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RUNNING HEAD: Interpreting Experience

**Bakhtin's Chronotope, Connotations, & Discursive Psychology: Towards a Richer  
Interpretation of Experience**

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### Abstract

In this paper, we draw on the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope to make the theoretical argument that the turn to embodiment can be supplemented through a consideration of connotation in discursive psychology. We use Billig's conception of linguistic repression as a test-case as to how connotation can supplement discursive analysis, but using our own interview material to do so. From establishing the case that connotation, understood through the lens of chronotope, is potentially of vital interest to discursive psychology, we move to drawing out three implications for this for doing qualitative research differently. First of all, we suggest that researchers need to feel the chronotope of the interview to manage its connotations *in vivo*. Secondly, we draw attention to the role of the absent other in everyday speech and how this absent other can be analysed differently to a typical discourse analysis - as layering connotations into speech. Finally, we draw attention to the hermeneutic attitude of earnest irony when doing research as a further means of generating as well as managing connotations.

Keywords: Chronotope, Direct Speech, Billig, Repression, Carnival, Connotation

## **Bakhtin's Chronotope, Eros, & Discursive Psychology: Towards a Richer Interpretation of Experience**

### **Introduction**

A little over two decades ago, discursive psychologists pointed out how psychologists' language about psychological phenomena did not *denote* reality like a mirror reflects what is actually present (see Sampson, 1991). Psychological language constructs what psychologists take to be true and discursive psychologists showed how an ethnocentric individualist expression of psychology is not necessary. With that, an opening was created for a range of methods of investigating the social production of 'psychology' as a resource used in conversational contexts. While many psychological denotations were revealed to be reflective of social power relations - such as prejudice (Potter and Wetherell, e.g. 1987), gender and class (Walkerdine, e.g. 2017) and the unconscious (Billig, e.g. 1999a, 1999b) - and emergent from patterns of interactional footing, the recent turn to 'emodiment' and 'lived experience' suggests a new direction for this history. This is because discursive psychology is especially adept at demonstrating how people discursively construct what they know about psychology yet runs the risk of relegating experience to the realm of epistemic knowledge: something that we talk about. Current thinking in the area seeks to push further to sociocultural constitution of psychology by exploring experience (e.g. Cresswell, 2012, Cromby, 2015). This extension is predicated on the claim that discursive psychology insufficiently addresses experience.

Epistemologically, we know from Burkitt (2014) and others that embodiment is crucial to understanding knowledge and identity, but we have only just begun to unpack how

embodiment can be studied methodologically. Cromby (2015), Cresswell (2012) and others have started this project. How do researchers include the richness of human experience in their work while not collapsing back into some sort of essentialism from which discursive psychologists have already freed us? In this article, we will look at 'embodiment' in a slightly different way. In particular, we will look at how we 'embody' self and others in our conversation through referencing or feeling connotations in direct speech.

We will first of all (our first argument) draw on the Bakhtinian concepts of 'chronotope' (space and time) and 'voice', as an epiphanic sign (Leiman, 2002), to demonstrate the benefit of an approach concerned with the social management of connotation. On a very practical level, we illustrate how the neglect of 'connotation' has led to neglect of 'voice' in qualitative analysis by way of illustrative extracts. To illustrate our claims, we discuss Billig's (1999a, 1999b) work on rhetoric and particularly on Freud as the former shows how repression and desire (what we call 'eros' in this article) can be understood as a sociolinguistic activity and so offers an illustration of how experience can be approached from a discursive perspective. We have chosen Billig's work as a case-study because of his sophisticated theorisation of rhetoric. Unlike others in the discursive tradition, he views rhetoric as both 'internal' (e.g. the "internal critic") and external or public. Our position is that Billig treats eros or 'desire' as the subversion of social rules in talk but there is no explanation as to why eros-as-anti-normative is pleasure-full. Through a discussion of denotation and connotation we show how discursive psychologists end up in a different form of denotation. As such, our work is not methodological per se: it is about a paradigm shift that enables us to rectify the bypass of connotation.

From here, we develop our second argument in the direction of enriching research practice. We outline how carnivalesque connotation involves the inversion of rules that is full of pleasure, as Billig claims, but we add an analytic focus on the aesthetic creativity of laughter to articulate what makes rule breaking pleasure-full. We argue for research addressing aesthetic creativity as the pleasure that constitutes eros: laughter is pleasure in subversion that moves us forward in novel ways. Ultimately, such focus leads to more robust understanding of human experience.

### **Denotation & Connotation Inspired by Bakhtin**

One of Bakhtin's most interesting essays vein emerged from his interest in Einstein's work on relativity and it is on the topic of what he called the "chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1981). Chronotope entails the notion of the time and space – including the corporeal placement of a body in situated times and space – and Bakhtin accomplishes two tasks in his discussion of this concept.

One, Bakhtin shows how time and space are expressed in the experiences of heroes in literary works. He describes how time and space are not merely metaphorical tropes because chronotope involves the blending of concrete life with aesthetic expression. That is, he develops the notion of chronotope to show how literature is intrinsically linked to embodied life. Chronotopes involve the ways that the world is entwined with literary expression and so, for example, he sees aesthetic expression as "grafted" to a particular space and time (p. 225). His discussion of Rabelais is a prominent illustration of how aesthetic expression builds links between events of life. Rabelais' work involves discussion of the body and the space of life that gives the text a visceral quality. The places and times of aesthetic expression are entwined

with them and so readers participate in the chronotope of Renaissance carnival, and all of its connotations, when engaging Rabelais. There is a false hierarchy between objects and ideas that Bakhtin is attempting to dismantle. In the case of naïve materialism, he is dismantling the primacy of raw material as a privileged form and, in the case of idealism, he is dismantling the primacy of Platonic ideal forms that are disembodied. Time (historical situatedness) and space are inseparably entwined with ideas in aesthetic expression and he seeks to follow Rabelais in returning a materiality to language and meaning (see Bandlamudi, 2015, for an excellent theoretical overview of carnival and psychology).

Empirically, consider an illustrative excerpt from an interview conducted by a student working with the first-author. This excerpt comes from an interview where participants were asked about their religious experience doubts and how such doubts are reconciled. The transcript has been transcribed using Jefferson transcription motivation and it is the kind of excerpt one would normally see in a discursive analysis<sup>1</sup>:

Excerpt 19:30

Turn	Speaker	Tex
13	Interviewer	yeah yeah (.3) w'tha's great. um is th'anything else you'd li't' add uh about. experiences uh. about adolescen::ce? ah spiritual experiences. I-
14	Participant	when I was a kid ya'know I was a n-rebel
15	I	He-heh
16	P	I'd go to bible camp an' try to skip <u>chapel</u>
17	I	He-heh
18	P	So hehe ch'a (laugh)- ya know
19	I	Righ-
20	P	An' y'know tha was because I wasn't <u>get</u> ting anything ouda-it. OTHER than the social aspect.
21	I	Righ'
22	P	I loved that (laugh)
23	I	yeah

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<sup>1</sup> All of the illustrative excerpts come from the same interview and so we denote the excerpts using the start time in the interview.

Typically, a discursive analysis would attend to the rhetorical positioning such as the participant orienting herself as a rebel (turn 14), while still being a religious believer throughout the entire interview. Bakhtin's notion of chronotope reorients our interpretive work to the places mentioned like "bible camp" and "chapel" (turn 16). Orienting the interviewer to being a rebel and going to such camp is integrated with an experience of laughter. The meaning of the places and how they are aesthetically combined in the text to entail ironic experience is chronotopic.

The second task to which Bakhtin sets himself with the notion of chronotope is subtle and it is to show how time and space are relativized and non-linear. He argues that, if "...taken outside its relationship to past and future, the present loses its integrity, breaks it into isolated phenomena and objects, making of them a mere abstract conglomeration." (1981, p. 146). Engaging an aesthetic expression like a literary work involves breaking down temporal boundaries where chronotopes of the past are entwined with present expression. It is for this reason that much of his work involves tracking the development of and emergence of the modern novel. He writes, for example, about various forms of ancient Greek aesthetics and shows how biography and autobiography are the same thing; they are all are public. This chronotope expresses a time and space where the radical interiority of modern life was not present. He notes how the modern novel, in contrast, involves a private life and is an expression of a chronotope where such interiority is embodied in life. The modern novel is an expression of searching into private spheres of how people live. Qualities of the ancient Greek chronotope do not disappear but are brought to bear in the expression of the modern novel, albeit in stylized expressions. He notes how elements of life are sublimated into other forms and so, for example, the autobiography provides material to create isolated individual



consciousness in modern times. The chief aspect of the relativity of times and space that matters to Bakhtin is the survival and continuance of laughter from prehistory into modern aesthetic expression, which will be central as we develop our argument and so we return to this idea below. At this point, it is important to realize that literary chronotopes are not necessarily replaced but can be part of a contemporary literary expression.

The modern novel expressed multiple chronotopes in simultaneous juxtaposition and this is the polyphony that resonated so well with the notion of relativity. Bakhtin writes that Dostoevsky had a

profound understanding of the dialogical nature of human thought, the dialogic nature of the idea. ... The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. (1984a, p. 88).

This quote illuminates an important implication that many chronotopes in the modern psyche are simultaneously present. Polyphony means that chronotopes are layered over one another in a simultaneous moment. The excerpt above involves the chronotope of bible camps and the kinds of things one ought to do at bible camp, which are the opposite of what the participants claims to have done. There her chronotopic expression of rebellion and going to bible camp for the wrong reasons layered over and implicitly has meaning by virtue of a differing chronotope: a time-place meaning where one got some sort of spiritual development from camp. Invoking

these two chronotopes may be recognized in DP as an in situ action but it bypasses how their experiential meaning is simultaneously present in the ironic action of the speaker.

The modern psyche thereby is populated with experiences rooted in chronotopes that may or may not resonate with one another.

Polyphony means that there are multiple chronotopes at play in a given moment and these can be experienced in terms of oneself or in terms of the chronotopes embodied by interlocutors. People are always taking others into account in a rich sense that includes such dynamics and Bakhtin writes that a consciousness

is pulled into interaction with other consciousnesses. In Dostoevsky, it never gravitates towards itself but is always found in intense relationship with other consciousnesses.

Every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, or is on the contrary open to inspiration from outside itself – but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person. It could be said that Dostoevsky offers, in artistic form, something like a sociology of consciousnesses...” (1984a, p. 32).

As such, there are tensions that involve competing experiences of being compelled to enact more than one chronotope simultaneously and this is the grounds for novel creativity.

Leiman (2002) refers to the embodied sense of other voices that we encounter or read, even though they are far away or dead as the ‘epiphanic sign’:

Because there is no established terminology to address this aspect, I have chosen to call it the ‘*epiphanic*’ quality of signs... A Finnish poet, Kai Nieminen (2000), has recently articulated this characteristic very aptly: ‘Translating literature is so fantastic because

authors long-ago dead become almost physically familiar. The author's voice and living spirit are always born when reading a book' (as cited in Leiman, 2002, p.227).

We would add to this that the other moves from an alternative chronotope of the past into the present speech (most notably in direct speech). It may not just be a chronotope of a distant or recent past however. Morson and Emerson (1990) outline how chronotopes of the present foreshadow (anticipating a future such as in utopia) side-shadow (such as alternative presents – "I would now be") and backshadow (e.g. looking back with nostalgia) alternative chronotopes.

This discussion of experience inspires a sophisticated discussion of connotation and denotation that gets at the kind of experiential tensions explored in psychoanalysis.

Denotation involves a simplistic approach to language where a sign gains meaning through a referent, but the

[t]he connotations of a language expression are pragmatic effects that arise from encyclopaedic knowledge about its denotation (or reference) *and also from experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about the contexts* in which the expression is typically used. ... connotations are conventional associations activated by an expression as additions to its 'primary lexical meaning'. In logic, the term connotation is more or less synonymous with 'intension' or what many linguists call '*sense*'. (Allan, 2007, pp. 1047-1048; emphasis added).

Allan illuminates how denotation may seem to be part of an utterance when one asks what the utterance is about, but connotation indwells any expression of language. The outcome is that meaning is never a mere matter of denotation, which is a central focus for concern of discursive psychologists. Where we seek to expand discursive psychology can come to the foreground

through a discussion of connotations. Connotations involve the layering of chronotopes simultaneously as one expresses them, and so different times and spaces can be simultaneously expressed in an utterance. Such epiphanic signs involve multiple ‘senses’ expressed in an utterance because different modes of embodiment are expressed at once. The “experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about” contexts are the differing chronotopes entailed in an utterance.

Rather than viewing connotation as a problem or a difficulty, from the point of view of chronotopes, connotation has significant potential for the study of human psychology. Since chronotopes are embodied, they are constitutive of human experience. The expression of an utterance populated with connotation involves the simultaneous expression of multiple chronotopes populating the sociology of consciousness. The excerpt that we presented and the comments that we made are about the connotations that entwine chronotopes. The irony and laughter we see in turns 18 and 22 are predicated on connotations to the kind of chronotope (experience and ideology) that bible camps ought to be in contrast to the kind of inverted chronotope that the participant engaged. Connotations of both chronotopes constitute the irony in the present time-space of a research interview. All three chronotopes entwine in the ironic comments and laughter emerges in the experiential connotations.

Negotiating these (sometimes contradictory) connotations is a hallmark of particularly troubling articulations of experience that grapples with the kinds of experiential tensions noted in psychoanalysis. Repression and other psychoanalytic notions can be understood along the lines of being epiphanic signs embroiled in connotations, but to see how this can be so requires a discussion of discursive psychology and Michael Billig, in particular.

### A Test-Case for Connotation: Billig's Linguistic Repression

Billig (1996) is one of the central figures in discursive psychology and he has shown how the rhetorical use of language enables a different approach to notions like the unconscious and repression (see 1999a, 1999b). In traditional psychoanalysis, Brown (1985) argues that psychic conflict is a state where there are different aspects of oneself that are at odds with one another. When the traumatic event is not acknowledged one is in conflict. For example, on the one hand one desires to express emotions and ideas surrounding the event. On the other hand, one desires not to express the emotions and desires surrounding the event. What happens is that the conflict results in the kinds of compulsive behaviours that get labels such as neuroses.

In contrast to this view of psychodynamics, Billig echoes Voloshinov's (2012) critique of Freudianism by discussing how conversation plays an important role in psychodynamic processes. Freud pointed out that release of emotion symptoms came about through conversation and so highlighted the importance of conversation in terms of recovery. What Billig picks up from the Bakhtin circle is the companionable notion that language may also be integral to the discursive construction of emotional symptoms in the first place. That is, if conversation is integral to the alleviation of repression then it is reasonable to consider that conversation may be integral to the preceding repression. Freud's mistake, argues Billig, was treating deeply unconscious thoughts as essentially non-verbal instinctual desires. Freud missed how language is central to thinking and how emotions that we take to be conscious or unconscious are not pure inner states. Billig shows how the formation of repression is not addressed in Freud and turning to the social construction of psychological phenomena through

language illuminates how repression can occur through social interaction and highlights how emotions are not wordless. Acknowledging that speakers perform action with language highlights how the “battleground” of the psyche is not between language and wordless instinct. He locates repression in the realm of language by arguing that it works through people’s rhetorical skill at using language in an argumentative context. Consider the following

illustration:

Excerpt 54:25

Turn	Speaker	Text
35	Interviewer	Yeah (.5) s’um (1) In ligh - in ligh of yur question::ing of-yer beliefs. Um. an things such-as y’know. where has Jesus-body gon::e and. um the <u>ascension</u> an-an <u>things</u> that aren’t quite clear. um how’r how are these. uhm beliefs clarified. Like how-ave you <u>resolved</u> -
36	Participant	I don’t-worry about’em.
37	I	Y’ don’ worry about em?
38	P	no
39	I	so um, y’would-you would say you wouldn’t-
40	P	I trust.
41	I	Y’trust. so rationale. Y’wouldnt put rationale a’t the <u>forefront</u> u-of pickin apart those issues-
42	P	O - I guess I trus’ tha gaw- if-h-created the <u>worl</u> (laughs) th’h’knows what he’s doing. Hehe[he (laughs)
43	I	[ummmmm
44	P	I don’know I ga’some books on th - ((name)) has. has um er tol’m me tha’ I’tthough would be <u>helpful</u> an’ I’ve read a little bit of’em. Bu- cuz y’get into the <u>science</u> . An-a there’s some good books ou’t there thas he’s <u>recommended</u> . A-unfortunately I <u>have</u> no’ really <u>studied</u> those as much as I - s’it’s a continual. Y’know I will I-I thin the who::le chapter er’t the whole book of <u>genesis</u> . Y’know is <u>myth</u> . Bu’t there’s allota of <u>truth</u> in it. ...

The interviewer turns to a discussion of questioning one’s own position on aspects of religion that are not clear. Note in turns 36 and 38 how the participant cuts the interviewer off. The statements orient us and the interviewer to the way that these aspects are simply not part of consideration. Billig’s rhetorical framework allows us to see Freudian ‘repression’ as a linguistic action. Note, however, how the interviewer continues and the participant (turn 42) again contests the value of discussing the doubts by invoking irony. A longer account emerges in turn

44, but this account, seen through the prism of Billig's framework of rhetoric, continues to reinforce the act of repression because it rhetorically shifts the consideration of doubts to another source: an author. People's language-actions push "thoughts" away as they are not constructed as per the flow of interaction and the polemic choices people make prevent thoughts from being real possibilities.

Billig suggests that, if Freud had spoken about repression as language-action, he would have noted how it emerges through changing the topic or other forms of replacing one expression with another. Like Freud (1958), Billig points to the small minutiae of talk to highlight how we switch topics or redirect psychological phenomena through other discontinuities like false starts or subtle action. For example, Billig's framework draws our attention to turn 44 where the participant stutters: "have no' really studied those as much as I – s'it's a continual..." Invoking the first person pronoun would take responsibility back to the participant to study if she had admitted that she has not studied as much as she should. Rather than invoking the "should", she stutters and changes the topic. This is the kind of false start that gestures to repression as an action in language. Such unsaid – yet rhetorically effective – action provides clues to the rhetorical nature of repression on Billig's account. To be effective in our conversations with others, we thereby need to repress in this rhetorical sense and researchers need to acknowledge that conscious emotion is not a non-verbal impulse because it is a judgment that is rhetorically contested. He argues that what is pushed from consciousness is not bodily feeling, but a means of interpreting and therein constructing psychological emotions.

Billig lies within the tradition of discursive psychology that seeks to avoid a denotative approach to language by building the case that meaning is constructed in situ. The challenge is that removing a fixed referent in determining meaning does not guarantee that one avoids denotation. His analysis of the excerpt above would be about accountability and dealing with the aspects of religious beliefs that one may doubt. Billig and discursive psychologists offer the possibility of shifting what talk is about but still remain in the realm of denotation because they offer an approach to account for what talk is about.

A focus on connotation, would complement this by looking at how connotations are managed by intonation (See also Sullivan's 2012 critique of Billig). Consider the connotations and chronotopic experience entailed in the excerpt above. The interviewer's stammering in turn 35 is populated with embodied experiences as a comparatively younger interviewer asks a question of much older adult. The trepidation in the question is connoted in the structure of the talk. The contrasting certitude enacted by the participant in turn 36 with a radically different experiential connotation is central to interpreting this interaction. We move through the text by participating in the chronotope of the interview and Billig's analysis is predicated on this to explain the rhetorical positioning. Connotative intonations, such as the confidence, uncertainty and the anticipation of condemnation are the chronotopic background through which denotations are articulated.



### What should qualitative researchers do differently?

In this next part of the article, we draw attention to three follow-on implications of connotations for what researchers should do differently: 1) Understanding the tensions in interviews; 2) Drawing attention to embodied voice as opposed to discourse; 3) giving a space to the ironic in research practice. The first is a relatively brief look at managing connotations in the interview context; the second a more in-depth look at managing connotations embedded in quotations and the third implication asks for a re-orientation towards the ironic in qualitative research.

### Feeling Interview Tensions and Managing Their Connotations

Without participating in the chronotope of the interview, we cannot understand the tensions we see in the conversation and the act of linguistically repressing doubts becomes shallow. Researchers need to *feel* it. These connotations are nicely expressed by Iris Murdoch's critique of language-use philosophy

Words may well mislead us...since words are often stable while concepts alter; we have a different concept of courage at forty from that which we had at twenty. A deepening process, at any rate an altering and complicating process, takes place. (1970, p. 28).

Here, the view of 'thoughts' that Billig assumes (denoting topics in a dialogical routine and owned by particular individuals who repress or express these rhetorically) is given further nuance. Murdoch points towards a view of thought where 'thought' is both familiar and alien; its vague at its edges and full of strangeness in its articulation. This strangeness is a matter of managing surprising connotations as much as it is about pushing away thought or hiding

thought from oneself. By extension, neuroses discussed by Freud are bodily connotations of traumatic denotations rather than symptoms of an underlying neurotic repression.

Consider the surprising connotations in turns 35 through 39. The interviewer repeats the comment of the participant in the form of a question in turn 37 and so enacts a kind of surprise (note that the stammering from his previous turn is gone as the question just flows). The connotation of someone that does not worry about aspects of faith that are problematic is experientially surprising. The interviewer doesn't let the account pass and raises the issue of rationale again in turn 41. The stammering and then return to the questions are not about neuroses on the part of the interviewer in terms of unconscious repression, but rather managing the experiential connotation entailed in what the participant has said.

#### Paying Regard to The Absent but Embodied 'Other' in Everyday Speech

Secondly, a focus on connotation is useful because it draws our attention to the variety of ways in which we manage (or perhaps wrestle) with the connotations of denoted thoughts which all involve various degrees of merging with 'the other'. Bakhtin (e.g. 1990) is very clear that there is always an important separation between 'self' and 'other' in an actual, physical encounter. However, in everyday speech, we regularly quote other people's voices, either in relationships of agreement or disagreement. In fact, there are various degrees of merging with this absent other (e.g. quotation is less merged than reported speech which is more merged):

"Our practical everyday speech is full of other people's words: with some of them we completely merge our own voice, forgetting whose they are; others, which we

take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; still others, finally, we populate with our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them. (1984, p.195)

At the point of most separation, we have quotation marks in indirect discourse, such as when the quoted words of another act as a connotation to our own words – ‘He said “do it” and I did it’ or ‘he said “don’t do it” and I did it anyhow’. Here, there is clear separation between self and other in speech. At more merged levels, however, there is the “hidden dialogue” where speech is rhetorically organised around an absent other - what Billig (1986) refers to as “the internal critic” and of most relevance to embodiment, the “sore-spot” where the words of another provoke an over-reaction in our speech. In turn 43, we see a joke that redirects the interviewer’s query, but we can interpret how a sore-spot was touched when an elongated account nevertheless ensures. Consider emphases in turn 44 of “helpful”, “science”, “studied”, “genesis”, “myth”, and “truth”. The participant draws attention to not doing research with the emphasis on “have”, but the other words all involve rhetorical resources the interviewer prompted with his question. This account followed up from short truncated responses in turns 36, 38, and 40. Such responses were not typical of this participant. They have touched “a sore spot” in one’s bodily use of discourse – a repressed but emotionally loaded truth. Curiously, the “sore-spot” is often labelled an ‘extreme case formulation’ in discourse analysis (Pomerantz, 1986) which is true when taken as a denotation of a topic. The topic is denoted or formulated in an extreme way. However, the connotation of this extreme case formulation – e.g. the other speaks a sensitive repressed truth about oneself entwined with chronotopes of the past, is absent from this formulation (see Sullivan, 2016).

Our central concern, however, is with the first level of separation between self and other in connotations – that’s the level of indirect discourse. (see also Sullivan 2012, 2016). Building on this, we examined a range of studies in discourse analysis concerned with emotion and affect to see how they use quotation marks for direct speech (Hepburn, Wilkinson and Butler, 2014, , McAvoy, 2015; Martin, 2016;; Nightingale, Quayle and Muldoon, 2017, Radley and Billig, 1996). Consistent with Sullivan’s suggestions, we found very inconsistent usage with little or no analysis on how voices of others are ‘embodied’ (in the sense of ‘direct speech’) and suggestive of connotations within the participants’ speech. To return to Billig’s (1986) conception of the “internal critic”, what this means is that the “internal critic” is not just internal to the other side of the argument or the “anti-logos” but is also embodied in particular figures who have an embodied presence in speech, rooted in different chronotopes. Connotations, embodied in the voices of others, develop from chronotopes from the past, future and conditional present. These significant others – e.g. future self; parents, experts – brought into speech are what make working out the meaning; the deepening of concepts as Murdoch puts it, into compelling experiences. Consider the depths added to our interpretation of the extract when we include connotative experience.

Speech is refracted through a variety of connotations and judgements and feelings of other people in different places and times. These ‘others’ are embodied in quotation marks and it is a testament to the lack of interest in this side of embodiment that the quotation marks are missing or inconsistently applied. In the forgoing, we can see how ‘voices’ are embodied not just in quotation marks but also in chronotopes (time-spaces) and how these chronotopes offer a useful analytic lens to understanding connotation of affect and embodiment.

### 3) Giving Space to the Ironic

While the discussion above highlights quite a different understanding of the ‘embodied’ other than the usual corporeal version of ‘embodied’, as one embodied, epiphanically, in speech, there is another more visceral sense in which self and other intertwine in an embodied, pleasurable way. This entwinement is laughing irony that we see in the preceding extracts. As such, this final part of the article will examine the relevance of connotations of ironic laughter and eros for research practice concerned with understanding embodied “truths”.

Again, when we focus on the denotative practices of laughter, as Billig (e.g. 2001) has done, we can discuss various problems of power such as racism, justification, and repression in talk. Such research is important in its own right, but leaves us stuck for understanding the communal pleasure embodied in laughter: What makes play with language and, in our context, connotations of chronotopes, pleasurable? Addressing this question moves us on from understanding laughter as another form of ‘repression’ towards understanding it as revelatory of another side of emotionally charged “truths” (e.g. the ridiculousness of a social situation).

Bakhtin (1984b) outlines the importance of pleasure in language with a discussion of laughter that parallels this discussion of the erotic in Freud (2003). The former treats laughter as fundamental to our lives and so treats laughter with the same salience that Freud approaches eros. They are both addressing embodied experience and, we argue, the same genre of experiential phenomena. Bakhtin, however, takes a slightly different view of eros in that he argues for a conception of pleasure that is not as individualistic as Freud. Carnival becomes a

central motif for understanding laughter and Bakhtin links it with consciousness by arguing that a:

“carnival sense of the world helps Dostoevsky overcome gnoseological as well as ethical solipsism. A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness.” (1984a, p. 177).

Laughter is understood by Bakhtin as profoundly sociocultural phenomena as much as it is a deeply experiential one because “laughter is not a subjective, individual, and biological consciousness of the uninterrupted flow of time. It is the social consciousness of all the people.” (1984b, p. 92).

What is interesting about Bakhtin’s approach is that he treats laughter as a chronotope that has origins deep in human prehistory. In his essay of the chronotope, he argues that humans have always had rituals of everyday life that include laughter and violations of decorum that accompany it. Laughter is the oldest chronotope that continually manifests in human experience. Laughter, for Bakhtin, is a way of knowing that is special for its socio-communal quality and for its sensuous nature. Consider how he writes that

The festive organization of the crowd must be first of all concrete and sensual. Even the pressing throng, the physical contact of bodies, acquires a certain meaning. The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people’s mass body. In this whole the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself; it is possible, so to say, to exchange bodies, to be renewed ... At the same time the

people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community. (1984b, p. 255).

The embodied engagement of laughter is done *with* others as part of a mass body and we can see this in the way that laughter is contagious. It brings people together in a way that is experiential and unifying such that one knows something is worth laughter but to explain the joke abstractly erodes its authentically funny quality. Hence, Bakhtin argues that laughter is not about “... *abstract thoughts* about equality and freedom, the interrelatedness of all things or the unity of opposites. No, these are concretely sensuous ritual-pageant ‘thoughts’ experienced and played out in the form of life itself...” (1984a, p. 123). It is a kind of sensual socio-communal knowledge that is not propositional and this is Bakhtin’s answer to what constitutes eros.

This understanding of laughter and eros places readers in a conundrum because taking it out of the realm of propositional knowledge makes it hard to discuss what a laughing consciousness is about – raising a place to expand upon Billig who is trapped in denotation. Hence, for Billig (2005), the effect of humour in interactional contexts of power is of importance. Humour can be used to abuse and degrade people as well as provide relief from tense situations. Turn 42 could certainly be understood in this manner: the participant rhetorically positions herself when confronted. The experience of laughter, however, as a means of embodying the truth of a situation (or using our bodies as a lightning rod of inquiry) is understated.

Consider the following excerpt that actually comes earlier in the interview.

Excerpt 13:15

Turn	Speaker	Text
1	Interviewer	S’umm I’guess kinda somewha related t’ the last. Section. Um. Are-there-where-there any. <u>peak</u> spiritual experiences you ha. experiences tha’were um. (.5) kin-of elated where

- 2 Participant you uh. had a sense of god er you um. y' [((inaudible))  
[NO BELLS  
an'whistles. Um. no lights ah. I'thin tha. probably a' one  
point uh, that I really felt a miracle had taken place. was  
when tha' we pulled of an intervention. when my son who was  
into drugs and alcohol (.5) finally got into. ahh the a.  
rehab the hospital fer the the'a rehab. An' that whole  
thing . was pretty miraculous whad happened there =
- 3 I Ye[ah
- 4 P = [because because it involved. people tha'were in three  
different locations on the west coast. I was in ((region))  
an'my family tha was in ((region)). uh they were uh  
objecting to my (.5) procedure of trying to do anything
- 5 I Y[eah
- 6 P [ABOu' this an' ah . they feld that <don'touch it> an I  
ignored 'em an' went for it an' all-I-can-say is gawd  
pulled of a miracle.
- 7 I yeah
- 8 P An' that was. ya-know tha was. thats the closest I can come  
where I actually sa- I jus'plain said hey that's. that's. a  
miracle <I didn' tell tha' to my family cause they werent  
gonna> believe in it anyway y'know they jus.
- 9 I right
- 10 P (laugh)
- 11 I Rig[h
- 12 P [THEY're goo' lutherans (laugh)

The interviewer asks about religious experiences and the participant tells a story about getting

her son into treatment for drug dependency. She orients us to the way that she sees this as a miracle, but what is interesting is the account of the family. She describes how her family would not believe her that it was a miracle (turn 8) and laughs in turn 10. Consider the joke at the end that “THEY’re goo’ lutherans (laugh)”. This twist of irony reveals a truth of the situation, which is that “good Lutherans” would not believe in miracles. This counterintuitive revelation is funny but it also shows how there is a ironic aspect of the faith that would not be readily something a religious participant would be inclined to admit: divine intervention is not part of the religion.

The joke makes visible a truth that is unsaid yet still now known.

Understanding the role of the chronotope of laughter in knowledge can be seen in how Bakhtin argues that “laughter degrades and materializes” (1984b, p. 20). The materialization that Bakhtin notes involves the sensuous quality of knowledge entailed in laughter and the



degradation can take us to understanding what is known in the chronotope of laughter. The laughter in turns 10 and 12 connote an important idea that would normally be obscured is revealed while also degraded. He argued that laughter means one

experiences this flow of time in the marketplace, in the carnival crowd, as he comes into contact with other bodies of varying age and social caste. He is aware of being a member of a continually growing and renewed people. This is why festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of earthly upper classes, of all that opposes and restricts. (1984b, p. 92).

Laughter is a chronotope at the connotative juxtaposition of other chronotopes and so involves awareness of the impossibility of a particular consciousness that only sees the world in a particular sacrosanct way. Connotative juxtaposition involves degrading the sacred quality of any single genre and so any monologic expression is relativized against others. The ironic humour degrades the Lutheran tradition and pokes fun at a lived truth: its participants do not want divine interaction. As such, laughter is not a denotative consciousness about anything in particular but is one that “purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality.” (1984b, p. 123; see also p. 473).

The laughter chronotope is about an embodied understanding that a single view on the world is not possible, regardless of what the view is. Hence, the participant can be both a religious believer and critical of religious institutions. The interviewer’s “right” entails a shared

experience of laughter that also brings them into an alternative shared chronotope at a critical distance from the serious chronotopes of getting a son into rehabilitation, a family that is uncooperative, and a religion avoiding the presence of the divine. It reflexively, too, eases the situation. Discursive psychology and Billig may rightly focus on the interactional and power dimensions of this humour in such serious situations, but the laughter chronotope here also suggests a co-existing space and time where the contradictions and tensions can coexist. They are unresolved paradoxes that cannot be corrected through formal logic or Hegelian synthesis. Laughter enables a simultaneous presence of such tensions that works! Attending to such moments are crucial for researchers because the connotation entails the truth of the situation that ought to be addressed in research. Mere denotation like we see in Billig bypasses experience and the simultaneous tensions lived at the moment of action.

Bakhtin is clear that laughter is a sociohistorical cultural phenomenon (1981, p. 236) but it is unique in how it enhances the outcome that comes from degradation. Bakhtin sees a special quality of laughter where it entails a capacity for renewal because it does not take any one voice seriously. There are other ways of deconstructing consciousnesses and chronotopes such as cynicism or vehement argument. These modes are not like laughter because they are not generative in the same way. Laughter enables an openness that may not have been present before because it leaves one “freed from the oppression of such gloomy categories as ‘eternal,’ ‘immovable,’ ‘absolute,’ ‘unchangeable’ and instead were exposed to the gay and free laughing aspect of the world, with its unfinished and open character, with joy of change and renewal.” (1984b, p. 83). It enables the possible aesthetic creativity and thereby means that “[c]arnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new*

*mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful social-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life.” (1984a, p. 123). Laughter in research thereby relativizes while also creating new possibilities for relationships and creative action once a monologic view has been degraded. This freedom is the pleasurable quality of laughter that reveals complex truths that researchers ought to notice if they seek to remain faithful to lives of their participants. For example, the excerpts revealed religious praxis as ironic and self-aware that a denotative analysis would bypass. Once laughing connotation breaks one out from within a single chronotope, one is free to play with what was previously treated with dogmatic certainty.

Turning to chronotopes and laughter enable us to grapple with experientially compelling aspects of life that cannot be reduced to mere rhetoric while also addressing the pleasure in rule breaking. Eros, from a Bakhtinian perspective, involves laughter as a chronotope that reveals the lived experiences people take for granted as second nature. This aspect of eros-as-laughter enables us to see how it is part of creating new and exciting possibilities through the break-down of sacrosanct rules.

How then should we analyse such embodied others and lived experiences in speech, beyond the basic of paying attention to the role of direct and indirect speech and embodied experiences such as laughter? The participants can testify to the issue at hand (e.g. religious experience) by virtue of their ‘lived experience’ of that issue. This demands a hermeneutics of trust built into the method insofar as the testimonial is trusted by virtue of being a testimonial to lived experience. In discourse and conversation analysis, direct speech of participants is used not as a testimonial to lived experience but is instead used as a testament to power (see

Sullivan, 2012 for more on this). Behind what is being said lies the denotation practice and that practice says something about the flows of power (e.g. gender power) that organize the discourse. Hence, extracts are quite detailed and significantly long and the author interacts with this speech of the other as a means to understanding power, but also overwhelms the embodied 'other' with comments regarding the 'function', 'consistency' and 'variation' coding rubric of these approaches.

Here, we would like to introduce an interpretation style which emerges from our consideration of chronotope and the 'epiphanic' sign: the hermeneutic style of 'earnest irony' (see Bernstein, 2016; Lear, 2011). What this means is that the direct speech of the participants interacts with one another in a variety of ways. This could be without the boundaries of an extract per person or per interaction. In other words, they lose their embodied boundaries in 'created dialogues' (Sullivan, 2012, Moate and Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2017, Smissaert and Jalonen, 2017) or 'tables of soundbites' (Sullivan, 2012). This allows for a carnivalesque mesalliance of ideas, people and situations, done with the aim of demonstrating the embodied connotations of an idea as it resonates through different voices. For example, Smissaert and Jalonen (2017) have passed the idea of academic writing through the tones of a menippean 'dialogue of the dead' while Sullivan (2012) examines how the idea of an organisation "sounds differently" in different organizational contexts which can be brought together in a created dialogue.

The trope of irony resides in how these textual representations, however, underlie a deeper sense in which the author/researcher adopts the position of the "rogue, clown and fool". Researchers don't have to take anything seriously, which includes dogmatic adherence to method or pretense to objective or analytic distance. Laughing along with participants enables

one to understand the chronotopes and experiential tensions at play. Bakhtin wrote about the special role of the rogue, clown, and fool in literature where he made the claim that the author acts as a fool (1981). That is, an author has the role of showing another's mode of being in the way that an outsider like a rogue, clown, or fool portrays others from the perspective of one who does not understand or fit into the normal life. Elsewhere, he writes that the

use of the system of popular-festive images was not as an exterior, mechanical method of defence against censorship, as an enforced adoption of Aesop's language. For thousands of years people have used these festive comic images to express their criticism, their deep distrust of official truth and their highest hopes and aspirations (1984b, p. 269).

These figures express alternative perspectives in their parodies and other forms of rejecting what others take for granted. Researchers do not take the sacrosanct forms of life seriously like their participants. Bakhtin saw such a role as deeply entwined with laughter and so questioning what others take for granted by holding up a mirror to the heroes in literature. His position was that good authorship tapped into the depth of laughter with these characters to accomplish the sophisticated tasks of revealing what is not part of awareness. The aesthetic activity of a good author was one entwined with the role of rogue, clown, or fool.

For our purposes, we can see how these outsiders are a template for researchers revealing what Freud would consider to be repressed. Consider what Bakhtin writes about these outsiders:

they grant the right *not* to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally, not 'to be

oneself'; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entr'acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as a comedy and to treat others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage – and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets. (1981, p. 163).

Researchers can cultivate an ironic mode and so an “expression of a new free and critical *historical* consciousness” (1984b, p. 73) that is embodied in the outsider. Just like the rogue, clown, or fool, a researcher can tap into the degrading and aesthetic quality of laughter to address sociohistorical heterogeneity to depict and reveal what people do not see. The forgoing comments about the excerpts could be seen a revelatory to the interviewer and participant. We see chronotopes and the collapse of space-time in the discussion of bible camps, sore-spots and dealing with doubts, the linguistics of repression, and a complex religious experience that is critically self-aware. A researcher, like the outsider who dwells in the realm of laughter, reveals what other cannot see for themselves. A researcher who acts in the laughing chronotope of the outsider enables people to “appear for a moment outside the usual conditions of their lives... and there opens up another – more genuine – sense of themselves and of their relationships to one another.” (1984a, p. 145).

Like these outsiders, researchers become persons who are in the world but not of it as they act like a “spy” or “reflector” (1981, p. 161). Bakhtin opens up an understanding of how the role of a researcher is revealed in aesthetic laughter what people live as second nature. Just like the rogue, clown, or fool, the existence of researchers are

a reflection of some other's mode of being – and even then, not direct reflection... the right to be ‘other’ in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single

one of the categories that life makes available... they see the underside and falseness of every situation. (1981, p. 159).

The help of one from the outside who cultivates aesthetic laughter is one who can lay bare what one cannot initially see without the carnivalistic mirror.

### **Conclusion**

Our endeavor to highlight an alterity to embodiment that is open and accessible to inquiry brings us to the following conclusions. First of all, that embodiment can be epiphanic. In a sense, the other can be resurrected. In this resurrection, they metamorphosise from their own time-space to the demands of a new time-space without losing the immediacy of their original chronotopes. Analysis that bypasses the embodied experience in chronotopes is simply too impoverished to say much about the chronotopic layers of human phenomena. To study this resurrection, it is important to look at the moving gap between 'self' and 'other' in discourse; an imperceptible gap that can become clearer in reported speech. Secondly, and relatedly building on this vision of chronotope (embodiment) demands increased attention to connotation as it undergirds denotation. Connotation is tricky and a problem for much of discourse analysis insofar as scientific analytic interpretations can be carnivalistically revealed as stabs at meaning. Discursive psychology and Billig have a procedure defended as empirical and can appeal to this systematicity to establish rigour. It is not preferable to systematize irony in terms of methods and procedures. There is much potential, on the other hand for connotation predicated on sympathetic engagement with the text and getting to know people. We focused on the connotations of other time-spaces, and particularly laughter, as it brings us

that much closer to truth as it shows up in lived experience. There are multiple connotations however and as Radley and Billig (1996) comment, there is not time for a 'full interpretation' but these connotations emerge from an ironic frame of reference and interpretation style as much as they do from method. To more fully grasp connotation, we suggest a carnivalesque placing of bodies (epiphanic blended with the corporeal) in criss-crossing chronotopes. No method is an adequate substitute for working deeply with a text such that one dialogically becomes part of it.

Fittingly, there is an ambivalence to all of these Bakhtinian concepts (chronotopes, polyphony, eros, carnival) that leads us away from literal or correspondence theories of truths (the truths of "ordinary language philosophy" and what we can literally observe) and jump us into a different kind of truth: a created truth but a lived, experiential truth. It places researchers in a demanding position because an ironic mode means that nothing is safe, including one's own purview. An ironic mode means not to take things too seriously while simultaneously grappling with the seriousness of the subject matter. Qualitative work that fails to rise to the challenge of irony will likely continue to bypass lived experience.



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