

## Connecting irony and humor with witticism and lightheartedness\*

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**Yoon, YoungEun. 2014. Connecting irony and humor with witticism and lightheartedness.** *Linguistic Research* 31(1), 183-211. Irony and humor have long been studied as two closely related phenomena by numerous researchers. Some, including Hänninen (1989) and Dews et al. (1995), have argued that humor derives from irony, while others, including Hay (2001), have regarded irony as a variety of humor. Recently, Hirsch (2008; 2011a, b) proposes a comparative model that differentiates irony from humor in the literary texts by means of some cues for irony and humor. Reyes et al. (2012) also propose a set of features that represent humor and irony. In this context, the purpose of this paper is to reexamine the relationship between irony and humor, and to provide an answer to the long-lasting question of why these two phenomena appear to be closely related. In order to answer this question, the works of an anonymous feminist artist group, the Guerrilla Girls, from 1985 to 2013, which are effectively utilizing both irony and humor, will be analyzed. It will be observed that uncommon wordings and phrasings in a witty and clever way involved in the irony examples induce humor, and that the situation where any seriousness or intensity is relieved works as a precondition for generating humor from the irony examples. Based on these observations, it will be proposed that the ‘witticism’ involved in most irony examples derives humor, and that the so-called ‘lightheartedness’ also plays a role in generating humor. It will further be proposed that GG’s works clearly show that ‘witticism’ and ‘lightheartedness’ are two essential components of most effective ironic utterances. (Ewha Womans University)

**Keywords** irony, humor, witticism, lightheartedness, Guerrilla Girls

### 1. Introduction

Irony is a well-established concept in our contemporary culture. As is well known, irony is divided into unintended situational and intended verbal irony. In the following, (1) is an example of the former, whereas (2) is, of the latter.

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\* I’d like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their helpful and valuable comments. Any remaining defects and errors are, of course, my own.

- (1) A man died the day before a hurricane hit, when it was sunny and calm. He was electrocuted while removing the TV antenna from his roof, as a precaution against the storm. (Lucariello 1994: 132)
- (2) (The speaker has just tripped over a stone.)  
Oh, wonderful.

In widespread sources such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and textbooks, it is generally defined that an unintended situational irony is an odd or amusing situation that involves a contrast, while an intended verbal irony is an utterance that means the opposite of or something different from what the speaker says. A contrast is involved in (1) between a man's precautionous effort and its unfortunate outcome, whereas the literal meaning of (2) deviates from what the speaker really means given the situation.

Comparing to irony, humor is much more frequently experienced in our daily lives in a variety of forms. Furthermore, intended humor seems to be more easily observed than unintended humor. It even seems as if we cannot communicate effectively without humor. We sometimes say a joke like (3) to amuse other people, or we intentionally twist what we have to say as in (4), which is both sarcastic and humorous. In (3), what man in a bar says could mean two things literally: one is that the man just obtained a bottle of gin for the sake of his mother-in-law, and the other is that he just acquired the gin in exchange for her. The latter reading is absurd. However, the second man is interpreting the man in a bar's utterance with this reading, which derives humor. The second clause in (4) rudely utters that the addressee is unworthy of the lady, which is against both our expectation after the first clause, and our proprieties. These two aspects seem to generate humor.

- (3) Man in a bar: 'I just got a bottle of gin for my mother-in-law.'  
Second man: 'Sounds like a good swap.' (Ross 1998: 3)
- (4) Don't keep telling the lady you are unworthy of her. Let it be a complete surprise. (Dolitsky 1992: 35)

Concerning these two separate phenomena, irony and humor, quite a few proposals have been made which analyze them as two closely related occurrences. Some, including Hänninen (1989) and Dews et al. (1995), have argued that humor

derives from irony, while others, including Hay (2001), have regarded irony as a variety of humor. Also, recently, Cutica (2007), Hirsch (2011a, b), and Reyes et al. (2012), among others, attempt to analyze the correlation between irony and humor in various ways. However, none of them seems to provide a direct answer to the question of why these two phenomena appear to be closely related. In this context, the purpose of this paper is to reexamine the relationship between irony and humor, and to present an answer to the above long-lasting question.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section some previous linguistic theories of irony and humor will be discussed. In section 3, in order to find out why irony and humor seem to be closely related, the works of an anonymous feminist artist group, the Guerrilla Girls, from 1985 to 2013, which are effectively utilizing both irony and humor, will be analyzed. In section 4 a new analysis on the relationship between irony and humor will be proposed. Section 5 concludes the paper.

## **2. Theories of irony and humor**

### **2.1 Irony**

Various types of ironies have long been studied by many philosophers and linguists, but the main focus of most of the linguistic researches on irony has been verbal irony. It is probably due to the fact that the focus of analysis in verbal irony is not the context, but the utterance itself, and that it provides a challenging research topic in the sense that its diverse examples cannot easily be accounted for by a single theory without exceptions. As for situational irony, which is irony of events rather than of words, Lucariello (1994) and Shelley (2001), among others, present significant analyses.

When it comes to verbal irony, Grice's (1975, 1978) pragmatic approach defines it as an utterance that conversationally implicates the opposite of what it literally says. However, these definitions have been criticized to account for only a limited portion of a variety of verbal irony data, and various concepts and theories have been proposed to overcome this defect by Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1998), Martin (1992), Giora (1995, 1997), and Attardo (2000) among others. Although these newly

proposed theories also do not comprehensively account for all the diverse data, Sperber and Wilson's echo theory is generally accepted as the most persuasive theory currently available. According to this theory, all examples of verbal irony are 'echoic' in that "the speaker echoes a thought she attributes to someone else, while dissociating herself from it" and "[t]he thought being echoed may not have been expressed in an utterance; it may not be attributable to any specific person, but merely to a type of person, or people in general; it may be merely a cultural aspiration or norm" (Wilson and Sperber, 1992: 56). Despite its limitations including the vagueness and limitlessness of the concept of its echoic sources, as criticized by linguists such as Giora (1995, 2001a), Seto et al. (1998), and Partington (2006), among others, the echoic theory persuasively accounts for typical examples of verbal irony.

On the other hand, the process models and functions of verbal irony have also been proposed by numerous researchers. For example, Giora (1995, 2003) proposes a parallel process model in which the literal meaning of an ironic expression is retained along with its ironic meaning, which is against Grice's (1975, 1978) sequential model in which the literal meaning is rejected and the figurative meaning is processed to derive the ironic meaning of an expression. Concerning the functions of irony, Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and Brown and Levinson's (1987) 'politeness' theory argues that irony is a strategy to save the face of the addressee in conversation. Jorgensen (1996) further argues that irony saves not only the face of the addressee but also that of the speaker. According to Dews and Winner's (1995) 'tinge hypothesis,' an ironic utterance 'mutes' or weakens its delivered evaluated meaning such as criticism and praise by tingeing it with the literal meaning.

## 2.2 Humor

The Greek scholars such as Plato (1908, 1934, 1937) and Aristotle (1909, 1910, 1939) were the first to analyze humor from a linguistic point of view, based on the concept of 'incongruence.' This theory of incongruity, which has developed into a representative theory of humor, argues that humor is derived from a clash between what is expected and what is actually perceived. Another representative theory of humor is the so-called superiority or hostility theory. Ross (1998: 53) discusses that the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1651) portrayed "laughter as a 'sudden glory' at a

triumph of our own or at an indignity suffered by someone else.” The release theory is another representative theory of humor, which, Raskin (1985: 35) states, argues that “humor releases some form of psychic energy and/or frees the individual from some constraints.”

Due to the enormous variety of the sources and functions of humor, diverse theories of humor including subvarieties of the three representative theories have been put forth. For example, Raskin (1985) proposes the Semantic-Script Theory of Humor (SSTH), which, Attardo (1997, 2008) argues, is an incongruity/resolution model. Also, Attardo and Raskin (1991) propose the General Theory of Verbal Humor, which is a revised or extended version of the SSTH. Sperber and Wilson (1986) try to account for humor within the framework of their relevance theory, criticizing the SSTH. Curcó (1995, 1998), who is an advocate of the relevance theory, proposes a theory based on the relation between the stimulus and its interpretation by the hearer. That is, the incongruity between the implicated assumption and the contextual assumption of the utterance occurs in line with the relevance theory, and the speaker reveals her dissociative attitude toward the contextual assumption, which derives humor. However, as Curcó admits, relevance theoretic accounts of humor cannot deal with all humorous utterances.

Besides, Attardo (1994) and Rogerson-Revell (2007) among others analyze the functions of humor. Attardo (1994: 323), for example, proposes ‘social management,’ ‘decommitment,’ ‘mediation,’ and ‘defunctionalization’ as four functions of humor. Raskin and Attardo (1994) and Taylor et al. (2007) also present computational and formal approaches to humor.

### 2.3 Irony and humor

Irony and humor have been analyzed as two closely related phenomena by many researchers including Hänninen (1989), Dews et al. (1995), Hay (2001), and Cutica (2007). Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) also propose that irony elicits humor. According to Winner (1988), an ironic utterance with a serious but derisive tone of voice derives humor due to the discordance between the tone of voice and facts, or between the utterance contents and reality.

Recently, Hirsch (2008; 2011a, b) proposes a comparative model that differentiates irony from humor in the literary texts by means of some cues for irony

and humor. This model is based on Dascal and Weizman's (1987) model for the interpretation of indirect speaker's meanings. The cues for irony proposed by Hirsch include 'the flouting of Gricean maxims,' 'the violation of the sincerity condition,' and 'the detection of echoic mention' or 'the detection of a pretense to be an injudicious person speaking to an uninitiated audience' (Clark and Gerrig 1984). She also proposes 'script opposition and the violation of expectations,' 'punch lines,' 'word play' (Alexander 1997), and 'non-sense,' as cues for humor.

According to Hirsch (2011a: 550-552), several steps are taken in the interpretation process of irony and humor. One step is to check for the existence of two incongruous scripts in the addressee's mind in the sense of Attardo (1997: 412). The existence of incongruity could be detected at the base of both irony and humor. Another step is to check for the special structures involved in ironic or humorous utterances such as a punch line for humor. Also, a check for the target of the criticism, the existence of the violation of Grice's cooperative principle, the existence of a pretense or an echoic mention, and so on involved in ironic and humorous utterances is executed, in order to differentiate between the two phenomena. Reyes et al. (2012: 4-6) also propose a set of features that represent humor and irony by analyzing some data sets from Twitter. Their formal and computational approach investigates features such as 'ambiguity'(structural, morphosyntactic, and semantic ambiguity), 'polarity' (a feature that delivers the converse meaning by characterizing positive attributes over negative attributes), 'unexpectedness,' and 'emotional contents' (a way of portraying information apart from grammar, such as sentiments, attitudes, feelings, and moods, etc.). They argue that their results confirm that the above features are useful indicators to represent irony and humor. They further argue that not a single feature but the set of features all together work as an effective tool to detect the two figurative devices, especially humor.

Attardo (2008: 123) states that "an area in dire need of research is that of the connections and differences between irony and humor." Besides, with all the researches on irony and humor, it is a difficult but appealing task to delve into the correlations between irony and humor.

### **3. Data analysis**

#### **3.1 Preliminaries**

The following examples of situational irony from Lucarriello (1994) show that some of them are also humorous:

- (5) The wimp who grows up to be a lion tamer.
- (6) Susan is very gregarious and popular. Despite this, she has always basically felt so lonely.
- (7) A man is in a car accident with a woman, who as a consequence intends to sue him. They have a meeting and she decides not to sue. A year later they marry.
- (8) Bob ridicules a coworker for clumsiness, then trips over the wastebasket.
- (9) A man died the day before a hurricane hit, when it was sunny and calm. He was electrocuted while removing the TV antenna from his roof, as a precaution against the storm.

All the above examples are ironic events which involve a contrast. Although, as Reyes et al. (2012) point out, whether a text is ironic or humorous is excessively subjective, (5) and (6) do not seem to derive humor. And yet, (7-9) seem to generate humor, more humor from (8) and (9) than from (7). On the other hand, the following examples of verbal humor from Reyes et al. (2012) also derive humor.

- (10) "I feel so miserable without you, it's almost like having you here."
- (11) "Sometimes I need what only you can provide: your absence."
- (12) "I thank God that you are unique!"

With examples like (7-12), a question arises whether these examples show that irony and humor involve some characteristics in common, as proposed by Hirsch and Reyes et al. Or there exist some other accounts for their correlations. In order to answer this question, in this study, a data analysis has been carried out on the works of the Guerrilla Girls (henceforth, GG) composed of a group of anonymous female

artists, which was established in 1985 with an intention to reveal the prejudices rooted in the art world against female and colored artists. For the last 29 years, they have successfully been giving voice to their messages through a variety of means such as posters, billboards, exhibitions, stickers, bus ads, magazine spreads, letter-writing campaigns, and protests, among others. What attracts us most in GG's works is that they are known to be both heavily and effectively utilizing the two pragmatic devices, irony and humor. There are several interesting observation results in GG's works. One of them is that most of their works employ irony and/or humor. Another is that most ironic examples are observed to be also humorous except for a few examples. Given these interesting aspects of the data, correlations between irony and humor will be inquired into, especially based on the examples of GG's works which are both ironic and humorous.

### 3.2 Data

We have examined all 69 works on the posters/actions section of the GG's official website (<http://www.guerrillagirls.com>) during the period from 1985 to 2013, except for 13 entries (1 interview, 5 book introductions, and 7 activities) due to the difficulty of analyzing specific linguistic phenomena and/or mechanisms utilized in the long texts and videos. Among the 69 works quite a few revised versions of the previous works are included. The diagram in Appendix summarizes the results of the analysis on the 69 examples of GG. The 69 examples have been classified into examples of 'irony,' 'humor,' 'irony only,' 'humor only,' 'both irony and humor,' and 'neither of the two.' As a result, 31 examples (44.93%) have been analyzed as 'irony,' 48 (69.57%) as 'humor,' 3 (4.35%) as 'irony only,' 20 (28.99%) as 'humor only,' 28 (40.58%) as 'both irony and humor,' and 18 (26.09%) as 'neither of the two.'<sup>1</sup> That is, about 70% of the works are utilizing humor, which is a remarkably high degree of percentage. Furthermore, about 45% of the GG's creations are employing irony. As defined by Bredin (1999), irony does not mean what it says and its unstated meaning must be taken together with its stated meaning. Hence, it

<sup>1</sup> It should be admitted, though, that both irony and humor are scalar concepts, so that some examples could be more ironic or humorous than others, and some examples analyzed as irony or humor might be perceived as non-ironic or non-humorous by some people. In order to reduce the differences in intuitions, five informants have been consulted scrupulously in several sessions, and their judgments have been weighed and considered.



is rarely used in general, especially in advertising, for example, which fights for cost-effectiveness, as observed by Kulas (1997/98). That about a half of their works is utilizing irony despite this is quite surprising.

By the time when GG were organized, as indicated by Raizada (2007: 39), “the headiness of the first wave of the feminist art movement was long gone” and “feminism was no longer ‘in’.” Also, the 1970s feminism was widely sneered by their “unduly strident, humorless, puritanical, and antimaterial, not to mention man-hating” manner. In this context, it is speculated that GG sidestep the fatigue that the general public felt from the straightforward and aggressive styles of the previous feminist movements, and approach the issues in indirect, smart, and humorous ways. Giora (2001b: 284) also points out that GG, as a socially powerless inferior group, resort to a protective device, indirectness, such as using the names of the past women artists, wearing gorilla masks, or utilizing subversive writing such as irony.

As mentioned above, 28 out of the 31 irony examples are also humorous, while 28 out of the 48 humor examples are also ironic. That is, approximately, surprising 90% of the irony examples are humorous, whereas about 58% of the humor examples are ironic. As for the irony examples, only 3 out of 31 are only ironic. With these appealing aspects of the GG data, in the following, we will examine the both ironic and humorous examples, and try to find an answer for the question of why the two phenomena irony and humor are often observed together, and how they are correlated. For lack of space, not all of the 28 examples but only 15 representative examples will be analyzed.

### 3.3 Analysis on both ironic and humorous data

First, in the following example, GG are taking on an aloof and condescending attitude. The second sentence in (13) is both ironic and humorous. GG wouldn’t really think that the art collectors feel terrible about most of their collection being art by men and rectify this immediately. In fact, the art collectors do not care much about the fact that they do not have enough art by women, let alone trying to do something about it immediately.

#### (13) Dear Art Collector (1986)

It has come to our attention that your collection, like most, does not

contain enough art by women. We know that you feel terrible about this and will rectify the situation immediately.

However, if (14a) were used instead, it would be less ironic and not humorous. Also, if (14b) were used, then it would be neither ironic nor humorous. Words like “know” and “terrible” in (13), in addition to GG’s patronizing attitude, are playing an effective role in deriving humor, in line with Alexander (1997) and Hirsch (2011a), who identify ‘word play’ as a cue for humor as discussed in section 2.3.

- (14) a. We think that you feel uncomfortable about this and will rectify ....
- b. We think that you should feel terrible about this and rectify ....

Second, GG are twisting the disadvantages of women artists as their advantages in the following 1988 poster. These so-called advantages are, in fact, the disadvantages of women artists as described in (16). This clever way of sarcastically distorting the realities of women artists exposes GG’s dissociative attitude toward them and also generates humor.

(15) The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist (1988)

Working without the pressure of success  
 Not having to be in shows with men  
 Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs  
 Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty  
 Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine  
 No being stuck in a tenured teaching position  
 Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others  
 Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood  
 Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits  
 Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger  
 Being included in revised versions of art history  
 Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius  
 Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit

- (16)
- a. Working without a hope of success
  - b. Unable to be in shows with men
  - c. Having to have numerous other free-lance jobs in addition to being an artist
  - d. Knowing that your career will never pick up
  - e. Having to face the prejudice that all your various art styles are labelled feminine after all
  - f. Having not much chance of obtaining a tenured teaching position
  - g. Having your ideas not being recognized as your own, but being shown by men artists
  - h. Having to make a choice between career and motherhood
  - i. Not smoking big cigars or painting in Italian suits like men artists
  - j. Having to be dumped by your boyfriend when he finds a younger girlfriend
  - k. Almost never being included as a major artist in the first versions of art history
  - l. Having not much chance of being called a genius
  - m. Having to fight against the prejudices on women artists, wearing a gorilla suit as GG

Third, the 1989 poster (17) is composed of 10 parts, but only two of them are recited in the following due to lack of space. The first part (Because aesthetic . . . .) is echoing the belief of the men in the art world in general, and GG are showing a dissociative attitude toward the sarcastic remark. This witty exposure of the men's pride by referring to "aesthetic quality" and "Affirmative Action" makes us smile. On the other hand, the second part is humorous but not ironic. It is an interesting observation that most of the pictures of nude men in major museums portray the Baby Jesus. However, if it is stated as in (18), it loses its humor. The wording "the majority of exposed penises" along with the rest produces humor.

- (17) Relax, Senator Helms, the Art World is Your Kind of Place (1989)
- Because aesthetic quality stands above all, there's never been a need for Affirmative Action in museums or galleries.
- The majority of exposed penises in major museums belong to the

Baby Jesus.

- (18) The majority of the pictures of men nude in major museums belong to the Baby Jesus.

Fourth, another 1989 poster (19) echoes the self-appraisal of the artists in general including the representatives of NYC Art Galleries that they are enlightened. The fact is, however, that bus companies hire almost equal numbers of women and men bus drivers, sales persons, and managers, as shown in (19). GG are dissociating themselves from this inner pride of NYC Art Galleries by comparing them to bus companies in a clever way. This rather zany comparison and the witty wording “enlightened” lead to humor.

- (19) Are Bus Companies More Enlightened Than NYC Art Galleries?  
(1989)

% of women in the following jobs:

Bus Drivers	49.2%
Sales Persons	48
Managers	43

Fifth, another 1989 poster (20) is borrowing the surface form of the Ten Commandments. Only two parts of the code of ethics are recited in the following.

- (20) Guerrilla Girls’ Code of Ethics for Art Museums (1989)

Thou shalt provide lavish funerals for Women and Artists of Color  
who thou shalt exhibit only after their death.

Thou shalt keep Curatorial Salaries so low that Curators must be  
Independently Wealthy, or willing to engage in Insider Trading.

The first part in (20) sarcastically states a clause echoing a situation that art museums usually do not have exhibitions of women and artists of color and they have some only after the death of those artists. GG are ironically criticizing this situation. Slightly exaggerated phrasings such as “lavish funerals,” “shalt to exhibit,” and “only after their death” generate humor. The second part also echoes a

current situation exposing a dissociative attitude toward it. Again, a bit exaggerated and clever phrasings such as “*must be* independently wealthy” and “*willing to engage in* insider trading” produce humor.

Sixth, the following 1992 poster derives irony and humor based on ambiguity. On one hand, Republicans are well-known for their pro-life position, i.e., disapproving abortion. On the other hand, GG sarcastically dub the Republican first ladies such as Mrs. Reagan and Ford having plastic surgeries as believing in a woman’s right to control her own body. GG do not think that Republicans believe in a woman’s right to control her own body (i.e., they do not believe in women’s choice for abortion), so that (21) is verbally ironic. The shrewd way of using the ambiguity, along with the funny pictures on the poster, also provokes humor.

(21) Republicans Do Believe in a Woman’s Right to Control Her Own Body! (1992)

Seventh, another 1992 poster derives irony and humor based on ambiguity, similar to (21). On one hand, the Roman Catholic Church disapproves of abortion. On the other hand, GG assert the Roman Catholic Church’s contrasting view on abortion before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The statement in upper-case letters in (22) echoes the pro-life advocates including the Catholic Church’s cliché, “returning to traditional values.” In fact, however, GG do not approve of the pro-life view. Therefore, they are showing a detached attitude toward the view, but at the same time approving the old Catholic Church’s view. Again, the interesting observation and the clever utilization of the ambiguity produce humor.

(22) Discover the Shocking Truth About the Catholic Church’s Position on Abortion (1992)

GG DEMAND A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL VALUES ON ABORTION

Before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, abortion in the first few months of pregnancy was legal. Even the Catholic Church did not forbid it until 1869.

Eighth, the following 1995 poster in the form of classified ads is composed of

five ads, only two of which are listed in (23). One is an ad looking for a gallery receptionist with minimum wage and no health insurance, but with requirements which look outrageous but reflect the conditions asked by the employers in reality. The other is an ad for a development assistant who is required to be satisfied with the position as a minority staff member, and to shut her mouth at staff meetings but to catch the eye of the public. These ads which echo or reflect the realities of women employees in art galleries cannot be posted in reality, due to their political incorrectness. This a bit exaggerated and detailed disclosure of the irrational terms inwardly demanded for women gallery receptionists, development and curatorial assistants, and artists, toward which GG reveal their detached attitude, leads to humor. Words and phrases such as “male, pale image,” “drop-dead appear,” “clothes to match,” “intimidate,” “relish,” “high visibility . . . silence,” and “photogenic a plus” derive humor.

(23) The Token Times (1995)

CLASSIFIED Help Wanted, Art World

WELL-DRESSED ART HISTORY MAJOR?

Blue chip NYC art gallery, wanted to change male, pale image; seeks multicultural receptionist with drop-dead appear, & clothes to match; ivy league education & attitude a must; NO ETHNIC ACCENTS. Minimum wage, no health insurance. Fringe benefits include: attending fancy parties and meeting the right people.

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$SMILE\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANT: person of color needed to intimidate foundations, corporations, and collectors into giving amounts of money. Successful candidate must relish being only minority staff member. High visibility in public, silence at staff meetings required. Photogenic a plus.

Ninth, another 1995 poster (24) criticizes the Whitney Museum's return to their former one-sided tendency to value white male artists in 1991 and before that. GG are echoing the belief of the major museums including Whitney with a dissociative attitude that the quality of white male artists' works has traditionally been much

higher than that of female and colored artists' works. The word, Whitey, in which the letter 'n' from Whitney is missing, is pasquinading the Whitney Museum's excessive bent for "white" male artists (whitey). This witty wording produces humor.

(24) Traditional Values and Quality Return to the Whitey Museum (1995)

Biennial Artists

1991: Females of Color (4.4%), Males of Color (5.9%),  
White Females (29.4%), White Males (60.3%)

1993: Females of Color (11.4), Males of Color (22.75),  
White Females (29.5), White Males (36.4)

1995: Females of Color (5.5), Males of Color (11.1),  
White Females (27.7), White Males (55.5)

Tenth, the 1996 poster (25) in the form of an ancient-Greece-type tapestry provides, on the surface, helpful hints for women, echoing sexual prejudices and discriminations against women in reality with a detached attitude. In the following, two of the nine messages in the poster are recited. The first message echoes men's biased perception about women's temperament, whereas the second reverberates men's partial attitude toward women's beauty and youth. If (26a) and (26b) were used instead of the first and second message in (25) respectively, it would not be humorous. Setting aside the funny-looking heads of gorillas superimposed on the women's heads on the tapestry, wordings and phrasings such as "delight," "special connection," "his penis," and "P.M.S." in the first message, and "have fun with the money" and "save on clothes and cosmetics" in the second play a role in generating humor.

(25) How to Enjoy the Battle of the Sexes (1996)

Delight in the special connection you have with your body: if a guy loses his temper, it has nothing to do with his penis; if you lose yours, it's P.M.S.

Have fun with the money you'll save on clothes and cosmetics after you're fifty and no one cares what you look like.

- (26) a. Only women show temperament problems connected with their physiological characteristics: if a man loses his temper, there must be a good reason; if a woman loses hers, it's due to the peevish temperament of women in general.
- b. Women lose their feminine attraction after fifty and you don't have to spend money on your clothes and cosmetics after fifty.

Eleventh, the 2001 poster (27) is criticizing the sexual discriminations in Hollywood. In the following, two of the eight parts of the poster are recited. In the first part, witty expressions like "anatomically correct Oscar" and "he's white and male" elicit humor. Furthermore, "anatomically correct" echoes the expression "politically correct." Hollywood is a world whose people are in general expected to be more progressive and more "politically correct" than other groups of people. The reality is, however, that severe sexual discrimination is practiced in Hollywood. GG state that the gold statuette in human shape is white and male, just like its winners, and anatomically correct, which is far from being "politically correct." In the second part, humor is generated from witty phrasings such as "*have to* be a man" and "to have a short attention span." The length of a commercial is quite short in general, and commercial directors strive to attract the attention of the viewers in a short time. The question is a rhetorical question which echoes the commercial production companies' belief that man directors are better than woman directors, from which GG are dissociating themselves.

- (27) Guerrilla Girls go Ape at the Oscars...and the Sundance Film Festival (2001)

The Anatomically Correct Oscar: He's white and male, just like the guys who win!

-No woman has ever won an Oscar for feature film direction, cinematography or sound.

Do You Have to Be a Man to Have a Short Attention Span?

-Only 8% of commercial directors are women.

-71% of commercial production companies hire no woman directors.



Twelfth, another 2001 poster (28) is a poster for a movie called “the Birth of Feminism” starring three sex symbols, indicated by the picture of them in swimming suits, Pamela Anderson as feminist leader Gloria Steinem, Halle Berry as civil rights lawyer Flo Kennedy, and Catherine Zeta-Jones as congress woman Bella Abzug. This imaginary movie poster is situationally ironic in that three sex symbols are starring in a film about feminism. Furthermore, the message at the bottom of the poster, “They made women’s rights look good. Really good,” does not reflect GG’s belief. That is, the reality is that they have mostly been sexy supporting actors next to leading male actors. Therefore, GG are disclosing a dissociative attitude toward the message. The message in the hands of the woman actors in the poster “Equality Now!” also elicits sneering humor. In fact, the whole movie poster is both ironic and humorous due to the incongruity between its main contention ‘feminism’ and its main promoters ‘three half-naked woman actors.’ Also, if (29) were printed on the poster instead, the humor and irony would have disappeared.

(28) The Birth of Feminism Movie Poster (2001)

EQUALITY NOW!

They made women’s rights look good. Really good.

(29) Feminism is out of reach in the movie world when big-time woman actors are thriving on their sexy images.

Thirteenth, the following GG’s 2002 work is in the form of a letter to Santa Clause by George Bush. As can be seen from the web page, the letter is written in childish handwriting and wording with spelling errors, which is intended to criticize President Bush’s military policies as being immature and self-centered.

(30) George Bush’s Letter to Santa (2002)

Dear Santa, December, 2002

I just first want to let you no I have ben a really extra super good boy this year. I done really good at making bad guys go away. I like everyone to no I am good. I want ↓

1. A big flag with lots of stars for my bike.
2. To do what I want when I want I am good.
3. All the oil in the world.

4. More neat guns and super cool stuff that blows up.

Love, George

PS- Saddam and Osama were not nice. Can you make them go away?

PSS2- Can I have Alaska?

PPSSS- I always listen to my dad.

In (30), GG are echoing Bush's self-evaluations on his military policies toward the Middle East, dissociating themselves from them. The contents of the letter reflect what Brush thinks of himself and of his work, although they are a bit wittily twisted and exaggerated. He thinks that all the things he does are good things and benefitting America. Here, humor comes from the way in which Bush's self-appraisal is presented in words, in addition to the visual effect.

Fourteenth, the poster (31) is one of the seven posters in a 2006 exhibition at the Istanbul Modern Museum. As explained by GG, the poster is created based on an Istanbul tradition that coffee grounds are used to tell people's fortunes. It contains four messages (one of them is recited in the following), which describe the future of Turkish women artists. And yet, they are too outrageous to be fulfilled, and GG are revealing their sarcastic and dissociative attitude toward them. Wittily exaggerated predictions such as ". . . from abroad will seek refuge here," ". . . relocate to be better appreciated," and the idea of reading coffee grounds itself are humorous. Another message, not listed below, states that "The Turkish curator with the best record for promoting women artists will be cloned and his duplicates sent all over the world" also generates humor, due to its wacky idea of cloning a person and sending his duplicates to other countries.

(31) The Future for Turkish Women Artists (2006)

Beware of females from beyond the Bosphorus:

Over 40% of the artists shown in Istanbul Galleries are women...a much better percentage than in Europe or the U.S. Soon hordes of women artist from abroad will seek refuge here to improve their careers. Male artists will relocate to be better appreciated.

Fifteenth and last, the messages in the following 2009/2010 poster take a form of

toast to Irish art, echoing the male-dominant realities of the Irish art world. That is, (i) their museum collections are “manly” (male-dominant), (ii) their solo museum exhibitions are “macho” (male-dominant), and (iii) their academies are “seminal” (male-dominant); whereas (iv) their art schools are “harems” (female-dominant) and (v) their women artists are rarely seen in art exhibitions (female discrimination). GG obviously show their dissociative attitude toward these realities. Clever wordings such as “be manly,” “be macho,” “be seminal,” “be harems,” and “be heard of, but rarely seen” produce humor.

(32) Project Ireland (2009/2010)

Let's Toast Irish Art, Lads!

May your museum collections be manly.

May your solo museum exhibitions be macho.

May your academies be seminal.

May your art schools be harems.

May your women artists be heard of, but rarely seen.

### 3.4 Analysis on only ironic data

As we have seen above, 28 out of the 31 irony examples are also humorous. The three following irony examples are not humorous. The first is a 1991 poster criticizing President Bush for his driving out young men to wars by luring them with free education and a better life. The message “George Bush, “The Education President”” is ironic in that it echoes the government's argument, toward which GG shows a dissociative attitude. However, it directly mentions the argument and does not involve any extra witty phrasing. Furthermore, as the picture on the poster depicts the gravestones of the young soldiers who died in wars, its solemnity does not allow humor.

(33) George Bush, “The Education President” (1991)

Many poor Americans join the Army to get an education and a better life. If Bush had a real policy for public education, who would fight his wars?

Second, the following 1992 poster rebukes the situation in which rapes are not regarded as serious crimes. The message “you might as well “relax and enjoy it”” echoes the prejudiced opinion of men in general, from which GG disengage themselves. This poster deals with too serious a topic to generate humor.

(34) What to Do When Raped. . . (1992)

If you’re raped, you might as well “relax and enjoy it” because no one will believe you.

In 1988, for example, of the estimated 185,000 rapes in the U.S., there were only 39,160 arrests, resulting in 15,700 convictions.

Third and last, the following billboard echoes the statement by the Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives, representing Minnesota, Michele Bachmann. GG criticize Bachmann’s objection to the same sex marriage, as self-contradiction. Similar to (33) and (34), which mention an argument or prejudiced belief, this billboard message is also directly mentioning a previous statement, so that no wordplay or humor is involved.

(35) Same Sex Marriage Minnesota Billboard/Voter ID Minnesota (2011/2013)

EVEN MICHELE BACHMANN BELIEVES “WE ALL HAVE THE SAME CIVIL RIGHTS.” Statement made in Iowa, Nov. 2011  
Vote NO on the marriage discrimination amendment

#### 4. Witticism and lightheartedness

In the above section, examples of irony in GG’s works, divided into both ironic and humorous examples and only ironic examples, have been analyzed, in order to see the correlations between irony and humor. In section 3.3, where both ironic and humorous examples were examined, it has been observed that uncommon wordings and phrasings in a witty way involved in the examples induce humor, in line with Alexander (1997) and Hirsch (2011a). In section 3.4, where only ironic examples were analyzed, it has also been observed that the contextual gravity or solemnity

prevents the generation of humor.

Yoon (2000) presents a non-exhaustive list of mechanisms of humor based on the superiority, incongruity, and psychic release theories of humor. These mechanisms of humor include 'stupidity,' 'abnormality,' 'unexpectedness,' 'contradiction,' 'irrelevancy,' 'witty observation,' and 'witty wording.' The last two mechanisms of humor have been observed to play a role in the both ironic and humorous examples in section 3.3. As also pointed out in section 2.3, Alexander (1997) and Hirsch (2011a) propose 'word play' as a cue for humor, which is tantamount to the two mechanisms. I comprehensively call the witty and clever ways of making comparisons, observations, and analogies, and witty wordings and phrasings involved in the irony examples as 'witticism.'

Yoon (2000) also provides some principles as preconditions for the elicitation of humor. One principle proposed as a precondition is such that humor is generated only in situations where any gravity or seriousness is eliminated or alleviated, or that a humorous utterance could function as an ice-breaker to immediately remove any solemnity or seriousness from the situation. That is, a variety of forms and instances of humorous utterances are produced only in situations where this principle is satisfied as a precondition or prerequisite. I dub this 'lightheartedness' precondition for eliciting humor.

As observed with GG's works above and also argued by Lakoff (1973), Grice (1978), Sperber and Wilson (1981), and Hirsch (2011a), among others, irony essentially contains criticism. Furthermore, criticism requires a clever execution to effectively deliver its message. As discussed in section 3.2 with the case of the 1970s feminism, direct criticism often causes negative responses. As also pointed out in section 2.1, according to Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and Brown and Levinson's (1987) 'politeness' theory, irony is a strategy to save the face of the addressee in conversation. That is, they add the politeness as another principle to Grice's (1975, 1978) conversational principles, and propose that irony is used to criticize but save the face of the addressee in an indirect polite way. Jorgensen (1996) also argues that irony saves not only the face of the addressee but also that of the speaker. That is, the speaker could be exempted from the addressee's negative appraisal of the speaker's imprudence and impoliteness. According to Dews and Winner's (1995) 'tinge hypothesis,' an ironic utterance 'mutes' or weakens its delivered evaluated meaning such as criticism and praise. They argue that an ironic criticism mutes the

negative tone of the speaker's intended meaning by tingeing it with the literal meaning.

However, Colston (1997) argues, in contrast to Dews and Winner's (1995) tinge hypothesis, that an ironic criticism intensifies its assault. Although at first glance, Dews and Winner's and Colston's arguments contradict each other, both arguments say something about the functions of irony. That is, ironic utterances help avoid direct condemnation from the addressee and be able to get their messages across more strongly without easily being attacked. One kind of irony, the non-humorous irony examples discussed in section 3.4, simply mention a previous utterance, a victim's argument, or a general belief. With these examples, GG efficiently criticize the victims by indirectly showing a disagreeing attitude toward them. Another kind of irony, the humorous irony examples analyzed in section 3.3, word or phrase the messages in an unusual, wacky, and deft way, and effectively pierce through the addressee's mind. This witty way of giving color to the messages derives smiles and laughter, and drives the addressee to accept them with less repugnance. For example, wacky and witty analogies as in (19), (21), and (22), twisting something bad to something good in a wacky and witty way as in (15) and (23), and witty wordings and phrasings as in (24), (27), and (32) all effectually produce humor.

It has also been observed in section 3.4 that the seriousness or solemnity involved in the irony examples impedes humor to be generated. Therefore, we propose that in addition to the witticism contained in irony examples, the lightheartedness assumed by them plays a role in creating humor. The seriousness involved in sending young soldiers to wars in (33), the cruel prejudice against raped women in (34), and the discriminatory marriage amendment in (35) drive away humor from them.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, it is proposed that a variety of witticism and lightheartedness involved in most of the irony examples of the 69 GG's works provide an answer to the long-lasting question of why irony and humor appear to be related. As discussed in

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<sup>2</sup> The following situational irony example discussed in section 3.1 describes a serious event, a man's death, but derives humor. If this event happened to a person related with the addressee, he wouldn't get humor from (9). When we get humor from (9), we tend to delineate in our mind a humorous scene in a slapstick comedy.

(9) A man died the day before a hurricane hit, when it was sunny and calm. He was electrocuted while removing the TV antenna from his roof, as a precaution against the storm.

section 2.3, to explain the relationship between irony and humor, quite a few analyses have been proposed based on concepts such as incongruity or discordance, and representative features or cues for irony and humor. However, none of them provides a direct account for the apparent correlation between the two phenomena. One advantage of our analysis is that it derives a direct link between irony and humor based on a scrupulous analysis on irony data. It also proposes ‘witticism’ and ‘lightheartedness’ as essential components of most ironic utterances, which indirectly but effectively deliver their messages inducing humor.

## 5. Conclusion

To summarize our proposal, ‘witticism’ involved in irony in line with Yoon (2000), Alexander (1997), and Hirsch (2011a) generates humor, and ‘lightheartedness’ assumed in ironic utterances in the sense of Yoon (2000) functions as a precondition for inducing humor. As discussed above, irony is an effective tool for criticism. An ironic utterance avoids directly delivering its message but circuitously presents it, so that it saves the face of both the addressee and the speaker, mutes the aggressiveness of its criticism, and conveys its message efficiently reducing the risk of being attacked. We propose that the ironist tends to word, phrase, and twist his critical message utilizing ‘witticism’ and assuming ‘lightheartedness’ to maximize its effect, which generates humor. This way, he relieves the suffocating pressure and tension from the given situation by eliciting humor, which leads to the successful articulation and acceptance of the message. GG’s works successfully reveal this correlation between irony and humor. GG exploit the benefits of their indirectness, witticism, and lightheartedness, which help avoid causing offense and defiance, and deliver their messages even more strongly and forcefully in the sense of Colston (1997). In other words, GG’s works clearly show that ‘witticism’ and ‘lightheartedness’ are two integral ingredients of most effective ironic utterances. This way, an account has been proposed for the correlations between irony and humor. Additional accounts based on different data are expected to be provided by future research.

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## Appendix

GG's 69 works from 1985 to 2013

Year	Entry Title	Irony	Humor
1985	What do these artists have in common?		
	These galleries show no more than 10% women artists or none at all.		
	How many women had one-person exhibitions at NYC museums last year?		
	Women in America Earn Only 2/3 of What Men Earn. Women Artists Earn Only 1/3.		
1986	It's even worse in Europe.		
	Dear Art Collector	✓	✓
	Guerrilla Girls' 1986 Report Card		✓
1988	The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist	✓	✓
1989	When Sexism & Racism Are No Longer Fashionable, What Will Your Art Collection be Worth?		
	Do Women Have to be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?	✓	✓
	Relax, Senator Helms, the Art World is Your Kind of Place	✓	✓
	Are Bus Companies More Enlightened Than NYC Art Galleries?	✓	✓
	You're Only Seeing Half the Picture		
	Guerrilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums	✓	✓
1990	If February is Black History Month and March is Women's History Month, What Happens the Rest of the Year?		✓
1991	George Bush, "The Education President"	✓	
	Missing in Action		✓
	What's the difference between a prisoner of war and a homeless person?		
	These are the most bigoted galleries in New York.		
1992	Republicans Do Believe in a Woman's Right to Control Her Own Body!	✓	✓
	Discover the Shocking Truth About the Catholic Church's Position on Abortion	✓	✓
	What to Do When Raped...	✓	

1993	The Poster that Intimidated Pace Gallery into Showing a Woman Under 50		✓
1995	The Token Times	✓	✓
	Top Ten Signs that You're an Art World Token		
	Traditional Values and Quality Return to the Whitey Museum	✓	✓
	Cold-blooded Beast Takes Over Washington		
	Guerrilla Girls Proclaim Internet Too Pale, Too Male!		✓
1996	How to Enjoy the Battle of the Sexes	✓	✓
1997	Moma Mia! 3 White women, 1 Woman of Color and no Men of Color—out of 71 artists?		✓
1999	Guerrilla Girls reveal secret Giuliani/Saatchi plan for Brooklyn Museum		✓
2000	Send a message to those body obsessed guys in Hollywood		✓
2001	Guerrilla Girls go Ape at the Oscars...and the Sundance Film Festival	✓	✓
	The Birth of Feminism Movie Poster	✓	✓
2002	The Anatomically Correct Oscar billboard	✓	✓
	George Bush's Letter to Santa	✓	✓
	The Estrogen Bomb Card		
2003	The Schwarzenegger Shield		✓
	Don't Stereotype Me! sticker		
	The Women's Terror Alert		✓
	Send Estrogen Pills to the White House		
	The Trent L'Ottscar billboard: Even the U.S. Senate is More Progressive than Hollywood	✓	✓
2004	I Decide, You Decide, We Decide, They Don't Decide		
2005	The Venice Biennale		✓
	Free the Women Artists of Europe!		✓
	Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?	✓	✓
	From 1989 to 2005 & 2012 UPDATE		
2006	The Future for Turkish Women Artists	✓	✓
	Unchain the Women Directors!		✓
	¡Hay que quitar las Cadenas a las Mujeres Directoras! in Spain		✓
	¡Hay que quitar las Cadenas a las Mujeres Directoras! in Mexico		✓

2007	Horror on the National Mall!		✓
	Dear Collector, in Greece	✓	✓
	Dear Collector, in China	✓	✓
	Free the Women Artists! in China		✓
	Do women have to be naked to get into U.S. museums? in China	✓	✓
	The Birth of Feminism in The Netherlands	✓	✓
2008	Dearest Eli Broad action at LACMA, Los Angeles	✓	✓
2009/	Project Ireland	✓	✓
2010	Montreal project: Disturbing the Peace		
2011/ 2013	Free Women Zurich		✓
	Arms and the Man		
	Dearest Interview Magazine	✓	✓
	Guerrilla Girls to Museums: Time for Gender Reassignment		✓
	Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum?	✓	✓
	Update 2012		
	Not Ready to make Nice: The Guerrilla Girls in the Artworld and Beyond	✓	✓
	Interactive Street Project for the Art Boom Festival Krakow		
	Boston Billboard Truck Project	✓	✓
	The Estrogen Bomb		✓
	Same Sex Marriage Minnesota Billboard/Voter ID Minnesota	✓	
Sum	69 entries	31	48

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