorous text simultaneously (or perhaps cumulatively) across, and *because of*, its multiple schemata-frames. It is also significant that this layering is well beyond the semantic level and seems to be a very conscious, deliberate endeavour at the discourse level. The background knowledge and juggling of literacies required in this type of reading certainly demands a non-exclusive pluralism at the pragmatic-discursive level of cognition, plus a *will* to exert the effort in the first place. And, if this is the case, then perhaps the reader can continue to further explore the humour of a text by

adding further discursive features of diachronic literacies to the triadic reading of a text – but with direct, unbroken reference to, and without discarding, the pre-existing, synchronic schemata-frames.

This runs counter to the general idea of the Frame Problem, which suggests that simpler readings are discarded in favour of more complex readings (Gee, 2011a, p. 67). Presumably such a complex reading subsumes and obscures the simpler, discarded readings so that there is no *conscious* recollection of what has been discarded, although the process leading to such an event is not detailed in Gee's explanation.

By contrast, within the discussion of context lies another theoretical possibility which would support the concept of pragmatic-discursive pluralism. It would support the idea that the *process* of cognition across multiple frames is not only a conscious process, but that the various steps involved within such a process are also retrievable once the process has been completed. If context is understood as “a psychological construct, a conceptual representation of a state of affairs (or) reality as conceived by particular groups of people” (Widdowson, 2011, pp. 22-26); then it can also be understood as a set of semiotically layered conditions which respond to reader need and to reader literacies. Or, to put it another way, context is constantly altering according to a person's competence within schematic and systemic language knowledges, since “neither kind of knowledge is fixed...they are subject to modification (and) on-line revision” (Widdowson, 2011, pp. 53-54). Part of this constant revision is the increasing complexity of discursive understanding and competence for any person. That is, just as the discourse analyst can discover multiple contextualisations and readings, or instances of “situated meaning” which are relevant for diverse subjects in any speech event and which are “valid” (Gee, 2011a, p. 66); it is logical that a complex reading could feasibly and consciously refer back to simpler readings upon which it relies, without ever actually needing to reject them as incompatible. Rather the reading can be retained but ordered into a hierarchy of plausibility, or relevance.

In the case of the Magritte text, this would require the reader to not only be aware of the original, synchronic possibilities of textual reading, but to deliberately and consciously add a set of diachronic possibilities as well, with some sort of linking, but hierarchical reconciliation between all these potentialities. To this premise there are some objections which can be considered. For instance, the Magritte text presents as unusual in that it both facilitates and resists multiple contextualisations and intertextuality. It is highly facilitative for intertextuality because it occupies a ‘seminal’ or very influential position in modern art (Molesworth et al, 2003; Hindley, 1979). It is this prominent position which enables it to exercise intertextual influence over later, derivative texts, where it can be found to “assimilate, contradict, ironically echo and so forth” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 84). At the same time, its very prominence produces familiarity for modern readers and this type of repeated contextualisation-intertextuality may also dilute the force of the original text. What was revolutionary and conceptually novel in the 1920s, could quite easily be taken for granted today. Indeed, the layering of theory, including from semiotics, means that the sophisticated reader will contextualise the Magritte text as not only familiar, but, perhaps outdated in its original authorial intention. Thus, the difficulty here for the modern reader is that the original context is difficult to revisit when it is part of intertextuality: it requires conscious effort and research to produce anything new to say about a much-visited text. At the same time it is very difficult to decontextualise the layered readings in order to recontextualise, or even approximate, the original synchronic text. This is the dilemma of a hyper-documentation, such that the weight of commentary (or cumulative scholarship) actually imposes a distance between the original text and the corpus of what could be called the ‘industry’ of Magritte scholarship. It is a dilemma which suggests that the more scholarship that exists, the more likely it is that to see something *new* in the Magritte text will require a reading that draws on *post-Magritte* literacy.

The Frame Problem redefined: the Magritte text recontextualised

These objections are consistent with the Frame Problem in that they seem to argue against the idea that the reader could manage such a cognitive load without jettisoning at least some of the simpler readings as being naive, outmoded, too familiar, mundane, derivative or irrelevant. This line of reasoning would suggest that these earlier readings can be partially or even completely, forgotten. So, for instance, the more a reader knows about the Magritte text and its commentators, the less likely it is that the reader will revisit past, simpler readings. Put this way, the idea sounds more like short- (or even long-) term memory loss, and it is a logical premise, but not altogether convincing. Rather, it is also conceivable, and no less logical, that the simpler readings would be recoverable, given that to know that simpler readings existed presupposes the ability to recall those readings in at least some form, given the necessary contextualisation of the text through incremental readings. That is, the sophisticated reading is ultimately traceable to simpler readings, whether rejected or simply subsumed into the more complex knowledges and subsequent readings, and these readings form a referent for any later, more complex reading. This retention of earlier, contrasted or cumulative readings, is, feasibly the basis of all subsequent readings.

To further conceptualise this premise, it is possible to view later, more sophisticated readings as being along a lineal, causative, continuum of knowledges, where any reading can be recovered, revisited and explained (or rendered meaningful or significant) by pointing to its relationship with prior, and later, readings. Just to complicate this premise further, in addition to the temporally lineal relationship, there is also the consideration of plexity; such that any reading of a text -which is at least intertextual for the Magritte original text- relies on a degree of exposure to texts and readings which bear some resemblance to the original text or which are defined by sets of relationships to texts which in turn are ultimately traceable to the Magritte original. In addition, plexity is constructed by discursive relationships between readers: and these relationships inform the complexity of relationships between readers, texts and intertextuality (following Milroy, 1980 and Holmes, 2001). It is difficult to trace such non-tangibles of knowledge and frame construction and derivation, but we know they are there, and that they reflect and construct "different identities in different social interactions (reflecting) the range of different types of transaction people are involved in with different individuals" (Holmes, 2001, pp. 185-189).

It is conceivable, then, that any demonstrably derivative or intertextual text may only ever be understood superficially for all of its potential source knowledge and frames. A text which evokes the Magritte original does not need an obvious, direct, traceable link to the original, to be accepted as being intertextual. It merely requires a credible link to some other text which is ultimately traceable to the original – however indirect that link may be. Or, to echo Magritte further, not only is the original painting not a pipe, the illustration (Figure 2) accompanying this discussion is not the Magritte text either. If the reader has never viewed either Magritte's actual pipe, or the original Magritte painting, after viewing Figure 2 they still haven't seen either: they have seen a representation of a representation of a pipe. And yet, by employing our knowledges and frames as literacies, we can say that we understand and are familiar with, the original Magritte text.

Therefore, it is theoretically possible that this capacity for intertextuality and frame facilitation of knowledge could enable a successful linguistic transaction between readers who are familiar with the original Magritte text only through intertextuality. It is, further, feasible to generate a retail capitalisation of a recontextualised Magritte text. So, an advertiser who may have never actually viewed the original painting, might employ a contextualised knowledge of the painting gained through viewing a

print of the original, to capitalise on public awareness of the text, in order to recontextualise that frame to sell a completely unrelated product or service. None of these 'interested parties' need ever have seen the original text.

In one, actual example of this intertextual capitalisation, interestingly, the very referent itself is absent from the image (Figure 2). This text requires the reader to supply the missing referent by way of background knowledge, non-conventional implicature and intertextuality, in order to complete the literate reading. Ironically, Magritte's anti-bourgeois authorial intention can be transformed via a multi-layered recontextualisation to appeal to a diachronic, but presumably highly literate, bourgeois market. Or, this recent text capitalises on the social capital provided by an originally anti-capitalist text because the vendors and/or the purchasers understand and accept the validity of this intertextuality. As an instance of intertextuality the original Magritte text has been recontextualised as a T-shirt design with a distinct ideology, authorial intention and discourse of its own, where the original caption is present but the original referent-image is absent. This referent image has been replaced by a computerised plant in a plant pot: the reductionist nature of such an image is capital-essentialism. That is, the image is a very basic pixelated computer generated image which is very economically produced. It is not a pipe, it is not a realistic image of a pipe, but rather is a mundane image of an even more mundane, contemporary object and it is very clearly highly stylised as well. Contextualised in a contemporary anti-smoking society, the pipe becomes a taboo, a censored item which should not be graphically represented, but rather replaced by a living, socially accepted organism. The joke has been updated, perhaps even with some intentionality of 'what Magritte would do if he were to make the joke today'.

The retail and linguistic-semiotic success of such a design also indicates that the complete text is indeed completed in the mind of the reader through a known cue, and it succeeds as humour primarily because it is derivative of the original 'joke', upon which it builds. Its success is thus due to its hermeneutic trigger: to decode the 'new' joke is to be 'in on' the 'old joke'. If the reader succeeds in locating the joke in its intertextuality frame, the reader can also signal that they are part of an exclusive speech community where literacy includes familiarity with the original layers and frames of the Magritte text. This aspect of identity and inclusion-exclusion is fundamental to the nature and function of humour in general, where "jokes are told by and for people of the 'in-group'" (Gruner, 2000, p. 78). It is this multiplicity of purpose or function which indicates that a complex authorial intention can juggle multiple frames and readings to at least the triadic level.



Figure 2. Ceci n'est pas une pipe as a T-shirt design.

Indeed, it is essential that the joke is interpreted as a modern adaptation of the original, because without the identical script Ceci n'est pas une pipe in its identical font and style, which taps into the

schemata-script of the original, there is no joke. This indicates that the reader must necessarily juggle the original text at the same time as managing to reinterpret that text in its modern incarnation. This tends to subvert the lineal, unilateral tendency of the Frame Problem. From there it is no great leap to imagine that bringing more frame-knowledge to the modern text does not eliminate the first two (or more) interpretations. So, for instance, it is possible to extend the potentialities of reading to see the modern text against both Magritte's Marxist subtext and at the same time, as a text which may or may not be presenting a deliberate neo-Marxist irony. Using an anti-capitalist text to sell T-shirts as an emblem of semi-institutional protest presents the reader with the capitalist irony undermining its conceptualisation and economic purpose. It certainly offers the Magritte-literate reader more than triadicty. It is possible to see this latest version of the Magritte 'joke' merely as a text which derives essential meaning from the original humorous text. It is also possible to see that, in doing so, it has now extended the life of the original joke; it cannot be said that such a derivative act in any way 'kills' the joke if the humour is valid and recontextualised successfully. In building on the original reflexive purpose of semiotic commentary, the new text adds further layers beyond triadicty: it comments on the original comments and is 'self-aware' to some extent. Additionally, when a reader notes the (perhaps) unintentional irony of capitalisation which eludes authorial intention, this 'self-awareness' could quite easily be undermined and displaced. These tangents of reader frame and background knowledge add more layers of reading to the textual purpose. Such tangents can also be considered as operating within complex relationships: between readings, other texts and between readers. These relationships are dynamic and exhibit features which are well beyond authorial control: this can be described as 'un-intention-alities' mediated by plexity.

It is clear then, from all this discussion of multiplicity in readings, as Gee asserts, the potential of context is indeed unlimited. However, contrary to Gee's assertion of a Frame Problem, it seems that the more complex the reading, the more a reader is able, and indeed, is compelled, to balance and prioritise within a hierarchy of potentialities, these multiple readings. Far from being a 'problem' the FP could actually be a manageable asset to, and aspect of, literacy, where plexity and intertextuality generate seemingly spontaneous, or unrelated readings in a plurality of viable readings. It is this viability which provides the key to seeing the plurality as a very real, and contingent, possibility. This is, in a paraphrase, a more-than-triadic layering of frames and knowledge, which the scholar of, or reader with literacy for, Magritte texts already performs. It is an open-ended dialogue where intertextuality offers unlimited possibilities. So, by contrast, while it is possible that synchronic readings can be decreasingly profitable as sites of new information or insights, given the density of the corpus of Magritte literature (potentially, at least), the same cannot be said for re-contextualisations of the Magritte text, where readers can add diachronic knowledges for an infinite number of potentialities. The Magritte text can be decontextualised, recontextualised and 'intertextualised', ad infinitum.

CONTEXT RE-THEORISED

The upper limits of context?

There is nothing new in this idea of potentiality of context. What is new is the idea that the ever widening set of potentialities in reading the framing of the text is not a type of cognitive liability, but perhaps an attainable asset. To view the FP as an asset requires a questioning of some of the central assumptions contained in its theorisation. So, for instance, the FP posits that as we widen the aspects of frame, the "frame (becomes) both a problem and a tool...because we can use it...to see what information and values are (present) in a piece of language (but) our interpretations...are always

vulnerable to changing as we widen the context in which we interpret (the text)" (Gee, 2011a, p. 68). Indeed, this ever-expanding nature of context is where the FP first becomes evident. Thus, in the case of the Magritte text any one reading will, potentially at least, build on previous readings to the point where intertextuality presents us with a "Context (which) is indefinitely large... (a) context (which) is, in a sense, infinite" (Gee, 2011b, p. 31). This is a feature borne out by the previous discussion, where context seems limited only by the background knowledge and frames that the reader can bring to the linguistic transaction.

However, if we review the idea of context itself, we can also see the FP and context in a new light. One aspect of context is that it is a production of the reader, such that the text responds to, or is mediated through, whatever frame/s the reader brings to the text (Widdowson, 2011). It is a situation where the reading of the text invests that text with "reflexivity...where language simultaneously reflects context and constructs it" (Gee, 2011a, p. 101). This idea of spontaneity in context is extended in the assertion that context is plastic and an abstraction, where the interpretive frames and "local interpretation" (Brown & Yule, 1993, p. 59) dominate a reading:

Context...is an abstract representation of a state of affairs. This may be constructed from the immediate concrete situation...But it need not be. It can be entirely independent of such situational factors...context...is not what is *perceived* in a particular situation, but what is *conceived* as relevant, and situational factors may have no relevance at all...contexts are constructs of reality as conceived by particular groups of people. (Widdowson, 2011, pp. 22-26; italics in original).

Taking a broad view of this position on context means that the reading of a text can be whatever the reader is motivated for, and capable of producing; with the caveat that the reading must be *plausible*. Plausibility here is a rendering of "*conceived* as relevant": the reading must be *conceivable*, and to be conceivable, it must also be relevant. However, it is possible to underestimate the 'hidden' component of situational context, if that situational information is contingent on, or derivative of, aspects of the textual production in the first place. To illustrate, for a reader with no ability to decode the French language script and with no knowledge of pipes or of didactic frames or texts, the Magritte text will be virtually inconceivable and thus, probably also completely irrelevant. Situationally, such a lack of specific textual literacy will mean that the decoding of the text for this reader will not differ in any way, regardless of whether the reader views the original painting in its original context, or a modern print of that text. Neither can the reader justify a reading of the Magritte text as being, for instance, a textual commentary on space travel originally produced in the year 2011. In either of these readings, there is no plausibility because a minimal semiotic requirement of certain knowledges is lacking or is not applied: neither reading, therefore, is relevant or even justifiable. This is true even when the notion of subjectivity is invoked: there clearly *is* a hierarchy of readings according to plausibility.

This reconsideration of context offers an important qualification of Gee's "indefinitely large context" proposal. It is here that the idea of unlimited contextualisations must be constrained by what is actually possible, since what is actually possible is not entirely within the control of the reader. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be any limit on the number of potential readings which are subsequent to, derivative of, and more complex/sophisticated than, earlier readings where such a requisite plausibility exists.

Authorial intention and control: is the author dead?

This idea of hierarchy of plausibility, which suggests that some readings can be 'safely' discarded as erroneous if they are not supportable by any external evidence, means that subjectivity as a defence for

any reading must be reviewed. This is especially true in the case of privileging reader control over the text; a tenet more recognisable from Literary Theory. Its relevance to this discussion is in its diminution of authorial intention, which is significant because the theory is well-established and influential across disciplinary theories. It also operates as an essential counterpoint to the idea that context is limitless, since the reading is given more weight than the production of the text. Taken at face value, the privileging of the reader over the author completely removes the original contextualisation from any potential reading. Barthes asserts that in any reading of a text the author is of no importance, and the reader's engagement with the text is paramount (Allen, 2003). For instance, in the foregrounding of the text's reception by its decoders, the author, as a figure of 'omniscience', is not just relegated to secondary importance, but eliminated entirely. However, at the same time, the text, in both its formulation and decoding, is considered to be highly intertextual, or contingent for meaning on the frames of reference used by the author and readers:

We now know that a text consists not of a line of words, revealing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which...the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources. (Allen, 2003, p. 76)

The "multi-dimensional space" referred to is another way of saying that the reading is subject to heteroglossia. There is an inherent contradiction here because Barthes seeks to discard authorial intention, while at the same asserting that the reader is subject to heteroglossia – but without being entirely aware of these influences. It is highly unlikely that any reader can avoid *any* knowledge of authorial intention while engaging with a text from that author. To assert that authorial control is virtually irrelevant to the production of meaning in any textual reception also means that the reader is completely reliant upon, hypothetically, any and all frames of reference which actively exclude any knowledge of the author. Presumably this would also include the author him/herself when that person returns to their own text at any time after the original context of production. This consequently removes the foundational layer of semiotics from any reading which is subsequent to that of the original textual production, and it is here that the idea of ultimate reader control reveals a fundamental flaw.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that the process of intertextuality and layered readings can certainly be seen as a dilution of the original context, even while remaining as an essential, causative foundation which can never entirely be removed from the equation of relevance and plausibility. However tenuous, or however diluted as a result of plexity, there will always be some link to the original textual production and context, in every subsequent reading. This then raises the question of how much control is actively exercised by each participant in a linguistic transaction: by the author, the author as reader, linked reader or independent reader. In order to investigate this further, linguistic ideas such as Speech Act Theory offer another means of positioning the various participants in an intertextual reading.

The Author-God is dead, Speech Act Theory, face theory and other linguistic ideas

This diminishing of the importance of authorial intention and textual originality in Literary Theory runs counter to much linguistic theory where all participants in a linguistic transaction are *equally* considered (Holmes, 2008; Fromkin et al, 2009; Wardhaugh, 2010). This is particularly true for Speech Act Theory (SAT), for instance, where the illocutionary act is not only primary in a temporal sense, it is also considered to be highly causative, if not lineally predictive, at the locutionary and perlocutionary levels (Searle, 1969, pp. 23-24; 1999, pp. 145-146). The successful communicative speech act requires a seamless linguistic transaction, where meaning is negotiated equally between participants. Such success across speech act participants is also referred to as "communicative convergence", since there is a

necessarily collaborative junction of frames, background knowledges and will to understand (Widdowson, 2011, p. 54).

Such a collaborative view runs counter to the general 'sense' of Barthesian logic, where an inordinate degree of independence is allocated to the reception of a text, by the reader. In this system of theory, where there is no sense of collaborative meaning produced by *all* participants, the responsibility for successful decoding of a text is allocated exclusively to the reader. Apart from the jettisoning of authorial intention, it also gives rise to the conclusion that all readings are viable, and it is here that the theory becomes untenable, as indicated in earlier discussion. The question is then whether these apparently opposing theoretical views can be reconciled in any way. To do so, it is necessary to reconsider the notion of intentionality. If the intention of the author is rebadged as an intention to communicate, then authorial intention is quite clearly indispensable. On the other hand, if the decoder of a text is certain that their reading of the text is 'correct', regardless of the authorial intention, that reading is very difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge. Even after it can be corrected, such a foundational reading remains firmly entrenched, temporally and cognitively, since any later reading is *measured* against it. In turn, the reading/s are measured against authorial intention in any subsequent re-reading or recontextualisation of the original text. For example, in returning to a text, a reader will compare earlier readings with the later reading: thus a joke may suffer in the retelling, since it is already familiar. Or, a joke may be even funnier when the reader returns to it after an absence. Either way, the reader will necessarily compare a reading with authorial intention, even in the absence of the original author. The text has a certain autonomy in the readings of the decoder the more it is removed from the original context, but authorial intention remains as an intrinsic measurement, inbuilt into the text itself. Thus, reader and authorial intentionality are both significant in any transaction: regardless of whether context is synchronic or diachronic. The question then is as to whether intentionality swings in favour of the reader as the text becomes more removed from its original context. Or, it is possible that the reader increasingly feels an 'ownership' of the text as the readings become more personalised in their intertextuality.

There is, then, a mechanism for reconciling the Barthesian view of reader primacy, with the more linguistic view that participants are necessarily collaborative, and perhaps equal. This mechanism is intentionality, if it is framed as a *will to participate* in meaning production and the consequent emotional attachment to individual readings and roles in the linguistic transaction. That is, the author retains a sense of ownership (perhaps proprietary) in the production of the text, but each decoder also takes away from the speech event a certainty of correctness, and ownership of, their own particular reading. This ownership becomes more pronounced the more it is removed from the original context. After all, it is very difficult to dislodge an incorrect reading if the decoder is primarily convinced that they correctly read the text at the original speech event.

To more fully understand how this mechanism works, it is necessary to reconsider the nature of context in an original speech event as a product of intentionality. Present in any successful transaction is a demonstrable convergence in meaning between authorial intention and the reception of the text. Intentionality and agency are also important considerations in the success of the transaction since: "the degree to which the parties actually converge does not depend on how far they are able to do so; it also depends, crucially, on how far they want or need to do so" (Widdowson, 2011, p. 55). These ideas of will to understand, and intentionality of reading, are a means of reconciling the seemingly incompatible ideas of Barthes and SAT (as an example of linguistic theory). That is, while all participants in a transaction may very well be equally involved in the production of meaning, context is very fluid, and the textual meaning is immediately subject to revision and intertextuality away from the immediately

synchronic, original context. The text takes on, or splits into, multiple autonomies when the initial context ends as a speech event, because it is subject to “transient formations, constantly evolving, (texts) do not have a timeless meaning in themselves” (Bazerman, 2012, p. 228). Thus it is, that any one participant will ‘take ownership’ of the text *and* its textual reception away from this initial context. This includes the author, who naturally enough, will assume a continuing ownership of the text after it has passed into the receptions and recontextualisations of the other participants, however much these later sequences are temporally removed from the original context of production. An analogy can be made here between the concept of intellectual copyright and the nature of any given textual production. Interestingly, it could be argued that a reader also exercises a sense of authorship, when the text is received and incorporated into that person’s discursive formation. This is explainable as an equation of face.

Returning to the idea of context as a fluid, conceptual convergence of frames, it can be said that Barthes and other linguistic ideas are compatible after all: readings which can be supported by plausibility and relevance are linked to the original text but are also ‘owned’ by each participant. For each reader, the decoding is a highly personal assessment of the text, and is very often tied to notions of self. Additionally it could be argued that a reading is also a face equation, such that the reader’s notion of self-worth as socially defined is tied closely to the need to see their reading as viable and very relevant. Often this is because of the situatedness of the context itself: where the decoder is experiencing a text with other people it is important for that person to maintain face value by being ‘in on the joke’. This perception-conception ‘bundle’ of context renders the decoder’s reading so important to that person, that it is feasible that a person’s face is predictive for, and reliant upon, the need to assert that their reading is of worth, if not paramount. Of course, a reader who asserts that their particular reading is paramount, will inevitably cause friction and face loss for other participants whose readings may not match theirs. By extension, a reader who asserts a reading - which the author does *not* accept - is challenging not only authorial intention but also the self-image of the author. This is perhaps most obvious when the authorial ‘joke’ is not received as a joke, but rather as a humourless text. Similarly, it can also be a disjunct when the reader reads the text at multiple levels that the author did not consciously intend. It is possible that a reader who experiences the text at levels beyond those of authorial intention will destabilise the author, since the author does not want to lose face by being ‘second-guessed’ or ‘outsmarted’. However, it is also possible that the author may disguise their own intentionality in order to receive face from decoders who offer readings which enhance the author’s prestige because they unintentionally exceed the literacy of the author. The fact that any text is susceptible to fluidity of context and reading should thus be seen as an issue of control. Not only do participants seek to control their own readings by claiming ‘ownership’ of those readings, they also, implicitly, seek to lodge a claim of ownership over the text itself, by challenging others’ readings as inferior to their own.

The upper limits of context: Discourse Analysis

To demonstrate the way in which this concept of control operates, it is necessary to return to the Magritte text. It has been shown that context and recontextualisation work to produce a potentiality of readings which is at least open-ended, if not limitless. A Magritte specialist will offer a reading which is more sophisticated than the reading of a person for whom the Magritte text is a new phenomenon. Similarly, the sociologist, the psychologist or the historian may very well add to this literacy by reading the Magritte text through other specialist frames which produce viable, plausible and relevant readings. By the same token, a reading through Discourse Analysis (DA) theory should offer a literacy in excess of anything investigated thus far. Such a reading should also indicate that substantial layers can be added

to a reading, or set of readings, without necessarily discarding prior information. It will, in addition, offer an equation of face and control.

The employment of DA ideas in a reading of the Magritte text offers evidence that the original, synchronic contextualisation of the artistic joke benefits from a newer, diachronic recontextualisation, which rewards the effort in doing so. The modern recontextualisation (i.e. the T-shirt design) of the Magritte text evidences that not only is the transient nature of the original painting pertinent to its original context, it can also be seen as a more or less 'accidental' continuation of the same joke. The 'accidental' nature of the more recent joke derivative of the *essence* of the original text presents as a face equation which is also a form of unintentional irony. That is, the recent text suffers as a result of its self-conscious intentionality. The original 'joke' has become 'institutionalised' as part of the very establishment it ridiculed, but diachronically. So, when it is valued by modern critics as great art, or as a seminal artefact of the modern subversive aesthetic tradition, it has become essential to the face-line claimed by the modern art critic. The critic must be 'in on the joke' to assert face credentials. And yet, to value the anti-art text as great art is to assign capital, both monetary and social prestige, to an authorial intention that was presumably meant to be transient, not enduring. This adds another level to our reading of the text, such that the joke is almost timelessly a parody of high art and intellectualism, then and now, not merely a visual pun exploring literalistic referentiality or genre. To see it as a necessary face-token for the modern art critic, and thus ironically destabilising for that art critic, may very well enhance Magritte's original text to a level that is far in excess of authorial intention, but most likely, *consistent* with that authorial intention. That is, it is entirely logical to assume that Magritte would approve of this DA influenced reading of the T-shirt design: it is a type of merchandising which is entirely derivative, with minimal creativity, not only of his text, but also the very establishmentarian norms he was seeking to undermine.

To pursue this DA discussion further, it is productive to look at the construction of meaning at the semantic-pragmatic, or close-textual level. It is interesting that the original title of the painting was *La trahison des images* (*The treachery of images*) which renders the joke semantically even more transparent, albeit more potentially complex for its effect on viewers at the pragmatic level. The caption thus is consistent with the painting's title. As a speech act both 'scripts' in concert therefore signal as a negative, or contradictory, verdictive utterance. This causes us to question the authority of the text since the felicity conditions are not met, and the Gricean maxim of quality is flouted. Alternatively we could say that the structural ambiguity is also a signal that the producer of the utterance is opting out of the maxim of quality and that the co-operative principle is suspended, in the interests of setting up a paradox which hints at some hidden, more complex truth. Linked to this is the fact that the painting can also be seen as generically subversive of the medium of public art, and thus it textually contravenes a speech genre: in 1928 public art was not understood to have a role as a humorous text (Robbe-Grillet et al, 1995). This triggers a 'double-take' for the interlocutor seeking a conventional schemata reading of the text, and explains why the joke is operative on multiple levels. It also explains why there are several readings extant and further readings which are possible. Indeed, the structural paradox is only decipherable through non-conventional implicature, which draws on the interlocutor's background knowledge (Gumperz, 1982); in this case dealing with the awareness of painting and script as mere representations of a knowable, tangible reality.

To widen the enquiry with DA is to indicate that frames can 'improve' a reading. It could be argued that this type of specialist enquiry asserts control over its own reading, as well as claiming some superiority over other, necessarily competing readings: they are competing, but inferior, because they evidence less literacy and are thus less relevant and/or plausible. This suggests that there is a hierarchy of readings,

and thus more claim to relevance, if higher literacy presents a superior reading is not only possible, but innately persuasive. Of course, it is quite possible also that this primary reading may actually rest upon the salience of all these other readings for its own plausibility. It need not intrinsically reject all other readings, but rather, rely on them, only to exceed them in depth, width and, ultimately, relevance. Thus, a reading of the Magritte text which consists of a synthesis and sum of *all* of the previous readings in this article, as presented thus far, is presumably the primary reading.

MULTIADICITY

Context and control: multiadicity defined

This textual example illustrates a principle of interpretive control, which is that, while Magritte clearly articulated his intended message as a humorous text, subsequent interpretations of the text show significant variation both in accuracy and in scope from the way the author of the joke explicitly framed his text. This is additionally true for the T-shirt design which recontextualises the Magritte text in ways that are unpredictable: and perhaps especially so for the author of this latest incarnation of the original. It is also clear that different readers of what is, after all, a relatively simple semiotic 'joke' might feasibly miss the humour entirely, whether or not it is explained to them, or perhaps they may get more out of it than Magritte ever intended. A feature of this variegated set of readings of the same text is that they compete with, and frequently contradict each other, sometimes quite substantially. It is therefore clear that the author of the humorous text cannot completely control what interlocutors bring to the linguistic transaction and what they take away from it. In any joke, presumably, there is a similar tension between the authorial intention, however simple or complex, and the reception of that joke. This seems to be especially true when a highly literate reading presents which is persuasive, relevant and plausible. Without discarding other, less complex readings, such a reading necessarily asserts itself as the primary decoding, and control is contested by such a hierarchical relationship. Such a primary reading, if it is credentialised by the decoder's superior literacy, wrests control from not only the competing decoders, but also the author of the text.

To describe this lack of authorial control I suggest the term **multiadicity**. It entails the interpretive capacities that interlocutors bring to any linguistic transaction. It is more complex than a semantic, or *dyadic*, interpretation of any text, and it can be described as the potential and actual complication of lower level pragmatic, or *triadic*, understandings. The complicating factor could even be described as an *exponential* increase in pragmatic complexity as literacy layers-frames are increasingly brought to the reading of a text. Implicit in multiadicity also is a proportionate loss of control over the outcome, or perlocutionary act, of the humorous transaction by the author of that transaction.

As interlocutors bring diverse backgrounds and linguistic capacities to the speech event, they also contribute heightened unpredictability for its outcome. Although it is quite feasible for an equality of readings to occur in any linguistic transaction, it is also true that it is virtually impossible for interlocutor/s to match each other precisely with discursive frames. Rather they present with more, or less, complex speech repertoires and cultural literacies and highly individualised discourses; and thus there can be as many readings as there are participants. Additionally, individual readers can juggle multiple readings, even if they decide on a particular primary reading. It is this open-ended potentiality that is inherent in the term multiadicity: interlocutors can take away as much or as little from the interaction as they are capable of, or willing to invest. I would also include as a feature of multiadicity, a certain tension between authorial intention and the reading of a text, where the author has a face investment in the success of the text's reception (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1978; Hay, 2000, p.

716). The performance of humour is thus a risky face equation for the instigator, since success, or control, is never completely certain. Failure, and face loss, is, on the other hand, a liability, particularly if the humorous act is public: the greater the audience, the more vulnerable the humorist.

Indeed, in the case of Magritte, this unresolved tension between what he intended and the variegated reception his 'joke' received, reportedly caused the artist great anguish (Robbe-Gillert et al, 1995). This prompts the question of whether an unintended outcome, the perlocutionary sequel, should be considered a *mis*-reading of the author's humour, or whether it should be viewed as a viable reading according to that interlocutor's discourse. If the person 'responsible' for the humorous text is also considered to retain 'ownership' of that text and its interpretation, then multiadicity determines that any reading of the humorous text must draw on a limited range of intertextuality and that it is generative of a hierarchy of informed readings. That is, some interpretations will be more 'correct' than others, as measured against authorial intention. It is necessary to test this premise against Relevance Theory and ideas from Humour Theory in order to validate the idea of a primary reading, as postulated.

Relevance Theory, Humour Theory and Multiadicity

Literary Theory, as discussed previously, exaggerates the reader's control over the text, and asserts that the authorial intention is absent in any viable reading. Relevance Theory (RT), by contrast, tends to argue its polar opposite. It is pertinent to this discussion, therefore, because it offers a logical obstacle to the concept of multiadicity in the same way that the Frame Problem (FP) does: it minimises the options for viable, pluralistic readings. It does this, firstly, because RT diminishes the role of the addressee, and thus by default it argues for disproportionate authorial control; and secondly, because it focuses on *successful* communication (and thus, *relevance*) it tends to a certain uniformity at the perlocutionary level. The conclusion seems to be that the addressee either enjoys a seamless linguistic transaction, or misses out entirely. What is absent in RT is the concept of grades, nuances, or pluralism in 'getting the joke'. As with the FP, RT seems to have a tendency towards the "law of parsimony (where) the simpler explanation or theory is to be preferred" (Gruner, 2000, p. 10).

A similar tendency can be found in ideas taken from various strands of Humour Theory. This is despite extensive exploration of what can be labelled the 'mechanics' of humour. For instance, Yus (2003) examines various strands of RT, Humour Theory and Cognition Theory for differences and overlaps, but does not pursue failed humour beyond the notion of a breakdown in implicature. Rather, the common focus of these approaches is to evidence that the success of humour is reliant upon "inferential processes (which) include *enrichment* and *loosening*... explicatures... *strong implicatures* and... *weak implicatures*" (Yus, 2003: 1303-4; italicising in original). These cohesive devices are "exploited by speakers aiming for a humorous interpretation of their utterances... they yield a propositional form" (Yus, 2003: 1303-4). That is, they disambiguate meaning. While implicature certainly is a key element in narrowing the likely interpretation, it is still completely contingent on the interlocutor/s possessing the necessary communicative competence to match that of the humorist and being able to process the implicature in the first place. The result, according to this approach, is that the interlocutor resolves conflicting implicatures (or possibilities) in order to arrive at the essence of the joke. Again, this conclusion is unitary: it represents the resolution of conflicting possibilities in favour of only one solution. The possibility that the interlocutor may be able to balance multiple, even conflicting, implicatures, and thus 'get' the joke plurally and simultaneously at several levels (whether these are intended or not) does not seem to have been investigated through the application of any of these theories.

Without venturing too much further into the highly systematic strands of Humour Theory, it is possible to see the common thread of this 'all or nothing' concept applied to humour studies by prominent theorists (Raskin, 1985, 1992; Attardo, 1994, 2001, 2005; Davies, 2006). Indeed, this is the consistent position taken by the theorists consulted in Yus' wide-ranging summative article (2003, pp. 1313-1315). Such humour theorists link this consistency directly to Cognition Theory, which asserts a mutually exclusive functionality in the human brain such that competing scenarios must be resolved in favour of only *one*: "ruling out... incongruities is a natural, biologically rooted mechanism of human cognition" (Yus, 2003, p. 1314). It is congruent with ideas already discussed in the context of the Frame Problem, and suffers from the same logical fallacy. Unfortunately this reliance on Cognition Theory (CT) tends to a comparable unilateral or parsimony approach, and it is flawed, since CT, like the FP, acknowledges the brain's ability to *possess* and *process* these multiple, alternative, and competing scenarios. Similarly, there is acknowledgement that the interlocutor's thought processes or "cognitive environment" are "only partially predictable by the speaker" (Yus, 2003, p. 1315). There is, then, some undecidability as to why the hearer would choose one script-frame resolution over another in the event of equally *plausible* alternatives (when it is feasible that the hearer might actually be able to balance multiple solutions), or when complexity might ultimately make more sense than a simpler option, according to the hearer's cognitive environment. As already demonstrated in the Magritte text, despite the speaker's best intentions and expert use of language, any joke can miss its mark, exceed its 'brief', or fall somewhere in between. Ultimately these responses are collaborative between speaker and hearer, but this does not preclude the real possibility of multiadicity.

Relevance Theory, Humour Theory as evidence for Multiadicity

Apart from the admission that there is no certainty of knowing the "cognitive environment" of any one interlocutor, there is also the methodological problem contained within the research into HT, RT or CT. That is, it is clear from the reported data, that respondents are not asked if they consider multiple readings of any given text: they are offered mutually exclusive options. This could very easily represent a fundamental flaw in the conclusions of such research methods: if the researcher does not offer the respondent anything except leading questions the answers will be predetermined, at least for unitary plausibility. And yet, despite this methodological problem, there actually seems to be some evidence for multiadicity in the very ways in which theorists refer to cognitive processes and the potentiality of context.

This possibility of multiple outcomes is briefly referred to in Yus's discussion and it is implicit in other theorists' work. So, for instance, Curcio (1995, pp. 43-46, quoted in Yus, 2003, p. 1319) considers an ordering of "metarepresentations" where "lower-order" representations are "embedded". This, however, seems to be rather a re-configuring of the idea of Background Knowledge (BK), and not a discussion of hearer discursive needs and responses. Lafollette and Shanks (1993, quoted in Yus, 2003, pp. 1315-1316) similarly present the bilateral response as a matter of "listener's beliefs...Humor is context-dependent". Other statements quoted in Yus (2003, p. 1316) indicate that there is an awareness of hearer "individualised humor experience" and also that "each person's response to humor is unique". This uniqueness is not elaborated on, however, despite the understanding that it is this very unpredictability in hearer needs which the speaker must address. Building on Gumperz (1982), other theorists (e.g. Kotthoff, 1996; Hay, 2000; Rogers-Revell, 2007) have advanced the idea of context as being paramount for the production of humour, and as being a collaborative effort: "humor is jointly and dynamically constructed by interlocutors in context" (Rogers-Revell, 2007, p. 8). Context, therefore, is a useful point at which to build an approach which assesses the variables in the hearer's cognitive environment or context. If context can be considered as a collaborative production or site of meaning

involving all interlocutors, then it can just as easily be considered as being a site where unresolved tensions between readings will exist for each and every interlocutor. This is the case even after a particular reading is selected, say for the purposes of responding to a research questionnaire. It is evidenced by the fact that readers can *deselect* a previous response if it is found to be not as plausible as a later reading, or where they are influenced by another person's reading. The ability to revisit previous readings, or to modify a reading in response to another person's, indicates that all these instances of readings are most certainly retained by the memory, but in a hierarchical relationship.

Discourse Analysis applied to Multiadicity

To further investigate this idea of memory retention, multiadicity can be explained further by an appeal to some concepts drawn from Discourse Analysis (DA), particularly where it offers insight into the makeup of background knowledge and how these operate to produce meaning. While the term 'discourse' has in recent years become rather elastic, even dismissed as a generic "catch-all" (Alvesson, 2004, p. 327), it can be employed usefully in the sense most commonly found in Critical Discourse Analysis:

Discourse is more than just language use...it is a type of social practice, it constitutes the *social: knowledge, social relations, and social identity*, it is shaped by relations of *power*, and invested with *ideologies* (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8; my italics).

That is, discourse encompasses the context of a linguistic transaction as *more* than the physical environment of the speech event. It extends to include, for instance, the experience, competence, power differentials and ideologies between, and of, each participant. It has specificity, and extension, in this usage which can be meaningfully applied to multiadicity. Communicative competence, as an example of one element of discourse, symbolises an understanding of language in practice which is rather complex:

Communicative competence involves...the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have... (it is) everything involving the use of language and other communicative modalities in particular social settings (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 18).

Thus, rather than merely being "a continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence" (Crystal, 1992, p. 25), the term discourse "refers to the piece of communication *in context*" (Nunan, 1993, p. 20, my italics). Language as an expression of contextual meaning is therefore also an expression of the language itself as used in a real interaction. Or, it activates a new reality, specifically as it is "perceived to be meaningful, unified and purposive" (Cook, 1989, p. 156) by the *participants*. More to the point, what each person brings to a transaction is highly dependent upon *who* that person is, before, and during, the interaction. Similarly, what each person takes from an act of humour is filtered through their own discourse. And finally, the significance of the humorous text is developed from what participants interpret as meaningful, to themselves and to others. This is consistent with the idea of the text becoming an individualised reality according to each interlocutor's discourse, with the caveat that meaning is jointly constructed and the text is merely the 'trigger':

The physical text has no function apart from the writer and reader who interact with it. Its purpose is determined by their purposes because there are no texts, but only interpretations... the text is completed in the mind of a reader (Stubbs, 1983, p. 57).

Alternatively, the individualised readings can be seen as a set of alternative realities, filtered through discursive interpretations responding to the stimulus provided by the author and text. In this context each participant is actively "constructing and construing texts by keying them into contexts so as to realize discourse meaning (thus creating) different versions of social reality...or ideational constructs"

(Widdowson, 2010, pp. 28-31). Discourse and multiadicty are linked in this operation, because these realities, or ideational constructs pre-exist the linguistic transaction and continue to modify the reading as it develops its own, autonomous role. The entire operation of multiadicty could be described as a splintering of reality which each participant takes away from the original site of meaning production. There is no ultimate control over these autonomous splinters. There is, however, a certain predictability which can be deduced by analysing the literacies and discursive formations that each participant brings to, and takes away from, the original text. It is this tension between discursive predictability and open-endedness in the individualisation of reading which is at the heart of multiadicty.

Differences between Discourse and Multiadicty

This tension between predictability and open-endedness illustrates a crucial difference between discourse and multiadicty, even though they are linked. Briefly, discourse is what the participants bring to the text and it explains how they produce, collaboratively, the context for the reception (and production) of the text. Multiadicty is the set of potential and actual outcomes, or readings, of the text *via the participants' individual discourse/s*. These unpredictabilities in each reading are, perhaps paradoxically, the product of discursive formation *and* the spontaneous production of meaning which largely depends on a person's intertextualities and literacies. Or, multiadicty relies on discursive formations, and may ultimately be explainable as a unique combination of discursive factors, but it is a creative and unpredictable application of personal literacies which is at the heart of multiadicty. It is this unpredictability of response in each reading which marks us as particularly human, and which renders interactions attractive. Indeed, the central appeal of any linguistic transaction is not just its "orderliness" but also its novelty: "if a conversation is 'interesting', it is largely so because of the unpredictability of its content" (Wardhaugh, 2010, pp. 315-316). Multiadicty thus offers a means of describing the ways in which linguistic interactions cannot be controlled, since a central feature of any interaction is its unpredictability. Apart from an intrinsic appeal, this multiadic feature of unpredictability can also be used to describe the ways in which readings can produce highly charged readings even when discursive formations may be otherwise predictable.

For example, a person may be marginalised socially or otherwise be resistant in some ideological way to the producer of humour, such that the humorous text will predictably, for that person, be offensive as a symbol of their exclusion from the dominant discourse. Alternatively, a producer of humour may be privileged socially so that there is a predisposition discursively, or motivating power differential, for others to laugh, regardless of how clever, or funny the text itself may be (Gruner, 2000, pp. 88-89). In both these instances, the participants' discourse/s will pre-position them for the reception of the text: "if you have strong feelings about a subject you will (or will not) appreciate a joke about it" (Raskin, 1992, p. 9). Theoretically, a person's discourse predicts and produces the context for that text. Nevertheless, actual outcomes may be surprising overall and vary from what is to be expected at the individual level, if discourse is used as a predictor. The range of outcomes, both predictable and unpredictable, both hypothetical and actual, is an illustration of multiadicty. There is, then, in multiadicty, an awareness that there are simply too many variables in any potential audience for complete predictability, regardless of whether the target audience otherwise fulfils all the criteria for a successful transaction. Perhaps this explains why producers of television sitcoms will add layers of pre-recorded (canned) laughter over live audience responses to actual episodes to augment an inadequate level of response.

Multiadicity as response hierarchy

The question that arises from this discussion of discourse and multiadicity is related to the tension between authorial intention and hearer reception of the humorous text; that is, how are these readings to be measured against authorial intention? Three possible answers present themselves. One answer is discursive relativism, where all readings are equally valid, and explainable as *necessarily* irreconcilable to each other and to authorial intention. Another answer is to generate a hierarchy of readings according to variegated literacies, such that interlocutors who have more communicative competence and who produce readings which are more Multiadic, or pragmatically complex, are seen as more sophisticated. The third response would be to evaluate readings according to authorial intention, such that readings which are closest to the author's propositional content are seen to be most 'correct'. Of course there are two problems with this final option. The first is that we can never be completely sure what the author actually intended: language is an imperfect guide to the complete thought (or thoughts) expressed in humour. As Yus (2003, p. 1303) explains, "virtually no utterance encodes a complete thought...utterances always underdetermine the thoughts that they communicate". The second is that the author may not be completely aware of the intertextuality involved in their own utterances, since, as Barthes asserted, an utterance is the product of "multi-dimensional space in which...the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources" (Allen, 2003, p. 76).

For these reasons, it is relatively easy to find this final option unsatisfactory. This suggests that the other two options are reconcilable as being along the same continuum of discursive explainability, and therefore useful, with some qualification. There seems to be an inherent qualitative aspect to any hierarchical arrangement. This is evident in the idea of a communicative competence hierarchy, such that persons who can generate *highly* pragmatic, or Multiadic, readings of a text are demonstrating high cultural literacy, wide background knowledge and sophisticated pragmatic understanding of language use. It is this communicative competence which entails intertextuality and, often, subtle referentiality through ellipsis and tenuous cohesive devices (for instance). Additionally, communicative competence involves the ability to recognise and correctly interpret another's linguistic repertoire signals such as prosody and non-verbals, including gestures and facial expressions. These signals add informational levels and can disambiguate propositional content (Saville-Troike, 2003).

Such a level of competence typically includes a compatibility with the discourse of the producer of humour (assuming a mutuality of speech community-code-variety in the first place). It may also exceed the author's competence, but this is contingent upon the complexity of the text itself. Persons, for example, who favour a dyadic or triadic reading of a complex text, or who impose a discursive reading on a text when such readings are clearly not the discourse of the text's author (as far as can be evidenced), are certainly at variance with that demonstrable authorial intention. They might also be under-reading a text. They are, however, perfectly in harmony with their *own* discourse, and sometimes they can offer insights into the hidden discourse of the text's author. This is achieved through the imputation of attitude, or discursive intention. As Gumperz (1982, pp. 153-171; my italics) noted:

Interpretations... are *multiply embedded*...to decide on an interpretation, participants... listen to speech, form a hypothesis about what routine is being enacted, and then rely on background knowledge (etc) to evaluate what is *intended* and what *attitudes* are conveyed.

Indeed, this impulse is part of our discursive makeup to the point of intuitive responsiveness: "We positively seek out intentions in what people say and do...very often this result in the *imputation* of intention where no clear intention message is received" (Goody, 1995, p. 24; italics in original). Thus, to be offended by a joke on the basis of it targeting persons who are, for instance, disabled, is to respond

to authorial *intention*, as articulated by language, not the language itself. In this case, multiadicity offers insights into the discourse of both the author and hearer, but we would have to say that the communicative competence of the offended hearer exceeds that of the author. It may be that the multiadic reading will be much funnier than a simpler reading. On the other hand, a multiadic reading may also subvert the humour of the text entirely so that it becomes very unfunny. At the fundamental level, however, both extremes still require the ability to read beyond, and to simultaneously juggle, multiple levels of meaning.

In other cases, to not obtain significant humour from a text may very well indicate a *lack* of communicative competence. This is referred to in discussions of failed humour (Raskin, 1992; Gruner, 2000; Bell, 2009), a related topic which would require more elaborate discussion than is possible here. Nevertheless the fact that the concept itself is well established is sufficient to illustrate the reality of multiadicity – even if only as a counterpoint to such binary divisions. Indeed, to endorse the idea of multiadicity is to argue, overall, that the ability to read a text multiadically is to obtain maximum benefit from the text. That is to say, a multiadic reading is superior in that it actively demonstrates an application of higher level cognitive ability and a command of greater communicative competence. The production of a text which requires multiadicity can also be said to be indicative of linguistic skill, in the same way that linguists value an expanded (or elaborated) code over a restricted code. The elaborated code, essential to high repertoire and linguistic capital, is also at the heart of multiadicity. It is “language use which points to the possibilities inherent in a complex conceptual hierarchy for the organizing of experience” (Bernstein, as quoted in Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 358). Of course, there is much more involved in a multiadic reading, including agential will to apply the effort in the first place, and the creative ability to synthesise complex pluralities simultaneously from available intertextual resources; but the idea of an intrinsic valuing of repertoire is evident in such a ranking system.

The open-ended-ness of Multiadicity

Despite the fact that the hearer may very well be certain that their interpretation is more correct than that of others, there remains, in multiadicity, an open-ended-ness which causes us to question our own textual readings. For instance, we can re-view a text some time after our initial reading and either find it funnier, or find it less funny than we did the first time. It is, however, unlikely that our original experience will be duplicated. This is because, regardless of which outcome we experience, in a later reading we will find *more or less* in the text, even though the text itself is unchanged. This is due to the fact that our discourse is never static; we bring further intertextuality to a new reading, and this informs our ability to generate the new reading. It also suggests that in any text there is this multiadicity as a latent potential, and that, as part of a later reading/s we become increasingly aware of, and assured, that we are ‘connecting’ with authorial intention. It is possible, therefore, that much, if not most, of the ‘fun’ of humour is its Multiadic nature, and this is explainable by the undecidability of authorial intention: we can never be sure exactly where *all* of the joke comes from.

Similarly, I would claim as part of multiadicity’s ongoing effects what can be termed the *afterlife* of a humorous text. Not only are texts revisited, they also enter a cultural space where, for instance, punch lines or other items are transferred to other uses and contexts. As an example of this, it is common to ‘recycle’ lines from films in new contexts which refer back to the original context, but which are given new meaning in their recontextualisation. Eventually this continuing intertextual usage becomes an identity marker of a sociolect or speech community uniting persons who share, among other things, a common response to the original text. Interestingly, the more distance which is obtained from the original text, the more the quoted line from the text enjoys autonomous stability in its constant

reinventions. That is, a line from a film takes on its own existence, or afterlife, independent from its original context, as a separate text which can be applied to ever more situations, with derivative humour through juxtaposition. Additionally, jokes may be endlessly repeated in their intact form, or they may be retold but adapted to new contexts, transferred to new cultural environments and passed on into anonymous authorship. Both are instances of an ongoing textual validity which is Multiadic.

CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated through textual evidence the possibility of multiple and layered readings of humorous texts. At the simplest level, even the visual pun, a text which is contingent upon conflicting semantic readings, can be shown to be the product of intertextuality and prone to discursive reactions which are beyond even pragmatics. The operation of discourse in the production and reading of virtually any text means there is an open-ended-ness in texts which is both unpredictable and perhaps limitless, especially where texts are re-read over time. It is this unpredictability and complexity of readings which the producer of a text can never hope to control with any degree of accuracy. This open potentiality I have labelled multiadicty. Multiadicty also implies literacy and a hierarchy of responses: it contains within it the means of measuring any response to a text for, not accuracy, but rather literacy. That is, the ability to understand multiple registers, background knowledges, cultural literacies and linguistic repertoires is to have a superior linguistic ability and potentiality of performance. To apply these abilities to a text is to perform linguistically at a much higher level. The same can be said for the producer of a text: if that person can generate a text which appeals across multiple literacies and repertoires, it is demonstrative of a superior linguistic ability.

In applying DA to a more complex textual reading, I believe I have demonstrated how multiadicty operates in practice. By doing so, I assert that is possible to simultaneously balance several, often competing interpretations of a humorous text. Indeed, I assert that such a multiadic reading can not only be more intellectually satisfying, it can, quite simply, be *funnier*. I certainly do not accept that a perfect match between authorial intention and reader interpretation must exist for humour to be successful. Rather, I would suggest that the humorous text which ultimately eludes definition, but which matches across multiple frames and scripts, is a superior text.

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