



Review

**PROVOKED BY CHARLIE HEBDO: VISUAL SATIRE AND
MANAGEMENT STUDIES**

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PROVOKED BY CHARLIE HEBDO:

VISUAL SATIRE AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES

“I fear for your revolution, my dear sir; I fear it will never succeed because you’ve not yet learnt to be frivolous” (Eagleton, 1987: 129)

Satire, especially in visual form, has long played a significant role in balancing the powers of those in control of societies, communities or organizations. Focussing on the cover of the ‘survivors’ issue’, the first publication of the French satirical magazine ‘Charlie Hebdo’ following a deadly terror attack on its staff, we explore how incongruity, irony and caricature afford visual satire its potency to provoke readers to reconsider values and beliefs. Set in contrast with the seriousness of most management research, visual satire done well can resist fixed categorizations and binary oppositions to communicate and debate sophisticated knowledge claims. The mirror play of humor and tragedy in the cover of the ‘survivor’s issue’ prompts us to reflect upon our own academic writing practice and the possibilities of incongruity, irony and caricature for management research. We do not begin with a gap in knowledge, but with the tragedy.

BLOOD

Every Monday a group of award-winning visual satirists gathered in Paris for the editorial meeting of [Charlie Hebdo](https://charliehebdo.fr/en/), a low-budget French magazine with a weekly circulation of 60,000. While distribution numbers were small compared to other Paris weeklies, Charlie Hebdo stood out for their hornet-nest style of animated provocation, a self-described “angry magazine ... a gazette of the grotesque – because that’s what so much of life and politics is” (Charlie Hebdo <https://charliehebdo.fr/en/>) With the sting of its satire aimed at anything and anyone deemed sacrosanct or sacred, from French prime ministers to religious faiths, the magazine gained notoriety in both intellectual and fundamentalist circles inside and outside France. For some, Charlie Hebdo’s garish pranks were no laughing matter: in 2011 their offices sustained an arson attack and their comic production was relocated to a secret hideout under police protection.

But the secret did not hold, and on the cold January morning of January 7th, 2015, two masked gunmen clutching Kalashnikovs forced their way into the building killing eleven people, including the magazine’s editor, cartoonists, columnists, office staff, an assigned guard, a building maintenance worker and a visitor to the office. As the events spilled outside, a French Muslim police officer was executed at close range and others injured. The next day, two men claiming allegiance to the Hebdo attackers took hostages in a Jewish supermarket, resulting in further casualties and their deaths when police stormed the building. A female accomplice was purported to have escaped to ISIS controlled territory in Syria. Finally, by Friday, the hunt for the two male Charlie Hebdo attackers ended in a fatal shoot-out in an abandoned warehouse.

Globally, communities responded with a groundswell of support for the magazine.

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3 Mourners crowding the streets of Paris held placards declaiming ‘Je Suis Charlie’, a
4 collective expression of public empathy repeated many times over on twitter (with
5 analytics website Topsy reporting 1.7million tweets on 7th January using
6 #JeSuisCharlie), Facebook and on the magazine’s website.
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9 Online, the attackers claimed their actions to be a violent response to Charlie
10 Hebdo’s irreverent cartoons of Muslims and especially of the Prophet Muhammad, who
11 in past issues had been drawn naked or carrying a bomb – when the very depiction of the
12 Prophet is widely perceived to be blasphemous in Islamic tradition.
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15 *Vignette 1¹: Since the massacre I had been glued to the internet and social media trying*
16 *to try to find answers. I remember seeing the hashtag #JeSuisCharlie suddenly appear*
17 *and then it went viral (as did, albeit with less resonance, the slogans ‘I am Jewish’, ‘I*
18 *am police’ and ‘Je suis Ahmed’ in reference to the killed Muslim policeman). Within a*
19 *day, cartoonists around the world began tweeting images of their own visual response –*
20 *some angry, many grief-filled. A weeping Tintin² brought me to tears, as did facebook*
21 *posts by my Muslim friends and colleagues; all equally outraged and pensive.*
22 *Newspapers reported that Charlie Hebdo would publish their next issue the following*
23 *Monday. I wondered, what would this mean? Would everything erupt now? Would they*
24 *back down and, with it, capitulate on the French love of freedom of speech; or would*
25 *they continue as usual? And would that lead to more deaths and retaliation? (Gail)*
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30 In this essay we attempt to trace this capacity of visual satire to move and incite,
31 not by realistically representing states of affairs but by caricaturing, distorting,
32 magnifying and therefore loosening rigid connections to the real. Satire done well
33 remains incongruous and ironic; it is relevant and heard in a world that is awash with
34 real and fake news, facts, and theories. Focusing our discussion on what became known
35 as the ‘Survivors’ issue’, the first magazine cover printed following the attack, we make
36 two points that are inspired by this particular cover of Charlie Hebdo. First, visual satire
37 is a powerful means by which society can communicate and debate sophisticated
38 knowledge claims; a ‘satirical consciousness’ that thrives on *not* knowing better; on *not*
39 being serious in order to sublate the clever strategies and traditions of knowledge that
40 continually divert focus from ‘normal life’ (Sloterdijk, 1987: 536). This defiance of
41 strategic and ideological resolutions and the binary opposition of ‘truths’ versus
42 ‘falsehoods’ is achieved not through academic argumentation, but rather through a
43 visual format and the sophisticated use of incongruity, caricature, and irony. Second, the
44 Survivors’ cover of Charlie Hebdo inspires us, as management scholars, to question our
45 own work in light of the limitedness of knowledge claims when set against the
46 uncertainties and abysses of a (dis/)organized world. Are we as management scholars
47 certain of the unassailability of our often rigid adherence to traditional methodologies
48 and objective reporting, or is there room for us to raise emotions, gather attention, or
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55 ¹ The essay uses vignettes from Gail whose immediate reactions to events and images provoked
56 conversations and debate between the three of us (co-authors) as to whether and how the events around
57 Charlie Hebdo attack resonated in the way we work as academics in the field of management studies. In
58 this, the image from the cover of the ‘Survivor’s issue’ of Charlie Hebdo was a grounding provocation.

59 ² Tintin is one of the most popular European comic characters of all time – a young reporter created
60 by Belgian cartoonist Hergé see <http://en.tintin.com/essentiel>

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3 speak to wider concerns without striving for resolution and equally important endeavor?
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5 We acknowledge from the outset that ours is a very limited viewpoint on the
6 events, written by authors whose connection with both the attacks as well as with the
7 specific French context is through the mediation of news feeds, social media and liberal
8 democratic background conditions. In the spirit of an essay on visual imagery, we
9 withhold comprehensive assessments, instead trying to highlight implications of visual
10 satire for our field; a question that also touches more generally on the limits imposed on
11 academic knowledge claims.
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14 THE COVER OF CHARLIE HEBDO'S SURVIVORS' ISSUE 15

16 In the week following the tragedy, Charlie Hebdo went into print again. The
17 French daily broadsheet Libération provided the surviving staff with secure office space,
18 and donations covered publishing expenses of issue #1178 which became known
19 colloquially as 'the Survivors' issue'³.
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22 *Vignette 2: After the attack, circulation figures for CH's Survivor's issue had reportedly*
23 *exploded -- over 7 million copies in six languages with international distribution in most*
24 *major markets. But it was impossible for me to find an outlet where I lived outside of*
25 *France. I facebooked my friend, Elodie, in Paris to see if she could buy me a copy of the*
26 *next Charlie Hebdo. She told me she would try. With tight purchasing restrictions in*
27 *place (one copy per person), long queues started in Paris the early hours of the*
28 *morning. The question on everyone's lips was what would the cover look like? Would*
29 *Charlie Hebdo buckle? Would they attack the religious faith of the perpetrators? At*
30 *17:51 pm on the publication date, Elodie sent me a facebook message: "Got one!!*
31 *You're lucky! I had a miracle to get it! Give me your address." The very thought of*
32 *owning a copy became strangely important, if not thrilling. The issue for me was not*
33 *about religion but about violence and freedom of expression. Others felt very differently.*
34 *(Gail)*
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40 When the issue was finally unveiled, the [cover image](#) (14 January, 2015, No 1178)
41 was of a grieving Prophet holding a 'Je Suis Charlie' placard, with the contemplative
42 headline "Tout est Pardonne" [All is Forgiven].
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45 We argue that this image expresses much of both the power and danger of visual
46 satire; its imagery forcing most readers to contemplate a reaction; to fall in with an
47 apparent public sentiment, to be confronted with their own values, emotions and
48 knowledge claims about the world. At one and the same time it delivers both an insult in
49 form of another blasphemous image that elicits further worldwide threats and criticism,
50 and a soothing injunction for forgiveness. In the tradition of satire, defined as "the use of
51 humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices,
52 particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues" (Oxford
53 English Dictionary, n.d.), this image raises more questions than it answers. It opens up
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58 ³ This and the other covers we mention can easily be found on the internet. Following discussion
59 with the AMR editors we decided not to reprint them in this journal.
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3 the tragic (in the undecidability of values) and the comic (playing with such
4 undecidability): a provocation to think differently; a liberty to laugh at powerful kings,
5 clerics, politicians or at management; to debate that which we thought we knew, to upset
6 the ways we are typically organized to see, understand and manage things.
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9 While satire may appear crude, its construction often revels in grossly distorting
10 specific bodily features or caricaturing what others hold sacred or desire most; be it a
11 figure of moral, religious, or public standing. But to be successful it depends on a
12 sophisticated development of a sense of *incongruity*, *caricature* and *irony* to create
13 complex but necessarily unverifiable knowledge claims for political and social effect.
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15 INCONGRUITY

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18 Satire, and the laughter it can induce, begins with the creation of a sense of
19 incongruity in the audiences' mind. For the philosopher Henri Bergson (1911: 113-4)
20 laughter erupts when we encounter a stasis or interruption in movement, language, or
21 thought that makes distinct an event that is out of place with the ordinary fluidity of
22 ongoing life. This shattering of what is congruent, this upsetting of normal patterns is
23 the source of comic force. For Bergson (1911: 170) all humor thrives on the
24 commonness of such incongruities, the more quotidian the better. In playing on
25 incongruity, comedy surfaces the demands we all encounter in living sociably. We are
26 expected to read situations, and fall in with their demands, compliant in ways that allow
27 us to adapt and survive. Ignorance, indifference towards, or refusal to comply with these
28 demands is something particular and occasional, becoming a distinct class of things of
29 which we might be in awe or afraid - or at which we might laugh. Satire isolates and
30 emphasizes such incongruous character traits, behaviors, or situations in order to
31 undermine their presumed status; it deflates the pumped-up and grounds the elevated,
32 relying on the force of an image to which the viewer adds meanings, often multiple
33 ones, rather than relying on text to explicate a position.
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39 In this practice Charlie Hebdo at times excels with its covers commonly
40 portraying incongruous subjects and ideas. Only a week after the arson attack, for
41 example, the magazine published a [cartoon](#) showing a seemingly Muslim man
42 passionately kissing another man made out to one of the magazine's cartoonists (1
43 November, 2011, No.1012). With the accompanying caption: "Love is stronger than
44 hate", this was a 'properly irreverent combination' (Davidson, 2015) in form of a carnal
45 interpretation of love as a unifier; a same-sex act conducted by a representative of a
46 unifying religion that does not condone such behavior, and yet incongruently depicted in
47 precisely such an act. Another example is the magazine's depiction of the then
48 presidential candidate Trump (18 June, 2016, No 1247) - whose speeches and more
49 recent edicts systematically curtail the rights of the LGBTQ community - as a defender
50 of that very community against hate crimes, only to insult Muslim and LGBTQ
51 communities alike through gross and derogatory language⁴.
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58 ⁴ English Trans of cover.: Headline: "Trump as President?" Image of Orlando nightclub
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3 This exemplifies Bergson's argument that the comic - especially satire - is a
4 contrivance of plausible interruption which creates a feeling that events are out of joint.
5 In taking actions and meanings out of context caricature serves to undermine their
6 presumed authority, revealing the contradictions by which creeds typically structure
7 action, be it in the governance of a nation or the management of an organization. Satire
8 depicts incongruous scenes between different people, social groups, or ideas – all
9 expressed ironically, saying one thing, but meaning many others. This sets up
10 incongruous forms: discrepancies between what is considered to generally be the case;
11 the stable classes or rules (including those of management theory), commonsensical
12 understandings, habits, or Gestalten, and what happens in the specific moment. Such a
13 distorted logic can be expressed in syllogistic form (c.f. Bateson, 2000: 205):
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17 Believers are committed to the one truth.

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19 Here two believers with different beliefs are committing to one another.

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21 They are being truthful.
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24 Charlie Hebdo thrives on visually scripting incongruities such as these. In the
25 cover of the Survivor's issue, we find another example of something deeply incongruous
26 at play in the response to the attacks. This time its depth comes from breaking with
27 Charlie Hebdo's otherwise overtly aggressive custom of satire; the expected behaviors
28 of victims or perpetrators; and with the flow of events as they unfolded. In a cartoon
29 that, once again, depicts the Prophet Muhammad, the remaining editorial staff spun a
30 comic tension between smooth and skillful negotiation of the world and its looming
31 abrupt interruption, religious mockery, and divine forgiveness. They interrupt
32 themselves, their own structures, exemplifying their tradition by turning, briefly, on their
33 own urge to satirize.
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37 CARICATURE

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39 Caricatures are Charlie Hebdo's vehicles to elicit the kind of comedic humor by
40 which underlying incongruities are brought into sharp relief. Typically, there is
41 something crude and simplistic about Charlie Hebdo's cartoons: drawn in skewed, often
42 emphatic lines that signal from the outset: 'this is not real'. This is apparent in the
43 Survivor's issue, but also more recently in Charlie Hebdo's depiction of world figures
44 such as Donald Trump. These cartoons establish their own internal consistencies:
45 signifiers that relate to each other in the cartoonists' own making of the image, yet which
46 have to connect somehow to the established world of referents.
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50 The work of caricature is not confined to a singular feature of a group as such,
51 but to actively manipulate group features, so they are twisted, diminished, expanded, re-
52 oriented and differently animated (Sullivan, 2016). A portrait - art - attempts likenesses
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55 called "Pulse", after the shootings. Trump speech bubble: "They have to go, those towel-
56 heads who come kill our pansies!" [also possible trans. = "faggots!"]
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3 that reveal both type and uniqueness of character, one steeped in its own and wider
4 histories, whereas caricature pulls the personal into a category of clumsiness and
5 inelasticity, the chosen feature occluding everything else, the small overriding the big
6 through a break in natural order which yet remains somehow natural, like an eclipse.
7 For most caricaturists, the face is usually the point of emphasis, for it is the face that
8 bears a person's life most apparently. The style of caricature used by Charlie Hebdo, like
9 all caricatures, is never wholly preposterous, though can verge on it: a facial feature
10 exploded, a momentary and unconscious twitch extended into a cruelly long span, a
11 sallow demeanor spread like a virus to cover an entire scene, a face touched – as in the
12 case of the Survivor's issue cover – by 'inappropriate' forms: a tear echoed by a genital-
13 shaped turban.
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18 In each case the person is absorbed by the generality of the feature in a kind of
19 reverse facial takeover. Sometimes this caricature descends into the puerile, the cruel,
20 becoming a provocation of offence; and taking offence (as well as laughter) is what
21 Charlie Hebdo want, in part, because with anger can come a space of dis-sensus and
22 emotional upset in whose fray all manner of meaning can emerge. Though with anger
23 there is also the possibility of closing off, a reaction of direct opposition that sharpens
24 rather than complicates existing tensions.
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28 The power of such caricature rests with their ability to conjure in the audience
29 both a sense of surprise and confirmation as well as outrage and sympathy, something
30 'accurate' representations rarely do. The comic comes in acknowledging which feature
31 to emphasize in which context: a certain garment, facial feature, a preponderant color or
32 mannerism. How can drawings of something specific and singular, a kiss or a beard or a
33 piece of cloth act as synecdoches for much wider conditions and bring them into direct,
34 graspable focus? As Bergson explains, in successful caricature the restraining
35 supervision of reasonableness is loosened, as is the presumed capacity to arrange oneself
36 symphonically, as a collection of parts. In the skewed emphasis of caricature the
37 cartoonist reveals the conceits of attempting to represent situations as a unity, showing
38 how the tendencies and qualities inherent in the material 'parts' themselves can push
39 back up through the façade of an organized whole to assume their own, wild potency:
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44 “The art of the caricaturist consists in detecting this, at times, imperceptible
45 tendency, and in rendering it visible to all eyes by magnifying it. He [sic.]
46 makes his models grimace, as they would do themselves if they went to the
47 end of their tether. Beneath the skin- deep harmony of form, he divines the
48 deep-seated recalcitrance of matter. He realizes disproportions and
49 deformations which must have existed in nature as mere inclinations, but
50 which have not succeeded in coming to a head, being held in check by a
51 higher force” (Bergson, 1911, I §3)
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55 Caricature has no inherent morality. It is, suggests Baudelaire, a dangerous form of
56 expression in that a sense of superiority over others (laughing at their apparent
57 weaknesses) reveals also a weakness in those who laugh (Hannoosh, 1992, 31). The
58 emphatic, self- sustaining, manic stare on this Charlie Hebdo cover is an image that sits
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3 in the same tradition as the egregiously drawn cartoons of Julius Streicher, published in
4 the infamous propaganda pamphlet *Der Stürmer* (part of the German National Socialist
5 programme to de-humanize Jews in the 1930's). Charlie Hebdo's caricatures are
6 sometimes dangerously close to Streicher's and to other racist satire (e.g. Malmqvist,
7 2015). We might ask whether it is caricature at all, given the way representatives of a
8 religious group – Muslims, a class of whom, of course, there is a plurality of members –
9 are being depicted as a general singularity and often with hostility? One answer may
10 rest with considering whether the Charlie Hebdo caricature is aimed at defaming a group
11 of people or the pretensions of religious doctrine: where Streicher's hooked noses clearly
12 served to incite hatred against a group of human beings, Charlie Hebdo's kissing cleric
13 or its blaspheming drawings of the Prophet Muhammad might be said to veer toward a
14 general irreverence toward revealed religions; but this is only a matter of degree,
15 especially given the context of Charlie Hebdo's purported long-standing obsession with
16 Islam. To Muslims - individually or collectively - such degrees might be vague indeed.
17 Another way, perhaps more potent, is to consider the intent of caricature, whether it aims
18 to close off inquiry and critique by emphasizing what 'is' the case, or open up inquiry,
19 by damning those who look to close down curiosity and experimentation in human
20 endeavors. Against such ideologues, satiric mockery serves as 'stubborn insistence on
21 the seriousness of life against the frivolous word garlands of abstraction' (Sloterdijk,
22 1987: 535). In this way, caricature works not so much by its content as by being an
23 irritant to all truth claims, notably against those living in, and benefitting materially
24 from, the 'proper places' (Certeau, 1988) of power such as those afforded, inter alia, by
25 religions.
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33 The physiognomic eloquence of a caricaturist can rid the subject of grace and
34 manners -- they lose their civilized or intellectual sheen, such as it is, and become either
35 more manic or mechanical, held by forces to which their individuality has no adequate
36 response; leaving them open to ridicule for such a public loss of autonomy and dignity.
37 Care needs to be taken when belittling people in this way. If Charlie Hebdo's caricatures
38 urge on readers a view that Muslims are all equally obsessed with organizing human
39 affairs according to a singular, religiously inspired, absolutist design then they are no
40 better than Streicher's. If, however, the caricature pushes back at those who believe and
41 insist life is a unity and who seek to impose their designs on others, then the satire
42 becomes ethically charged. It works because caricature refuses to occupy the elevated
43 space that those claiming to speak for others want to occupy. In this refusal, caricature
44 opens up discursive space for what is inherently risky, alien, and disturbing. Streicher's
45 work is no longer satire because it turns the quest for truth into one of dogmatism and in
46 interfering with dialogue it no longer ruptures the world, so much as propound a
47 singular, demanding and insistent all-sided viewpoint that is doomed because of its
48 inability to tolerate multiplicity in human life (Sloterdijk, 1987: 19). Caricature only
49 works if it ridicules those figures who assert singular views on the world, figures who
50 expose themselves to being the object of humor because they demonstrate what for
51 Bergson (1991, III, §4,) is:
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58 "... a very special inversion of common sense. It consists in seeking to
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3 mould things on an idea of one's own, instead of moulding one's ideas on
4 things, - in seeing before us what we are thinking of, instead of thinking of
5 what we see."

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7 Thus the caricaturist steps into the gap left by this inversion of common sense because
8 nothing else can fill it. Reason is impotent when appealing to such figures who
9 instinctually believe their ideas present a complete view of the world, and caricature
10 works by disabling their presumption that the world can and will conform to their idea
11 of it.
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13 IRONY

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16 A third aspect to visual satire is irony. Richard Rorty (1989: 76) contrasts the
17 ironist with the metaphysician. By metaphysician he means someone who attempts "to
18 know about certain things – quite general and important things", typically by
19 differentiating knowledge claims from opinion and speculation. The aim of the
20 metaphysician is to move from 'thinner' and more flexible terms to essences and
21 certainties. The metaphysician believes there are answers to problems, that these
22 answers are shareable, in that others can be persuaded of their veracity and cogency, and
23 that - as answers - they cohere in some way, showing truths that reveal an order to the
24 world that we cannot deny, irrespective of our socially and historically unique situation.
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28 Irony infringes on this revelatory process as a foil by which ideas, claims and
29 values are made to stand out and then are assessed for their plausibility and potential.
30 For the ironist, theories and doctrines are never true, just as the pursuit of truth itself
31 cannot be a sacred act; truths are just more or less persuasive and, above all, indicative
32 of the sorts of beliefs, desires and attitudes of those uttering them (Rorty, 1989: 79). At
33 its most extreme, as in the heretic form of Hebdo's cartoons, irony can upset those
34 concerned with societal norms or religious dogma precisely by not taking them too
35 seriously.
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39 The Survivors' issue ironically incorporates and plays with the many
40 metaphysicians involved in the events surrounding the attack on Charlie Hebdo's offices
41 and the anticipated response to the Survivors' issue. We see metaphysicians in the form
42 of religious believers occupied with the revelation or seeming enforcement of scripted
43 orders. There are also politicians for whom the foundations of the French Republic were
44 at risk. And there is a part of French society for which 'Je Suis Charlie' is a rallying call
45 to re-affirm, in unquestioning solidarity, the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity
46 to preserve the existing economic and social order and its institutionalized and selective
47 restrictions to freedom, its inequalities and its exclusions – especially towards ethnic
48 minorities, immigrants or refugees (Fassin, 2015: 4). The positioning and clashing of
49 these metaphysical positions is an invitation for irony. It is precisely in these grave
50 situations where the ironist's work can be most effective: tackling that which is blackest.
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55 The cover of the Survivors' issue takes this up, in part, finding room for the flick
56 of a smile in the darkest of events. At the same time, the cover's ironic impact fails or, at
57 least, comes into question because of Hebdo's choice of reaping satirical capital from an
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3 already marginalized group often excluded from public debate whose frustrations on
4 living in, or being affected by the West have, at times, spilt into a righteous bitterness.
5 This is even more the case when we consider a similarly righteous element inherent in
6 Charlie Hebdo's simultaneous claim to the sanctity of western values associated with
7 free speech - the sort of knowledge claim that its cartoonists have made a career of
8 lampooning. Placing the Survivor's cover in a mirror requires one to reconsider such
9 sanctities, and entreaty more careful consideration of the minority group being
10 lambasted. Here we glimpse the limits of Charlie Hebdo's use of irony and are beholden
11 to question whether there is a place too dark, too grave where the seriousness of events
12 forecloses on its disturbing flippancy; events such as the shootings in Paris?
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16 To find humor in the bleakest hour (Weeden, 2013) the ironist maintains what for
17 Bergson (1911: I §1) is an emotional distance: "[t]he comic demands something like a
18 momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple". The
19 intellect here is realized by remaining a spectator, giving a distance on events that means
20 people can acknowledge the often comic nature of otherwise intensely possessing
21 situations. That they must do so in public, as incongruities must be shared, and so does
22 their amusement - for we rarely laugh alone, and never for long - making satire a
23 peculiarly occasional experience and one that requires a shared background of the
24 complexities involved to succeed. Yet in such distancing, the ironist is often at risk of
25 replacing one hierarchy of values with another: their own. This is not least because they,
26 being ironic, suppose their intervention to have had an effect, when often all that seems
27 to have happened is a form of temporary nihilism. To the extent the cover of the
28 Survivor's issues avoids such nihilism it recurs to an implied metaphysical position of
29 the 'superiority of the West'. To the extent it embraces it, it accuses all claims for
30 metaphysical certainty as being complicit with the tragedy. Through its offensive
31 gesture, coupled with the spectre of forgiveness, and against a background of violence,
32 readers are invited into an ongoing discussion in which people might find agreement
33 were they allowed to talk ideas through critically, knowledgeably and persistently. The
34 upshot of such engagement cannot be purifying, or transformative, but in Rorty's (2004:
35 137) laconic phrasing, "a little more grown-up", ironically by often being a little more
36 puerile.
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44 IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

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46 *Vignette 3: As Paris continued to reel from the attacks, most religious and political*
47 *leaders categorically denounced the violence. Many in the general public, including*
48 *ourselves, voiced disbelief and engaged in axiomatic debate: How can a few poorly-*
49 *drawn cartoons matter against millions of printed holy books? Did Charlie Hebdo go*
50 *too far with their inflammatory imagery; or is this idolatry an exercise of freedom of*
51 *speech and press and thus a basic right or necessity of a democratic society? I was*
52 *inspired by the peaceful vigil of millions meeting in the streets of Paris – could this*
53 *outweigh the dispatch of gruesome violence by the attackers? (Gail)*
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57 At first glance, the pages of the *Academy of Management Review* seem far away
58 both from the sophomoric provocations of Charlie Hebdo and from the bloody events in
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3 Paris. A second look, however, leads us to ask how a small magazine with limited
4 funding and operating in hiding, with no drive for academic rigor, without a reputation
5 for serious reportage and equipped merely with a talent for vulgar transgressions and
6 profanities, can bring such contradictions and oppositions into the public discourse in
7 the way it did? Charlie Hebdo's imagery had worldwide resonance, irritated, offended,
8 but also excited readers and polarized the public in a way few Academy scholars have
9 ever done, despite their training and academic skill – but perhaps also in a way no
10 Academy scholar would or should ever want to do.

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14 Yet we have been provoked by the Survivor's cover of Charlie Hebdo to consider
15 whether there is room in management studies for the characteristics that make visual
16 satire powerful, and the exposure and challenge it lays bare. In closing we sketch out the
17 potential relevance of these four themes for management scholarship: the use of visual
18 satire, incongruity, caricature and irony.

20 Visual satire

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23 While it seems clear that comic provocation, vulgarity and savageness alone are
24 a poor recipe for an alternative *content* of scholarly discourse, there is something about
25 the way visual satire such as Charlie Hebdo's works, the way comic writers and artists
26 on occasion 'hit home' and make an audience think – and sometimes respond. There
27 seems to be an issue of *form* that attests to the capacity of satire, especially when
28 embedded in visual imagery, to enjoin us into deep and important debate while
29 simultaneously alienating and excluding; something that gathers both order and disorder,
30 the seeable and the inexplicable, a form of wisdom that lives alongside the rigid
31 knowledge of the sciences and the complexities of history (Cooper, 1986). Something
32 that provokes as well as edifies through the power of open-ended visual narratives.

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37 Where scholarship espouses precision, clarity and objectivity, the visual satire of
38 Charlie Hebdo's Survivor's issue creates intellectual and creative disruptions and
39 organizes interpretation and response. Cartoons such as this, veering between
40 ostentatious crudeness and caustic heresy, aim to lessen the impress of abstract
41 ideological and knowledge claims. While they draw little effect from artistic subtlety
42 and suaveness, they employ a minimalism in visual technique and meaning coupled with
43 an astute sense and appreciation of the peculiarities of the world. Good visual satire is
44 never one-sided; its simple but skillful interjections into massively complex situations
45 disturb precisely because they do not try to provide definitive or rigorously drawn
46 answers. Satirical cartoonists interject a rigid view into the overflowing mixture of
47 opinions, arguments and facts – they draw in their audience asking them to do the work
48 of on-going interpretation and in so doing they wrest open a space in which meaning
49 resists closure and settlement without, therefore, being considered irrelevant.

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54 The Survivor's cover of Charlie Hebdo, or the more recent one of (now)
55 President Trump, illustrate the agitating power of visual satirical 'forms' alongside
56 textual narratives, even if that power to affect others lies in the failure of the satirical
57 attempt. One image speaks over the seven thousand words of this essay and over
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3 millions of words written about the wider issues at stake. Their power to bring together,
4 in a specific image, much wider patterns of knowledge requires sophistication belying
5 the crudeness of of the satirists' craftsmanship. Such sophistication is difficult to attain
6 in scientific work aimed at defining boundaries and settling truth claims as the very
7 processes of defining and settling sever those connecting patterns that link wider
8 knowledge relations. There is a complementary quality to scientific and visually
9 satirical narratives. The former aims at arresting meaning by specifying particular
10 relations while the latter tries to free relations to evoke wider patterns that connect. Like
11 being its negative, visual satire's lack of scientific specificity affords a grasp of wider
12 concerns that so often limits the relevance of academic claims. How then may our
13 considerations of visual satire's threefold characteristics help when considering the
14 process of scientific knowledge production?
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19 Incongruity

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21 In acknowledging the incongruity of cartoons we find a different framing for
22 academic work; not just as a purveyor of facts and textual interpretation, but as a way of
23 challenging the prevailing constraints in organizational life. Business leaders, strategists,
24 advisors, analysts, but also and especially academics, through their methodological
25 procedures, tend to divide the world into parts; parts that can then be ascribed
26 characteristics: stable and fleeting; inside and outside; good and bad; right and wrong.
27 The ensuing promise of clarity and order comes not simply through knowledge claims
28 but a wider politics of symbolic, material and legalistic barriers and incentives that
29 protect entrenched divisions and orders. These operations of power sustain ideas, to the
30 point where rival ideas and their exponents are considered alien disturbances to the
31 productive utility of knowing things for certain. Believers (whether religious, or in
32 academia, business and politics) compete with one another for wider membership, each
33 arguing for their organizational prowess while using institutionalized power to silence
34 what fails to fit into the belief system. Into this plate- tectonics of belonging, humor
35 steps like an unwelcome guest; a reminder of the contradictions and complexities in any
36 belief system, without taking sides, or striving for closure. The humorist is serious in
37 refusing to provide answers, throwing the task of interpretation back on the audience,
38 urging them to reconsider their standard forms of expression.
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45 Though perhaps Charlie Hebdo intervenes on questions of belonging in a more
46 visceral and provocative way than those typically considered by members of the
47 Academy of Management, we might still learn from its effects. In what ways does the
48 Academy erect and protect its borders? Can we, too, laugh at our convictions about
49 methodological and theoretical integrity and therefore face up to the many things that do
50 not fit into the explanatory boxes and matrices we have drawn? Can we accept the social
51 and political nature of what counts as knowledge? In what ways, for example, are
52 'wayward' methods tolerable, especially when they fail to provide rigorous definitions
53 and certainties? What about images such as Hebdo's: can they count as carriers of
54 meaning alone, without the need for a prescribed interpretation? And can we expect the
55 academic and managerial readership to take active participation in the ongoing
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3 construction of meaning so as to leap out of theoretical boxes into the wider universes of
4 knowledge that influence any specific managerial issue?
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6 Even more generally, visual satire encourages us to question academic rigidity
7 in many ways, such as academic contributions emphasizing theoretical over applied
8 contribution, the oft-mentioned capacity for ‘relevance’; the integrity of disciplinary
9 distinctions, the validity of journal lists or rankings for performance evaluations, and so
10 on. The intent is not to necessarily break these down, but to bring them into
11 questionability, perhaps by being able to laugh about the foolishness of our belief that
12 we can know anything for sure at all and our attempts at trying to establish stable causal
13 connections in a world that is continually changing.
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16 Caricature

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18 Caricature rests on distortion, on grossly over-emphasizing one element at the
19 expense of all others to bring ensuing contrasts into sharp relief. Already, much
20 academic work unwittingly runs danger of caricaturing organizational life whenever
21 complex organizational affairs are reduced to specific, isolated features (Tsoukas &
22 Chia, 2002). When we depict organizations, managers or workers, we all too often
23 emphasise certain features, be it strategies, routines, processes of sensemaking, or
24 institutional forces as if these were definitive of these groups as a whole; as if we could
25 recognize and judge them just by these features. Here we run danger of grossly
26 distorting our representations. This is more obvious in visual caricatures which project
27 disproportions and deformations which have to exist latently, but which require the
28 cartoonist’s pencil to come to full prominence. By refusing to be serious or trying for
29 representational clarity, can management studies bring organizational contrasts into
30 sharper relief?
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36 This requires making what is apparently commonsensical stand out, for instance
37 through visual means or through a loosening of language and wayward descriptions so
38 that these wider patterns of knowledge can be recognized and discussed and thus read,
39 without being taken too literally. Successful caricature is a tightrope walk between de-
40 masking stereotypes while avoiding becoming stereotypical itself; it requires braveness
41 to acknowledge the unknown and unsettled nature of affairs. Yet it also risks hurting
42 people emotionally, and promoting a lack of social or organizational compassion. And
43 compassion, as Hanson and Trank (2016) show when studying a death penalty defense
44 team, is as overlooked an area of concern in management research as satire (Tsui, 2013).
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49 Irony

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51 The comic medium refuses to make knowledge claims, and where it does make
52 claims, it does not attempt to elevate those insights beyond their immediate, raw impact.
53 Visual satire in particular invokes a fluidity that is also at odds with the methodological
54 promise of secure foundations. As a verb, to satirize is to indulge in and accommodate
55 what matters here and now by invoking a multiplicity of wider meanings. This requires
56 the capacity to both question basic beliefs as well as commitments to such certainties
57 unlike Rorty’s (1989) metaphysicists who finds questioning such beliefs deeply unsettling.
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3 Charlie Hebdo covers are temporary in nature – it carries ironic resonance only for a
4 period but it achieves a communal achievement by which complexities are brought
5 together and shared – even if only for a while. As its potency fades, irony loses its
6 organizing capacity; as the fault lines in society change so does the relevance for any
7 ironic image. The provocation here for us is as follows: how certain are we that
8 management typologies or matrixes provide enduring insights? Visual satire, as
9 exemplified in the Survivor’s cover of Charlie Hebdo, provides us with a momentary
10 and ironic glimpse of the profound rifts that cut across the fundamental principles of
11 culture, organizations and humanity, continually urging us to remain nimble in our
12 thoughts and cautious of all too certain ideas.
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18 CODA: VISUAL SATIRE AND MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP 19

20 *Vignette 4: Two days later, I received a brown envelope in the mail – it contained my*
21 *copy. When I messaged Elodie to see how much I owed her and she replied, “Nothing!*
22 *It’s the Charlie Spirit. And I do trust you to make good use of it.” I realized then that*
23 *she had sent me her own copy. All of this brought the world into perspective and I kept*
24 *asking myself how my and our work matters when compared to a simple piece of visual*
25 *satire. I had forgotten about my day job as a scholar. I joined the masses. (Gail)*
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29 Within the pages of management studies, tragedy and humor are often hidden or
30 marginalized: where levity intrudes, seriousness takes a break; where success is at stake,
31 limits are out of bounds. There is little concern for the tragic in management practice
32 and scholarship chiefly aimed at success, achievement and growth and with little
33 concern for the limits of humanity and the possibility of the futility of struggle and strife
34 (Tsui, 2013; Walsh, 2010). Despite the growing literature on care and compassion (e.g.
35 Tomkins & Simpson, 2015), a focus on the graphic or egrigious remains outside the
36 norm (Whiteman & Cooper, 2016). And so are satire and polemics which can ‘scarcely
37 be hidden under mask of scholarly respectability’ (Sloterdijk, 1987: 18). The
38 consequent lack of frivolous text and imagery in the pages of management scholarship
39 makes the pursuit of economic returns as textual and serious as the suits worn by the
40 pursuers. Where humor is present, it is deemed to be acceptable only if it has a purpose
41 within an already understood web of relevances; a topic to be studied (Collinson, 2002;
42 Hatch, 1997) rather than an approach to studying topics.
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48 The images and narratives drawn by visual satire are the polar opposite of those
49 typically appearing in top management journals– the cover of Charlie Hebdo embraces
50 the stable and the volatile; the known and the unknowable, what can be said and what
51 resists linguistic grasp. It does all this without claiming authority, merely by pointing
52 out, and thus brings into glaring light the incongruence of various sides. And, at the
53 same time, it packs both an intellectual and emotional punch despite no longer
54 resembling a definite ‘thing’ or ‘fact’ or piece of ‘data’. Rather than trying to keep things
55 representative, within the cover of Charlie Hebdo, the comic and the tragic belong
56 together, and with the drama of the attack any difference between comedic levity and
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3 real-life relevance becomes irrevocably blurred.

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5 We do not advocate visual satire as a replacement for orthodox management
6 theory and empirical research; nor are we at ease with the style or sentiment of Charlie
7 Hebdo's publications. And yet we are intrigued by the mirror play of humor and tragedy
8 in visual form and prompted to reflect upon our own academic writing practice, which,
9 in contrast, we found to be humor-free. Taking inspiration from visual satire means
10 considering alternative ways of mattering; not just by providing new factual content or
11 theoretical accuracy, but by probing into the form of the things that are studied. And as
12 life is always complex and opaque, satire may help open up spaces for multiple
13 interpretations without either having to take sides or having to settle things for good: by
14 staring into the unknown, complex, and multiple without flinching or looking away.
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19 Charlie Hebdo's cover image after the attacks has provoked and repelled us in
20 complicated ways. It has also left us with many unanswered questions for organization
21 studies. Charlie Hebdo's staff were killed in their boardroom, and the police officer was
22 killed while on duty, in acts of terrorism, and there have been many other instances of
23 course. Yet apart from a few notable exceptions (e.g. Cornelissen, Mantere & Vaara,
24 2014; Starbuck, 2002) the organization of terror is not well covered in management
25 studies, and even then it scarcely places the academics themselves into the frame. How,
26 then, can we give greater thought to emerging global phenomena such as terrorism and
27 war, but also to environmental changes, pan-national supply chains, digital technology
28 when their often complex, changing, or clandestine characters defy management
29 journals' concerns for specificity and clarity? As populist rhetoric rises, as expertise is
30 belittled and jokes win elections (Nussbaum, 2017), can the Academy (like many others,
31 including those providing the networked infrastructures that convey those ideas) remain
32 focused on establishing small connections while ignoring the wider patterns that connect
33 them all? What of the links between terrorism and finance, trade deals, industrialized
34 farming, environmental impact or labour migration? Visual satire shines a light on these
35 relations that affect real life without trying to fully interpret or define them. Management
36 responses to and from within these phenomena can benefit from similar scholarship. If
37 nothing else, it shows us that academic writers on management issues have their own
38 abysses to consider and some, much braver than us, already do.
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