

Stephen Popple 2025

Unravelling Heritage Dr Zinn Assignment 1

Humour as cultural heritage

My review of the article Humour as cultural heritage by Anastasiya Fiadotava (Sept 2025)

I found the article to be an informative and interesting read and assume Fiadotava's intention was to explain from a contemporary academic's perspective that humour sits firmly within the cultural heritage umbrella. Page 2 sets out three research questions which her article is intended to address.

The author outlines what appears to be a commonly held understanding at the start of her Introduction "Cultural heritage is reflective of our past and present," (Fiadotava 25 pg1) she develops this by giving generalised examples of how humour is imbedded within most societies. Opening the parameters of humour in this fashion the article includes many but not all manifestations of humour as cultural heritage.

At the outset of the main article (page 2) the author helpfully informs the reader that conceptualising humour has some in-built difficulties or constraints. I found her clear explanation of why this should be so immensely helpful. The somewhat intangible form that humour can take means that recording, preserving and show casing can be a challenge.

The author often refers to how institutions, centres and nations can include and benefit from humour within a cultural heritage setting. Therefore, I consider the principal intention of this article is to encourage the use of humour by providing well supported examples of why humour is relevant, important and that it's a valued and less understood than other genres of cultural heritage. However, on one occasion I felt she overused the contributions of others rather than use her own intuition/knowledge to pin down aspects of humour which she had identified. For example, this caused me to become unsure of what she was describing re Folk Humour Festival (Auciuki) etc. Juxtaposing this was her free flowing, easy to absorb response to RQ3 *Particularity of..* on page 12/13.

The first of Fiadotava's research questions concerned the forms of humorous heritage institutionalisation. This was the primary focus of this article. Accordingly, this question, henceforth RQ1 dominates this article.

A minor point. Academia appears to have adopted Institution as the label with which to place humour in a broad sense. Manifest might have been a more accurate label with manifestation (of) humour within society the adjective. That said institutionalisation is a well selected flexible term. I may be off message here but within my understanding 'institution' comes with formal overtones whereas humour very often does not. Time will tell.

The institutionalisation of humour can be found in many places. Establishing humour as a proven facet of human nature is not hard to achieve. Written evidence of humour can be traced back certainly as far as the Romans.

As a repeating tool humour is very evident in advertising or as part of formal notices etc. As a means of introducing yourself or a serious topic. Music bands, poets etc often begin their set with a jokey reference to themselves, audience or venue. Therefore, establishing a positive relationship with their audience from the outset.

Thus, Fiadotava and other academics can dispense with the requirement to justify humours position within cultural heritage discourse.

I found the authors mention of humour as integral elements of carnivals to be very illuminating. Given that many carnivals celebrate significant Saints days etc it seems that humour may not have always been present. (Howard P 2006) Carnivals celebrated over periods of hundreds of years how in many cases become discrete institutions. Humour is very evident throughout these events whether by static parody etc or by the actions of participants and onlookers. Arguably, some forms of institutionalisation and their associated functions are necessary to prevent popular events becoming unmanageable. For example, Notting Hill Carnival now has a highly visible police presence whereas this was not always the case.

Perhaps the above examples are somewhat extreme in that they tend to be on a large scale. Fiadotava (para 2 pg. 4) states that humour is treated as a grass roots representation of heritage incorporated within institutional heritage practices. This makes sense to me irrespective of the humorous origins.

The ephemeral nature of humour is acknowledged within the article. Intangible heritage such as risqué jokes may never be formally recorded can become forgotten. The author recognises jokes are a legitimate part of cultural heritage. UNESCO has included Niger's joke relationship practices as intangible heritage. Indeed, the humour of some regions or even cities such as Liverpool are unique identifying qualities.

Humorous graffiti has the potential to divide opinions between public and institution. A recent mural attributed to Banksy painted outside Lincolns Inn immediately after a serious disorder loaded with controversial Police/political overtones was denounced by UK government yet widely celebrated elsewhere. This places humour firmly into the spotlight as low (subversive) culture v high (controlling) culture.

With (Bonadio 2022) the author does include street art as form of cultural heritage. However, street art, graffiti and one-off performances events or shows etc are very important within communities

Even with limited examples the author clearly demonstrates the challenges to salvaging, processing, storing and presenting some forms of cultural humour.

The authors response to RQ2 outlines many of the difficulties and challenges to preserving and categorising humour as cultural heritage.

Overcoming what Fiadotava considers are barriers to valuing, appreciating and thus preserving and showcasing humour is concisely phrased and well argued in my opinion. Unlike a book or painting etc the author accepts that institutions and individuals may need convincing that their

humour has value and is worthy of preservation. (Kalcik S 1975) explanation of humour gaining increased importance is helpful too.

However, as Howard P 2006) explains when he considers Live Interpretation there are and substantial benefits and potential problems with bringing heritage 'to life' with guides, actors or former participants in trades. Factor in the difficulties in nuancing jokes etc via language interpreters and it becomes clear that institutions may have to add layers of preparation and investment. (Ahmed F 2022)

A solution might be found by forming relationships with theatres, historical societies etc which is popular and has been shown to work well in the UK with re-enactment's etc. These are often held during the summer months. www.shorehamfort.co.uk

So, flexibility is needed to include preserved humour into what I choose to term mainstream heritage. I now concur with Fiadotava that humour deserves inclusion.

RQ3 Humorous heritage does stand out if we look for it. But as humour is a multi-faceted topic and subtly part of life, I think humour just bubbles away under the surface. However, humour can rise to the surface very stridently. Consider the political impact Banksy's recent cartoon on the white wall outside of the Royal Courts of Justice had. The UK's House of Lords mentioned this in session. HM Courts of Justice promptly covered up this work. (BBC 8 Sept 2025)) Humour can be seen as both tangible and intangible in the forms of cartoons, graffiti, street art, jokes, statues, stories, theatre, television, films, the workplace, education, families, social clubs, in sport and social media even formal public wartime warnings (The National Archives 1943) ; and so it goes on. An appreciation of the value of humour appears to be central to the author and her academic colleagues.

Having decided to read this article in one continuous session my initial impression that this article was intended to provide an update rather than advance contemporary themes with the sphere of humour. On reflection I now consider this to be perhaps unfair.

Unfair because the more I ventured into the examples Fiadotava examined I soon realised that to comprehensively answer the question of Humour as cultural heritage would be both unreasonable and impossible in one article.

Reasonably given that Fiadotava was almost certainly would be limited by the word count constraints by the International Journal of Heritage Studies she could not include a fraction of all global themes etc. about this emerging cultural heritage topic. Yet, I felt her choices were valid. Perhaps the article could have had more references from a wider geographical spread but her point about humour being found everywhere was made.

It is an ambitious article which eventually left me wondering if a series of two or more articles might have provided greater space to expand the scope and range of examples. Though I am unsure if periodic academic journals can accommodate multiple articles on the same topic. Though early in the article (para 3 pg. 2) Fiadotava does appear to acknowledge this.

My conclusion is the article did fulfil the authors remit by satisfactorily addressing RQ 1, 2 and 3. Her theoretical approach was informative. It critiqued rather than criticised individuals, institutions and nations approaches and offered examples that had proved effective.

The National Archives Catalogue ref NSC 5/624

Ahmed AF Salahuddin 2022 History and Heritage

Howard P 2006 Heritage Management, Interpretation, Identity

Friends of Shoreham Fort www.shorehamfort.co.uk

British Broadcasting Corporation BBC 8 Sept 2025

Kalcik S 1975 Journal of American folklore