



## CARICATURE AS A CREATIVE WORK FOR ITS CREATOR AND VIEWER

Evija Zača

University of Latvia, The Advanced Social and Political Research Institute,  
Lomonosova str. 1A, LV-1019 Riga, Latvia  
E-mail: evija.zaca@lu.lv

Nowadays we can witness a tendency where the visual replaces the verbal. Humour experiences the same: its visual expression – caricature – is a visual metaphor that already has taken its remarkable place in the field of humour. Caricatures have become a distorting mirror that show deformed but still fairly presented reality. Humour is important part of our everyday life's communication and it covers many spheres of people's life, even including marketing, politics, work relationships, etc. That is why caricatures became a remarkable tool, for example, in political contentions. This article will show what it takes to create this distorting mirror from one side and to see a reflection in it and accept it from the other side.

Keywords: caricature, creativity, humour, irony, knowledge.

### Introduction

Nowadays the physical space around us is more and more filled with visual material, which have different purposes – just beauty pictures, commercials, warnings, etc. The autonomy of the picture also increases. The picture is no more used as the explanatory illustration for some kind of text, but it already by itself gives the complete information to the viewer – it is no more appendixes but a self-sufficient object.

We can say that people are going back to their roots, when communication was made with pictographic drawings on cave walls. However, it does not mean the regression of people's evolution. Nowadays pictures are more complicated and varied in their interpretation. It means that people are able to understand more and more complicated semiotic codes and give a reaction to them. And we also have to count a fact, which was proved by Terry L. Childers and Michael J. Houston in their research that people remember pictures better than, for example, verbal messages (Childers, Houston 1984: 652).

One of the elements of people communication is humour. It also has its visual reproduction – caricature<sup>1</sup>. Caricature is a strong visual metaphor that nowadays is

---

<sup>1</sup> The synonym of “caricature” is the term “cartoon”. That is also more used in English speaking countries to describe the object of this article. But in this article we will constantly use the term “caricature” that is phonetically closer to the term used in Latvia. And also term “cartoon” has other meanings that do not link with object of the research of this article and could make some miscomprehension.

more and more integrated into our everyday life. If the beginning of caricatures in nowadays sense is connected with political leaders who used caricatures to belittle their opponents, now caricatures are an ordinary part of the different media and they focus on different themes, events and people. The example of the popularity of caricatures, for example, in Latvia could be proved by the results of my survey during which we overviewed the daily newspaper *Latvian Newspaper* (in Latvian *Latvijas Avīze*). This research showed that on the average there are 59 caricatures publicized per month – on a monthly basis there were even 70 caricatures published. The average amount of caricatures per one day was 2.4 caricatures, but the biggest amount of caricatures posted in one newspaper was seven.

Popularity and importance of the caricatures is acknowledged also by the fact that there are two cartoon museums both in the United States of America and Japan and also by one in Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Switzerland, Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal and Macedonia. There is also an annual competition held, called *World Press Cartoon*; it joins caricaturists from all over the world.

At the same time, caricatures are really specific type of humour, which is accepted not by everyone. The reason for that is the way of expression of this humour – it is a picture as a metaphor. Therefore it means that not everyone can figure out the meaning of this metaphor, which results in the refuse of the caricature. The main goal of this article is to understand the specification of creating the caricature and afterwards of understanding and acceptance of it.

The whole article is based on my master theses that were presented in the year 2010. The article will be divided into three parts. The meaning of humour will be explained in the first part. The specifics of caricature as the way of humour will be explained in the second part. The question – what kind of mechanisms build the caricature and what is needed to understand it – will be also explained there. Part of the explanation will be based on quantitative research which includes an overview of more than 700 caricatures. Finally, in the third part we will give an example from my survey which was made in Latvia and Russia. This example will show how different or similar perceptions are in both countries.

### Humour as the way of communication

Humour as the object of research exists already since the antique times and many antique philosophers beginning with Plato paid their attention to it. For example, Aristotle said that laughter is the specific feature of human being which divides him from animal.

American researcher Michael Epp described how the research on humour was developed in the United States of America. He claims that working out this curious history for the study of what came to be identified as “American humour” has the virtue of linking the emergence of American humour studies to the emergence of American studies itself (Epp 2010: 50). As a result, humour from the object of small research became the basis of the whole national studies. It shows the breadth and multiplicity of

humour as an object of research – it does not have one strict way of explanation so it requests wider research on different spheres (for example, political system, economic development, ancestral customs, cultural values, religion, etc.).

In addition to the aforementioned, still there is one problem which makes the research on humour more complicated – there is no precise definition of it. Researchers find it difficult to envelope all features of humour so that it all would make one clear definition. Mostly it can be explained by the fact that was mentioned above – the breadth and multiplicity of humour.

Still we can accept some theories that try to explain the structure of humour and principles of its creation. For example, we can accept Danish philosopher Harald Høffding's created theoretical approach, which divides humour into two categories:

- 1) small humour – laughing, joking, etc., and
- 2) great humour – a true humorous attitude, or humour as a philosophy of life (Vejeskov 2001: 323).

Three phases through which the creation of the fact of humour goes can be identified quite clearly. These are the following:

1. Some kind of event in external world works as an impulse for a specific mental reply.
2. A cognitive and intellectual process receives and evaluates the event, which results in a cheerful state of mind.
3. There follows immediate visible behavioural reaction to the cheerful state of mind – smile or laughter (Barnouw *et al.* 1989: 297).

It leads us to an undeniable fact that humour is a social phenomenon, so it can evolve and pervade only among people. It is a communication that gets to a positive outcome as laughter that approves the acceptance of humour. Similarly, Henri Bergson highlights the social nature of humour by saying that in order to understand it, we have to transfer humour to its natural environment, i.e. to society. Moreover, we have to define the function of laughter, and this function is social and it has to have the social meaning (Dmitriev 1996). Anatoly Dmitriyev also argues that the one who is alone cannot evaluate the funny one – laughter always belongs to the group (Dmitriev 1996).

David J. Wimer and Bernard C. Beins had the same idea in the basis of their research. They decided to explore what influences the perception of humour for people. Two possible factors were defined after both researches; the first – people receiving information and the second – the amount of people. For proving the influence of both factors two groups of people were formed. The first group received the information about how the other group has evaluated each of the jokes. People were told which jokes were evaluated as “hysterically funny”, “very funny”, “not so funny” or “terribly unfunny”. The other group did not receive the information about how the jokes were evaluated by the other group – in lieu of that the number of people in the group was increased. Results showed that the bigger influence on the perception of jokes was made by the received information, and not by the number of people in the group (Wimer, Beins 2008).

Wimer and Beins explain this result with three possibilities:

1. When one is uncertain of a “correct” response, one may look to others for guidance. As such, one’s beliefs or behaviours may actually change when confronted with information from “people who know”.
2. Maybe manipulation made the humour value of the jokes more salient. For instance, participants in the “very funny” condition may be influenced to devote more cognitive attention to the jokes, which would influence them to process more elements of the jokes; this in turn would lend more value to the jokes.
3. Finally, social sharing may be another explanation. Participants in the “very funny” condition may be influenced to share the amusement of others who apparently enjoy the jokes (Wimer, Beins 2008: 360–361).

By summarizing these three potential explanations, it can be concluded that in any way people were affected by the group. Is it the wish not to be different from others, wish to better understand the other group members or just a wish to support them? – Anyway, we can notice some kind of collective awareness, that creates unconscious wish to act according to the undeclared rules of the group.

There is an article about the humour in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Science* that draws the attention to the fact that there is no other phenomenon in social sciences that would present so much paradoxical contrast, as the humour does (Sills 1972: 1). On the one hand, it could be explained again by the varicosity of humour. But on the other hand, it is due to the fact that every person has its own way of perception. That is why one joke can be incredibly funny for one person, but even disgusting for another. This situation could be even more obvious in the case with caricatures that could be more complicated than in words said joke.

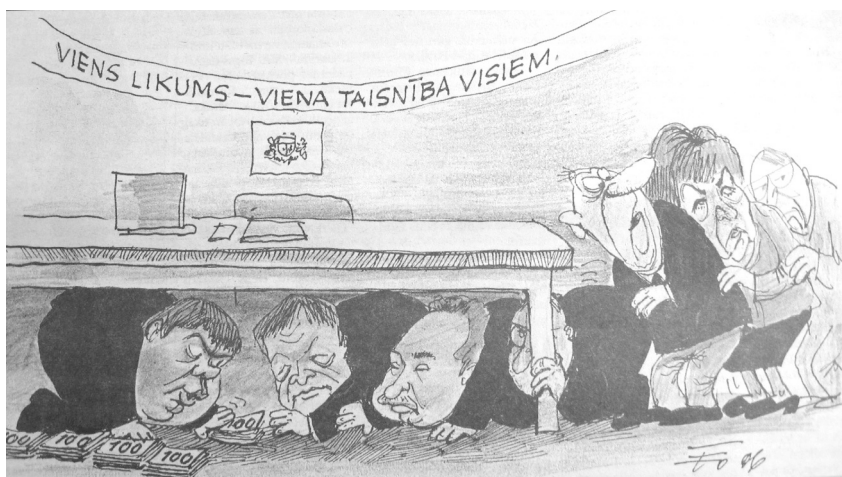
### Caricatures as visual humour – mechanism of its formation and perception

Nowadays caricatures have become more and more popular. It could be explained not only by the increase of visual images in the space around us, it also can be explained by decreased positions of verbal or written word. Humour involves wide comprehension, irony with wide use of epithets, metaphors and synonyms. However, in modern society with slogan “Time is money” people try to express themselves as shortly and concisely as possible. And that is the way how the verbal communication becomes more and more simplified. For example, because of the transition to a new economic form, the differentiation of the society in Latvia (probably not only in Latvia) became more evident. People in it differ by their way of thinking and even more by principled different language of signs in which they express themselves. That is why talking in an elegant way, using synonyms and epithets, is considered as bad form. However, the opulent vocabulary is the base of the verbal jokes (Medenis 2006: 1, 5).

Also the decrease of the number of verbal jokes could be caused by our open-minded society where almost no censorship exists – if only some taboos, about which people even do not want to laugh. The lack of the censorship leads to a question whether

there is a need for verbal jokes at all. If the meaning of an anecdote is to highlight someone's, for example, politician's imperfections, now then it loses its meaning – people can say it openly. That also makes situations when straight-forward critique is accepted as a joke.

Consequently a question – how caricature can still keep its meaningful position in the field of humour – rises. It could be partly explained by Childers' and Houston's thought that people remember pictures better than, for example, verbal messages. This fact could also be supplemented by the power of picture itself. One thing is to say that someone is doing illegal or wrong things, to laugh about someone's looks. But completely other thing is to accomplish it into one picture that shows all those told “defects” with exaggeration, but really clearly. It is like a process where a word obtains its visual expression that shows all the ugliness *per se*.



**Fig. 1.** Written on sign: “One law, one justice to all”. Author: Ēriks Ošs

We think that caricature is one of the most difficult expressions of humour, because its creator needs comprehensive knowledge that:

- 1) could capture all the intended message / information into one picture;
- 2) would be able to present the information with metaphorical codes that would be understandable to the society;
- 3) would induce the planned emotions into the viewers.

In this kind of humour everything is said only by image, sometimes even using no words. If words are used, their meaning is secondary – the main is picture. Moreover, the picture cannot be supplemented by such joke supplementary features as gestures, emotions, intonations or even dialect or defect of speech. Picture substitutes all these features and requires for imagination of the viewer therefore the effect of here and now does not work – mostly caricature can be received after some time when it was made.

The anecdote can be told directly to the receiver of the joke. It gives the opportunity to the teller of the joke to correct or to explain it. Yet once a caricature is made and given to audience for assessment it cannot succumb to any correction. It is only up to the viewer whether he will understand and accept it or deny it. Altogether taken, it creates mediated and distanced communication. That is why there is a request to caricaturist to create interesting and creative visual metaphors which still would be understandable to its viewer. This is where a communication between the creator and the viewer of the caricature starts. The communication will always be successful if both sides have the same association about the object of communication – in this case it is the caricature. But how could this consensus be achieved?

Even a language can work as the creating mechanism of caricatures. One case is when there is some written language used in caricatures as an explanatory means in the form of text or direct speech. But language in this case can be understood as metaphor – picture can create some linguistic expressions. One of the strongest expressions in the humour in general is irony.

Irony is one of the strongest caricaturist's weapons. In the humour, in general, it is mostly used to highlight / reflect something that is wrong or even something evil. Irony in many cases provokes laughter. And Dmitriyev points out that laughter always has been something secondary in regard to the evil. Laughter only reflects the evil in its mirror, but never is the true reason of the evil (Dmitriev 1996). This statement, probably, could be the essence of caricature. Caricature is a mirror – not only for something evil but for the existing situation on the whole. It is also compatible with the idea of metaphor.

That means that caricaturist does really difficult work that requires precision even if the caricature is meant to denote some kind of exaggeration. Wilhelm Šmids has said that irony is an art that allows showing something else. But at the same time it does not peter out in reality that casually exists at that moment. As a result irony allows us to suspect that the reality can be completely different (Šmids 2001: 79).

Hence putting together Dmitriyev's metaphor of mirror and interpreter with Šmids' idea about the irony as a pointer of the other side reality, we can conclude that caricature is a distorting mirror of reality which still shows us the truth though the reflection is deformed.

In fact, caricaturist has to bear huge responsibility. That is why caricaturist needs knowledge!

Also Victor Raskin in his work *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour* mentions experience as one of the factors that constructs the humour. He acknowledges that he does not laugh about things that he was laughing about 20 years ago (Raskin 1985: 4). He determined also six resources of knowledge: *script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, language* (Dmitriev 1996). Both resources and knowledge are obtainable during caricaturist's life and the process of this obtaining is endless. It requests constant work and involvement into the discourses in public space.

After learning all the necessary techniques and resources of humour, caricaturist has to figure out, what and how he will create the distorting mirror. That is when he has to turn to public space. That is the space about what and to whom the caricatures are made. People who create the audience of caricatures are directly involved in this public space. The question is – how caricaturist can attract the attention of as many people as possible? No doubt it could be achieved by “playing” with topical themes that rotate in this public space.

Once the theme of caricature has been chosen, caricaturist again has to return to the choice of the expression. Accordingly, we can divide caricaturists into two types:

- 1) artist-aesthete – in works of these caricaturists the main thing is the aesthetic essence of caricature, not the informative one. The whole information is carried by the caricature itself, so there is no need of the explanatory text;
- 2) aist-philosopher – the main thing for these caricaturists is the information. That is the reason why they supplement their caricatures with the explanatory text (Dmitriev 1996).

To summarize, one part of caricaturists choose to create the distorting mirror only just as the picture. The other part of caricaturists, on the contrary, finds it necessary to explain what they have pictured. This could possibly be due to the fact that caricaturists realize that they have created too incomprehensible reflection in the mirror that no one would understand it. Yet unfair seems the Dmitriyev’s conclusion that people need to have more knowledge to understand the caricatures of the artist-philosopher. He also determined that viewers of these caricatures are more valuable, but viewers of artist-aesthete caricatures can be referred to as “culture of masses”. We believe that more knowledge is requested to understand the caricatures of the artist-aesthete, because of this simple reason – lack of explanation. Artist-aesthete provides the viewer only with the picture therefore the result of its interpretation is up to the viewer himself. Whether the caricature will be understood depends on the experience and knowledge of the viewer.

The second agent of this communication – the viewer of caricature – leads us to the question about his knowledge. Since humour is the way of communication, it needs not only to be created but also to be heard. That is why it takes at least two people so the humour could exist. That is why the viewer is important as the receiver of the message.

Jennifer Hay draws our attention to the fact that there is the ignorance of humour receiver in most of the humour studies. And that is completely wrong because the receiver has a significant role in construction of discourse on humour (Hay 2001: 56). The main part is plaid by them while giving the support. Hay criticizes the fact that there is this widely established thought that the only support to humour is laugh. But it is wrong opinion and she gives four more ways how the receiver of joke or, in our case, the viewer of caricature can give his support:

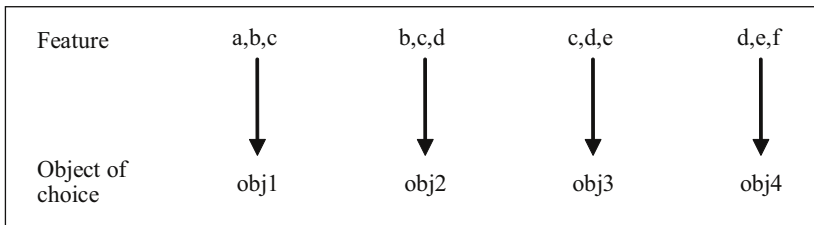
- 1) recognition of the humour;
- 2) comprehension of the humour;

3) assessment of the humour;

4) agreement with the message of the humour (Hay 2001: 55).

After identifying the ways of support, it can be concluded that this support could be reached only in case the viewer has knowledge. But that does not mean that this knowledge has to be the same as the caricaturist has. Although, they definitely have to be similar. This obstacle is most possible in case both actors of the communication come from one community, public space mentioned before. Common codes and values, the exact processes and people in one particular space circulate there.

However, a common space is not a secure guarantee to perfect awareness between both agents of communication. Greg Urban explained this in picture below. He considers that the fact that cultural objects are very changeable makes it impossible to talk about some stable cultural codes that affect human mind.



**Fig. 2.** Schema of identification of cultural objects (Bowen, Petersen 1999)

The schema of identification of cultural objects shows the way how the features of precise object change in the course of time. It happens when new features come and replace the existing ones. But this figure can be interpreted differently: it can also show that each person chooses the features that he wants to receive and accept. This way also depicts that the choice of objects could be referable to humour. In conclusion, this figure shows that any object of culture, also humour, undergoes changes already in the context of one society / community where it was created and most actively circulates.

That is why a misunderstanding appears there; even in one particular society about the interpretation of one phenomenon. It makes the situation understandable when the disagreement is even bigger in a global society where uncountable variations of cultural codes exist. That allows us to conclude that humour can experience changes in its nature and also in the perception of it. The changes of nature of humour can be illustrated with the examples of those caricatures that made some negative reaction from other communities (for example, the caricatures of Mohamed published in Denmark). This is an example how caricature can lose its feature of entertainment and joy-bringing way of humour and become offensive and blasphemous anger-provoking. It also can be evidenced in case when perception of caricature differs.

To conclude, caricaturist needs knowledge to create the caricature also for the viewer of caricatures to understand them. That could help him understand, for



example, such element as irony. Šmids describes irony as the deepest understanding because it refuses definitive determination of things and identity. It also plays with ambiguity that cannot be precisely included in any concept. It is a game with contradictions and diversity. It could seem that those two exclude one another but in fact, they are joined together to prove the truth of life (Šmids 2001: 80). Conceivability of the irony is the key to the effectiveness of the irony. Irony is the way how caricaturist inspires the viewer to feel superiority over the caricatures (Šmids 2001: 80). That is one way how knowledge-based understanding can bring positive emotional experience to the viewer.

Still there is a need for the bigger power to start some kind of movement. The same could be said about the caricatures – caricaturists need wider knowledge than the viewer. Caricaturists are in charge of creating the distorting mirror. The possibility and will to understand it is voluntary. The citizen of Riga (Latvia) Benita Placena can approve that. She has an interesting collection – the caricatures with the motive of lonely island. There are more than 2000 caricatures in her collection. She has also drawn earlier in her life so one day she decided to draw a caricature by herself about her favourite theme – the lonely island. However, she could not make up anything. That is when she understood how talented and quick-witted the caricaturist should be (Drēziņš 2006: 30).

A quantitative research was made, during which 736 caricatures made by three caricaturists that were publicized in the newspaper *Newspaper of Latvia* were over-viewed. The research gave the data that showed what kinds of elements are used to create the caricature.

The most often used element was irony – it was used in 80% of caricatures to depict the reality. Irony was set apart from sarcasm or critique, which are sharper and abusive. They were noticed only in 13% of caricatures. That shows that caricaturists, at least in Latvia, do not try to be abusive by an offensive towards someone; they truly want to show the reality. That is because critique or abusive remarks are sometimes not objective but very subjective.

As the second most popular element in creation of caricatures is pun. On the one hand, it could disclaim the previous statement that the picture of caricature replaces the verbal text. But on the other hand, it has to be clear that in the case of caricature the text is really only supplement to caricature. Sometimes the word game in caricatures is accomplished as the game with characters. The next most used elements were the characters of famous people and symbols / visual metaphors. That brings us back to the knowledge matter. Viewer of the caricature has to know something to be able to recognise it. You have to know the person, his position in public space in order to understand the caricature.

It can be said that knowledge of one particular element, for example, the symbol, can replace knowledge of another element, for example, identification of people. For example, we can take the caricature below. One of the main symbols here is a hockey player with the uniform of the best hockey team in Latvia. Though you do not have to

know the symbolism of the uniform to understand that he is the winner – you just see other symbols that asserts that (cups, a uniform of judge as a carpet).

This creative communication between the caricaturist and the viewer is made, which is based on interpersonal understanding and this, in turn, is based on similar experience that creates similar knowledge. It is also the way how this communication becomes equal. Harvey Weiss suggests that the caricaturist, by inviting their viewers to read “between the lines” of what is drawn or portrayed, offers a “caricature literature” which permits them a grand opportunity to “eat it” (Al-Shaikh 2007: 67). Meaning that the caricaturist invites the viewer to an interesting game where the game itself is as important as the outcome.

It is more likely that people would accept such invitation gladly! However they also set the rules. The viewers want this “caricature literature” would not be direct, clearly realizable at first sight. When directing information towards a large number of people, the best information forms will be those allowing broad variety of interpretations, i.e. information that allows personal interpretations of different types. In this respect, the picture as a code form for the message becomes very interesting (Ginman, Ungern-Sternberg 2003: 76). The reason being the following: it is a challenge to understand the joke, but the solution of it is the source of satisfaction. That is the reason why humour loses its power and attraction when it is too obvious. For example, it was discovered that children are choosing more and more difficult jokes by the time they are developing (Sills 1972: 3), so it means – by the time they are improving their knowledge.



Fig. 3. Author: Gatis Šļūka

Each creator of some object, event or statement is waiting for the positive response to his work. However, this reaction is not just simple acceptance. It could be interpreted as a process of division into “us” and “them”. By accepting the joke with a laugh, a person wittingly or unawares separates himself from those who do not understand or accept the joke. As Dmitriyev argues there are different markers used in one or another group to prove the connection of his identity with the identity of the definite group of people. These symbols of the group identity – gestures, clothes, language, haircut, jokes – work as the basic sign which helps people to identify the similar people and divide from the others (Dmitriev 1996).

Bergson even defined laughter as some kind of conspiracy with other people who are laughing (Dmitriev 1996). The explanation for that is the fact that one thing can be funny for one person, but for another – completely opposite. The reason for that is the previously described importance of the values and the comprehension of the caricature. If we know the fact that the values differ in each society, we can see the direct cause of differences in perception of humour – different nation, different values, different understanding.

The caricature could be described as most national type of humour. If anecdotes are rotating among different nations and experience the modifications, caricature has its author, who is known, and the caricature cannot experience any modifications. It is created once and excludes possibility that it will be modified once entering the other society. That is the reason why Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh with conviction called Palestinian caricatures as national pictorial narrative (Al-Shaikh 2007: 66).

Summarizing the above written, humour has its dangerous side. It divides people that can also lead to serious conflicts (good example is the story about Danish caricature of Mohammad). On that account it would be interesting to clarify whether there is any possibility that a caricature would be understood in more than one country, with the exception of the one it was created in. For that reason, the next chapter will overview the research that was made in spring of 2010.

### Results of research in Latvia and Russia

During the research a survey in Latvia and Russia was organized. Altogether there were received 400 filled questionnaires from Latvia and 253 from Russia.

The aim of the survey was to find out whether there is any difference between the perceptions of humour by people from both countries. Ten caricatures were placed at the end of the questionnaire from which each respondent had to choose three and then had to explain his / her choice. The chosen caricatures were drawn by Latvian caricaturist Gatis Šļūka. The aim was to find neutral caricatures that reflect different themes – black humour, political humour, absurd humour, erotic humour, etc. – where people from different countries could perceive the right codes.

As a result, data showed that the choice of respondents from both countries is quite similar. In the first line there are five caricatures showed that were chosen by Latvian respondents, but in the second line – by Russian respondents.



Texts in caricatures: 2. Oh my God! The crisis is in staircase! – And the flu at the main door!  
 3. Stop snoring! 4. I just joked! (Planet is dancing on the posters with signs “Stop Global Warming”) 5. Red light district in Venice



Texts in caricatures: 1. Red light district in Venice. 3. Stop snoring! 4. Oh my God! The crisis is in staircase! – And the flu at the main door! 5. I just joked! (Planet is dancing on the posters with signs “Stop Global Warming”)

**Figs. 4–5.** Author: Gatis Šūka

As we can see, the choice of respondents from both countries is similar (and the first caricature in Russian list outweighs the next caricature only with one voice). Undoubtedly, it can be concluded that caricature depicting cars hanged in trees was sending the same messages to its viewers in both countries. This statement could be enforced by the following fact: many Russian respondents thought that caricatures that were drawn by Latvian caricaturist about the situation in Latvia greatly represent the situation in Russia. One respondent even declared that the caricature with cars hanged in trees represents the quick-witted Russian mind that can solve any problem: “I choose the one that greatly represents the situation in Russia. I would like to call it: ‘Quick-witted Russian mind that can solve any problem!’”. That is an interesting fact that a Russian sees his national identity in caricature made by Latvian about the situation in Latvia.

Accordingly, people from both countries have the same baggage of knowledge not only to understand the caricature but also make identification with it. That does not mean that there exists a share of one identity (that Latvians and Russians have the same identity). That can be explained in the common history that lasted for 50 years and that has established some common values, and with common experience there were established some opinions about the processes that happen. The best example is the caricature with cars hanged up in the trees. Both in Latvia and Russia any type of jokes about the roads, traffic, and law (about the bad condition of roads, about the braking of driving regulations, about the corruption, about different accidents with traffic signs, etc.) are popular. This particular caricature has touched the common

experience that was recognized and accepted by respondents from both countries as their own.

Reviewing caricatures of different countries, it can be concluded that most often caricaturists depict different politicians in this mirror. When we look back on the history, we can see that caricatures as we understand them today became notable as political weapon. As it was mentioned before, politicians were the ones who recognized the power of caricatures and started to use them to hold up to ridicule their political opponents or even other nations. Nevertheless, nowadays this “political order” does not work and even has turned to their first contracting authority. Now caricaturists choose to picture what they want, and mostly it is the source of the biggest evil in people’s minds – politicians themselves. It seems like never-ending topical object for irony and other humoristic tools. Still that is a humour to a rather narrow group of people – mostly delimited by the borders of their country (exception could be such popular politicians as Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin, etc.). It can be said that political caricatures are mostly nationally tended. As it was mentioned before, a quantitative research was made during which 736 Latvian caricatures were overviewed. This survey showed that all caricatures reproducing politics were made about the local politicians and political processes.

On the contrary, the caricatures that were chosen by respondents are the most widely recognizable ones. There are codes that a wider group of people can recognize.

Especially it could be more common to countries which have shared history and social and economic praxis, like Latvia and Russia during the Soviet times. Because of some similarities in geographical position, a caricature that tells about the weather issues (where the planet has joked about the Global warming) is also recognizable.

Still there is also an opposite example that could be represented in interesting opinions; see the caricature below.



**Fig. 6.** Author: Gatis Šļūka

The original idea of this caricature was to show the corruption scandal where Mercedes-Benz took part; it took place at the beginning of the year 2010. That is the original idea, but interpretations of it were really interesting:

- “Sign of Mercedes and money. Who has Mercedes, has money, and in the other way – who has money drives Mercedes” (Latvian respondent);
- “It reflects the drivers of this car well” (Latvian respondent);
- “The Mercedes symbol is pictured as quite the original with the amount of money that is necessary to buy it” (Russian respondent);
- “Laconically and precisely. It has a philosophical thought about the problem of the monopolization in the market of cars and in the market on the whole” (Russian respondent);
- “It reflects the essence of Russia, viewpoint of people, especially of militia” (Russian respondent).

As we can see, respondents from both countries recognized in this caricature the wealth of Mercedes owners. It could mean that even wrong interpretation could be the same in different countries, if there is the same experience that results in the same comprehension of the symbols. It shows that the same experience and knowledge can lead to the same wrong interpretation. Anyway, the key-concept is “the same”. It proves the conjunctive (or opposite – segregationist) nature of the caricatures and of the jokes in general. As it was also proved in theoretical overview about the humour and caricatures, everything is based on knowledge that could be based both on academic knowledge or experienced situations.

## Conclusions

Humour has different ways of expressions. This article is just a little insight into a theme that shows the mechanism of circulation of the visual expression of humour in the society – the caricature.

Caricature is specific medium of communication between its creator and its viewer. Nevertheless this communication cannot always be successful. To make it positive, both agents need somewhat similar experience and knowledge, which they could use creatively in definite situations. Caricature as a medium will make a complete circle – it will begin with work of the caricaturist and end up with the understanding and perception of the viewer.

Knowledge and experience divides not only individuals – it divides also bigger communes of people, for example, nations. That is why humour can also be the one that creates this division. The survey that was displayed in the article proves that certain codes that are clear not only locally but in the broader area exist there. That could mean that there exist such phenomena as the global joke. It just needs a skilled, knowledgeable and witty caricaturist who faces a knowledgeable and insightful viewer. Both agents participate in creative communication that allows discussing current events, as well to censure or just uplift someone with the help of visual metaphors. In conclusion, caricatures can be not only a serious object to look at but also a serious one to study.

## References

- Al-Shaikh, A. R. 2007. Historiographies of Laughter Poetics of Deformation in Palestinian Political Cartoon, *Third Text* 21(1): 65–78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528820601138626>
- Barnouw, E. et al. (Ed.). 1989. *International Encyclopedia of Communications*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bowen, J. R.; Petersen, R. 1999. Introduction: Critical Comparisons, in Bowen, J. R.; Petersen, R. (Eds.). *Critical Comparisons in Politics and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–20.
- Childers, T. L.; Houston, M. J. 1984. Conditions for a Picture-Superiority Effect on Consumer Memory, *The Journal of Consumer Research* 11(2): 643–654. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/209001>
- Dmitriev, A. 1996. *Sociologija iumora. Oчерki*. Moskva: Rossijskaia akademija nauk.
- Drēziņš, A. 2006. Krāt vīstulās salas, *Latvijas Avīze* 91(2642): 30.
- Epp, M. 2010. The Imprint of Affect: Humor, Character and National Identity in American Studies, *Journal of American Studies* 44(1): 47–65. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021875809990788>
- Ginman, M.; Ungern-Sternberg, S. 2003. Cartoons as Information, *Journal of Information Science* 29(1): 69–77.
- Hay, J. 2001. The Pragmatics of Humor Support, *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 14(1): 55–82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/humr.14.1.55>
- Medenis, D. 2006. Ardievas anekdotei, *Rūdiens* 31(107): 1, 5.
- Raskin, V. 1985. *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Sills, D. L. (Ed.). 1972. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Vol. 7. London: Collier-Macmillan Publishers, 1–7.
- Šmids, V. 2001. *Skaista dzīve? Ievads dzīves mākslā*. Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC.
- Vejleskov, H. 2001. A Distinction Between “Small humor” and “Great Humor” and Its Relevance to the Study of Children’s Humor, *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 14(4): 323–338. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/humr.2001.008>
- Wimer, D. J.; Beins, B. C. 2008. Expectations and Perceived Humor, *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 21(3): 347–363. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/HUMOR.2008.016>

## KARIKATŪRA KAIP KŪRYBINIS DARBAS JO KŪRĒJUI IR SUVOKĒJUI

Evija Zača

Santrauka

Nūdien esame liudininkais tendencijos, kai vizualumas išstumia verbalumą. Ši tendencija neaplenkia ir humoro: karikatūra, kaip jo vizualioji išraiška, yra toji vizualinė metafora, kuri užėmė svarbią vietą humoristikoje. Karikatūros tapo iškreipiančiu veidrodžiu, rodančiu deformuotą, bet dar pakankamai reprezentatyvią realybę. Humoras yra svarbi mūsų kasdienio gyvenimo komunikacijos

dalį, aprėpanti daugelį jo sričių – rinką, politiką, darbo santykius ir t. t. Štai kodėl karikatūros tapo svarbiu įrankiu, pavyzdžiui, politiniuose ginčuose. Šiame straipsnyje parodoma, kaip, viena vertus, sukuriama šis iškreipiantis veidrodis ir, kita vertus, koks atvaizdas jame regimas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: karikatūra, kūrybingumas, humoras, ironija, žinojimas.

*Received 5 September 2011; accepted 20 December 2011*