

# Contents

Preface to the new edition — vii

Acknowledgments — xiii

## Chapter 1

**Introduction: Jokes, humor, and taste — 1**

Researching jokes — 2

Jokes and humor — 4

Humor as a social phenomenon — 6

Humor and taste — 10

The context of Dutch humor — 15

The design of this book — 18

## Part I **Style and social background**

### Chapter 2

**The joke: Genesis of an oral genre — 23**

The joke as oral culture — 24

The spread of the joke — 28

The genesis of the joke — 30

The status of the joke — 34

High and low humor — 36

Conclusion: Changing criteria for judging the joke — 40

### Chapter 3

**Joke telling as communication style — 42**

Joke telling and social background — 43

Jokes and gender — 47

Jokes and class — 50

Gender roles and class cultures — 53

Joking and trade — 56

Humorous communication styles — 58

Gender and speech — 62

Class and speech — 65

Conclusion: Objections to jokes and criteria for good humor — 69

**Chapter 4****The humor divide: Class, age and humor styles — 71**

Humor styles: High and low, old and young — 72

Style, status, and knowledge — 78

Highbrow and lowbrow humor styles — 82

Arguments for lowbrow humor — 83

Arguments for highbrow humor — 86

The eye of the beholder? — 90

Humor styles and taste variations — 92

Conclusion: Humor styles beyond standardized Dutch humor? — 99

**Chapter 5****The logic of humor styles — 102**

Distinguishing good humor from bad — 102

Coarseness: Objections to bad humor — 103

“A good sense of humor”: Criteria for good humor — 107

Class culture and humor style — 113

The sense of humor and the self: humor style and authenticity — 117

Conclusion: Jokes, taste, and authenticity — 119

**Part II Taste and quality****Chapter 6****The repertoire: Dutch joke culture — 123**

Jokes and social boundaries — 124

Innocuous jokes: Stupidity and other unseemly behavior — 126

Sexual jokes: From allusion to transgression — 131

Irreverent jokes: Religion, power, suffering and sickness — 136

Hurtful jokes: Jokes at the expense of others — 142

Conclusion: The hardening of the humor — 147

**Chapter 7****Temptation and transgression — 150**

The balance between funny and offensive — 152

Varying viewpoints on offensiveness — 156

Tempting the laugh — 158

World-class jokes: Joke tellers on joke technique — 160

The importance of joke-work — 163

“Humor is humor”: The incompatibility of humor and morals — 165

Conclusion: temptation, transgression, and joke quality — 168

**Chapter 8****Sense and sociability — 170**

Personal styles of joke tellers — 170

Avoiding or transgressing boundaries — 171

Specialists and generalists — 176

Transgression, identification, and Dutch joke culture(s) — 180

Young and old — 180

Men and women — 183

Non-college and college-educated people — 188

Conclusion: Mechanisms of taste and the sense of sociability — 192

**Part III Comparing humor styles****Chapter 9****National humor styles: Humor styles, joke telling and social background in the United States — 197**

Researching humor styles in America — 198

Jokes and humor styles in the United States: Survey results — 201

Transgression and identification in American jokes — 207

American humorous identifications — 209

The social status of the joke in America — 211

American arguments against the joke — 214

American views on a good sense of humor — 218

“You gotta have a sense of humor”: Humor and the moral self — 224

Conclusion: Telling a joke to save your life — 230

**Chapter 10****Sociology and the joke — 232**

The appreciation of jokes: Genre and individual jokes — 232

Style: Evaluating a humorous genre — 233

Form and content: Evaluating individual jokes — 235

Gender, age, class and nationality: The dynamics of social differences — 237

Gender and role — 238

Age and phase — 239

Class and culture — 240

National differences and cultural logics — 242

Distinction and difference — 245

Good humor and bad taste — 249

**Appendix 1**

**The jokes used in the Dutch survey — 253**

**Appendix 2**

**Dutch humorists and television programs — 259**

**References — 264**

**Subject index — 276**