Multimodality and persuasive functions of irony and ridicule in a political trial.

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Résumé
Cet article définit ce qu’est le rire, l’humour, le ridicule et l’ironie dans la perspective d’un modèle cognitif de la communication et de l’action sociale. Des usages particuliers de l’ironie et du ridicule sont étudiés en détail en prenant comme exemple un important procès judiciaire Italien. Celui-ci fut considéré comme un « rituel de dégradation » de la classe politique Italienne. Lorsqu’une personne est ridiculisée, son pouvoir semble affaibli, contrastant ainsi avec la supériorité qu’il pouvait afficher auparavant. Cette personne ne représente plus une menace. Les moqueries lancées à son encontre contribuent à l’abaissé et à l’humilier tandis qu’elles procurent à celui qui les formule un sentiment de supériorité. En utilisant de l’ironie, le locuteur, à travers le sens littéral de son acte communicatif sous-entend un message différent avec une valeur opposée. En analysant l’expression multimodale et la structure persuasive des cas d’ironie et de ridiculisation apparus dans le procès Italien ‘Mains Propres’, l’article montre comment l’ironie est utilisée pour mettre en doute la crédibilité de l’accusé et comment le ridicule est employé pour réduire le pouvoir de l’adversaire.

Abstract
The paper defines the notions of laughter, humour, ridicule and irony in terms of a cognitive model of communication and social action, and analyses some uses of irony and ridiculisation in an Italian trial of high political import, that has been seen as a “degradation ritual” of a whole political class. In ridiculisation, one remarks some lack of power of the other, that contrasts with some pretended superiority but in fact is not threatening: thus laughing at someone makes you feel superior, while the other feels abased and humiliated. In irony the Speaker, by means of the literal meaning of his communicative act, indirectly implies a different meaning with an opposite valence. By analysing the multimodal expression and the persuasive structure of cases of irony and ridiculisation in the “Clean Hands” trial, the paper shows how irony is mainly used in that trial to challenge the credibility of the accused, while ridicule is used to lower the opponent’s power.

1. Introduction

The structure of real communication is determined by variables stemming from different domains of life – cognition, emotion, social interaction – and only a model encompassing all aspects of mind and social action can account for its subtle nuances. In this work I analyze some multimodal aspects of irony and ridiculisation and their persuasive use in a judicial debate held in Italy in 1993, the “Clean hands” trial (Processo “Mani pulite”), in which many influential politicians were charged of having received illicit funding from public and private top managers and bank holders. A trial of high political import, which caused, for many important politicians, the end of their career. The trial was broadcast through Italian television, which made it a unique political and moral event: some scholars (Giglioli et al., 1997) viewed it as a “degradation ritual” (Garfinkel, 1995; Goffman, 1967) for the accused politicians: a ceremony through which the guilty of some juridical or moral faults get publicly devoid of their public identity and status, as an outcome of public moral indignation. In the “Clean Hands” trial, politicians were put pilloried and lost their face, from both a political and ethical point of view. This caused a revolution in the balance of powers, resulting in a dramatic change in Italian politics. In the “Clean Hands” trial, the prosecutor, the attorney and the accused often use irony and ridicule. In this work, I present a general model of social action and communication in terms of goals and beliefs (Sections 2-3), I define irony and ridicule in terms of it (4), and analyze some cases of irony and ridiculisation in the “Clean Hands” Trial (5-7), by focusing on their multimodal deployment, their persuasive structure and their function within the trial.
2. A model of social action

According to a cognitive model of mind and social action (Conte & Castelfranchi, 1995), action and communication are governed by hierarchy of goals. A goal is a state not realized in the world that triggers action: an action aims to realize a goal, but this may be a means to a further goal (a supergoal); so any system – person, animal, machine, institution – plans and performs hierarchically organized sequences of actions to realize its goals. When a system does not have the power to achieve its goals, since it does not own the necessary resources or capacities, goal adoption arises between systems. System A adopts the goal of a system B, that is, A helps B to achieve B’s goals. Several kinds of goal adoption exist, both instrumental (e.g., social exchange) and disinterested (e.g., affect and altruism). To gain adoption, social influence and image may be exploited. Social influence holds when A causes B to pursue some goal B did not have before; and if this is a goal of A, A has influenced B to adopt A’s goal. Both influenced and non-influenced adoption (except, probably, for affect and altruism) entail image: to decide to adopt another’s goal, one relies on the image one has of the other. Image is the set of evaluative and non-evaluative beliefs that a person A conceives of person B. An evaluation is a belief about whether and how much some object, event, person are or provide means to some goal (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 1998). Persons are evaluated positively or negatively against several criteria (different goals): ugly or handsome, selfish or altruistic, just or unjust, stupid or intelligent, honest or unethical. But since the image people project to others is necessary to obtain adoption, to have a positive image – to be evaluated well against a number of criteria – becomes a permanent goal for people, one they have in all moments of their life (Poggi, 2008), and as all goals essential to adaptation, the goal of image, when achieved or thwarted, tends to trigger emotions: we feel pride or gratification when our goal of projecting a positive image is achieved, shame or embarrassment as it is thwarted (Castelfranchi, 1988). Further, there are two kinds of negative evaluations: one for inadequacy, if you lack the power necessary for some goals; and one of noxiousness, if you are endowed with power, but a negative power that risks of thwarting someone’s goals (a teacher may evaluate a not so brilliant student as inadequate, and one who bothers his schoolmates as dangerous). These different images elicit different emotions in the evaluated and, correspondingly, in the evaluating persons: powerlessness induces shame, which triggers compassion or ridicule in the evaluator; dangerousness makes you feel guilty, which triggers fear or anger in the other, and then in turn may make you feel proud or give you a sense of power.

3. Direct and indirect multimodal communication

Within this theoretical framework, communication is a kind of action whose goal is to influence other people by providing beliefs (Poggi, 2007). A system S (Sender) who performs a communicative act has the goal G to request system A (Addressee) to do some action, in the interest either of A or of S himself; a practical action (Open the window) or a cognitive action – providing or believing some information (Did John arrive?; John is here). A communicative act is composed of a performative and a propositional content; the performative determines what action S wants from A – to do an action, to provide or believe information – and the propositional content is the specific action or information involved. Performative and propositional content are complex beliefs, each composed by a set of single beliefs. To communicate each belief b of his Communicative Act, S produces a signal s that he assumes is linked, in the minds of both S and A, to belief b, which is then the Meaning of signal s. A signal is a perceivable stimulus that S can produce in any modality – word, intonation, gesture, gaze, facial expression, posture, touch, something drawn or written on paper or screen. The links between signals and meanings are stated by a Communicative System, a
set of rules about the meaning of specific signals (lexical rules) or of particular combinations and sequences of signals (syntactic rules). The combination of beliefs resulting by applying the lexical and syntactic rules for a verbal or sign language, or by processing the meanings of non-verbal signals, is its literal meaning, which expresses the literal goal of that communicative act. But communicative acts, as any kind of action, beside their direct goal may have a supergoal: a further goal for which the literal meaning is a means, hence an indirect meaning, a new belief that the Addressee must understand through inference. For example, through the direct goal of my sentence *Are you going home?* (the literal meaning of a question) I may want you to understand my supergoal (the indirect meaning of a request: asking for a lift). So a communicative act may have a non-literal (indirect) meaning beyond its literal meaning.

A typical case of communicative items or communicative acts that have a non-literal meaning are rhetorical figures. A rhetorical figure is a case of “recitation” (Castelfranchi & Poggi, 1998), that is, of revealed deception: S communicates something different from what he thinks, but wants A to understand that it is not what he thinks. If I use the metaphor *a sea of troubles*, I know, and I want you to know, that I don’t refer to a real “sea” of water but to a “wide quantity” of troubles.

In this model (Poggi, 2005), persuasion is an act aimed at social influence: in persuasion S “proposes” to A some goal GS to pursue, but this differs from other ways of influencing A (threat, promise, violence, manipulation) because 1) it is necessarily pursued through communication, 2) A is free of pursuing GS or not, and 3) S aims to convince A that GS is in A’s interest: it is worth pursuing since it is a subgoal (a means) to some goal GA that A already has. To persuade A, S can use the three strategies highlighted by Aristotle (360 B.C.): *logos* (logical arguments); *pathos* (the appeal to A’s emotions), and *ethos* (S’s character), within which we may distinguish (Poggi & Vincze, 2008) S’s intellectual credibility (his having the skills necessary for goal choice and planning: “ethos-competence”), and his moral reliability (his not wanting to hurt or cheat S, or to act in his own concern: “ethos-benevolence”).

The persuader produces multimodal persuasive discourses, that is, complex communicative plans in various modalities – written text, graphics, words, intonation, gesture, gaze, facial expression, posture. The discourse can be analysed as a hierarchy of goals, in which each communicative act in any modality, with its direct and indirect meanings, i.e., through its literal and intermediate supergoals, pursues a *logos, ethos or pathos* strategy, and all communicative acts aim at a common final goal. For example, in a discourse before elections, sentences, gestures, face and body movements all aim at the common goal “Vote for me”; if the orator says *I am here with this face* and then says *this is the face of an honest person*, he may aim at the supergoal of implying “I am an honest person”, thus pursuing an *ethos* strategy.

Within classical studies on persuasive oratory, epidictic, deliberative and judicial Rhetoric were distinguished (Aristotle, 360 B.C.). In all cases the Orator strives to persuade the Audience of some judgement to give or action to take. Epidictic, or celebrative, rhetoric is devoted to praise persons or events, possibly to motivate people to bring about such events or to take those persons as a model; deliberative rhetoric is aimed at convincing people in an assembly to make relevant decisions; in judicial rhetoric the Orator argues for the accused being guilty or innocent. These are all cases of persuasion in the sense above: all aim at triggering some goal in the addressee. But in judicial rhetoric, a trial is a case of persuasion in which the goal of punishing the guilty is shared, so the point for the prosecutor is to convince the judge not of this goal, but of the fact that the accused is the real guilty: he must convince the judge of the sequence of events and of the responsibility (awareness and intention) of the accused, by demonstrating that he did know he was performing a misdeed; to do so, he must test whether the accounts of the accused and of the witnesses are credible, and single out possible contradictions. The accused instead must convince the judge that he did not do what he is accused of, or that, even if he performed some misdeed or transgressed some norm, he was not aware of it. These persuasive goals may be obtained not simply through plain argumentation, but also through the rhetorical use of irony and ridiculisation.
4. Laughter, humour, ridicule and irony

According to the model presented we may define laughter, ridicule, humour and irony. **Laughter** (Castelfranchi, 1988) is an emotional expression triggered by surprise and then relief: the violation of an expectation stemming from an incongruous event, after leaving you in a suspense, does not finally result in a dangerous outcome; so you laugh when something you expected as threatening finally reveals to be innocent and not worrying. From this stems the sense of superiority that has been credited to laughter by Bergson (1900) and Freud (1905). On this basis, **humour** can be defined as a communicative act mentioning some unexpected but not threatening belief, in order to create the surprise and immediate relief which results in laughter. This may have the goal, in turn, of finding oneself superior to events or other people. We laugh of things when the violated expectation concerns an external event; but we may laugh at someone when someone violates our expectation – for instance when he cannot conform to some minimal standard of behaviour, thus revealing a lack of power – but then we find that the unexpected result (his lack of power) – is innocuous, of no importance, not at all threatening – simply impotence. In this case, the one who is laughing at feels superior to the one laughed at, who feels abased, humiliated, ridiculed: someone people make fun of. He feels that his own impotence is publicly sanctioned, yet not through punishment, that would in some way credit him with some threatening power, but through laughter: he doesn’t scare or worry anyone. This is why laughing at someone may be used to ridicule him. **Ridiculisation** is the act of remarking some feature of an object, event or person that is subject to a negative evaluation of powerlessness (not of dangerousness), one even more strongly so because the object event or person at issue in some way has a pretense of superiority; thus the contrast between pretended superiority ad actual inferiority results in a violated expectation that is, though, not threatening. Therefore, the evaluating people feel superior, because they feel rid of that inadequacy, and not threatened by it. When applied to a person, ridiculisation becomes making fun of her, which implies remarking, generally before other people, how ridicule he is. This has the effect (and possibly the goal) of abasing him, laughing at him together, feeling superior to the abased person, and strengthening social bonds between the persons laughing. So ridiculisation is a form of moralistic aggression: the blow to the other’s image, by lowering his power, is a punishment for his undue pretence, aimed at preventing further norm violation and inducing future submission and norm compliance. This is why, for instance, ridiculisation is so often used among adolescent gangs, to induce conformist behaviour. **Irony** in this framework is a rhetorical figure in which the Sender’s literal goal is to communicate a meaning x, but through this meaning has the goal to communicate another meaning, y, which is contrasting, sometimes even opposite to meaning x (antiphrastic irony). In an ironic act the “true” meaning, the one really intended by the Sender, is not the one communicated by the literal meaning of the communicative act: it is an indirect meaning, to be understood through inference by the Addressee. Very often the literal meaning (and consequently also the indirect meaning) of an ironic statement has an evaluative import, in that it directly bears, or makes you infer, some evaluation. When the ironic meaning is opposite to the literal one, if the literal meaning is positive, the ironic meaning is negative (e.g., an ironic praise) and the other way around (ironic criticism). One more feature of irony is that the Sender has the goal to joke, to make fun of something, or to “tease”, ridicule someone through his statement. Being a rhetorical figure, irony is a case of “recitation”: S says something he does not believe is true, but at the same time wants A to understand it is not true; and to reveal that his act is not to be interpreted literally, S may use multimodality to alert to irony. The “irony alert” (Attardo et al. 2002; Poggi et al., 2008) may be performed either through meta-communication (e.g. an ironic smile, i.e a signal specifically devoted to communicate “I am ironic”) or through para-communication: other signals in other modalities that contradict what is said by words, alerting the Addressee that literal interpretation is not enough.
In the following sections, we analyze some examples of irony and ridiculisation in the “Clean Hands” trial.

5. Irony

Let us start with a case of irony.

(1) The prosecutor Di Pietro (DP) is trying to demonstrate that the accused, the politician Cirino Pomicino (CP), received 5 billions Italian Lire from manager Dr. Ferruzzi before the election for the campaign of his party. CP says that the day after the elections he received Ferruzzi at his home at 7.30 in the morning, and that he did so just because seven months before he had promised Dr. Sama he would meet Ferruzzi. DP, to imply that CP did know he was committing some illicit thing, ironically remarks it is strange that Cirino Pomicino received Dr. Ferruzzi at his home at 7.30 in the morning, and, moreover, that this was only because, 7 months before, he had been committed to meet Ferruzzi, and not because he was to thank him for granting 5 billions for the election campaign!

He says: **Il vero impegno che aveva preso questo signore era di ringraziare, di sdebitarsi di un impegno che aveva preso col dottor Sama a giugno di sette mesi prima.**

(The true commitment of this gentleman was to thank, to pay off his debt of something he had been committed to with Dr. Sama in june of seven months before).

Let us analyze Di Pietro’s verbal, prosodic, gestural and gaze behaviour. In words he says: "**un impegno che aveva preso col dottor Sama a giugno di sette mesi prima**" (a commitment with Dr.Sama he had been committed to in june of seven months before). Prosodically, he stresses the words "**a giugno**" (in june), uttered with a raising, then suspensive intonation, and after a pause he utters "**di sette mesi prima**" (of seven months before) with a falling, conclusive intonation. Moreover, “**a giugno**” is pronounced with a voice of **high pitch and intensity**, as if imitating the voice of the accused in a parodistic way. Imitating another’s voice is a typical cue of reported speech (Maury-Rouan, 2007), and parody – i.e., imitation that stresses the ridicule features of the imitated thing – is by itself a way to alert to ironic intent (Poggi et al., 2008).

Focusing on the visual modalities, while uttering “**a giugno**”, DP raises both hands in C shape over his head, with right fingers touching left fingers, then moving apart in a relaxed way: he thus depicts an oblong shape up in the air, an iconic gesture resembling a cloud. But a cloud bears a metaphor of vagueness, so the ultimate meaning of this gesture is “something vague”. At the same time, DP looks up at his hands, as if pointing at something in the sky with his “deictic gaze”. This also means “cloud”, with its connected metaphor of “vagueness”. Here is a case of para-communication that alerts to irony: gesture and gaze, by communicating “vagueness”, which contrasts with the meaning of “commitment” conveyed by words, lets the Judge infer that DP’s statement is ironic, and that his apparent acknowledgement of what CP said should not be taken at face value, but rather manifests a clear mistrust in the answer of the accused. “June of seven months before” is too vague a time, and too contrasting with a strict commitment, to deserve inviting someone at 7.30 a.m.. In words, DP mirrors CP’s previous statement that he was committed to meet Ferruzzi only out of a past promise to Sama. DP says this as if he were convinced thereof; but showing ironic, he lets the Judge understand he is only pretending to be convinced. Thus he implies that the promise to Sama was **not** CP’s true commitment; the true one was to thank Ferruzzi for the 5 billions granted to his party for the elections. Figure 1 represents the persuasive hierarchy of DP’s ironic statement.
DP’s multimodal communicative action (A1) is to ironically show convinced of CP’s statement that the only reason for the early morning invitation was a commitment of 7 months before. This action has the supergoal (G4) of showing disbelief in CP’s statement. This aims in turn (G3) at having the Judge believe that there was a stronger reason for CP to receive Ferruzzi at 7.30, so as to let him infer (G2) that this reason was for CP to thank Ferruzzi for sponsoring the campaign, and finally (G1) to have the Judge condemn CP for illicit funding. The final goal of Di Pietro’s irony is then to show mistrust in the credibility of the accused.

Here is one more case of multimodal para-communication of Di Pietro’s irony.

(2) Immediately after the statement above, Di Pietro says:

“Oh, a mme sembra, e le chiedevo a lei conferma, se lei si sia sentito in dovere di svegliarsi alle sette e mezza perché le avevano dato cinque miliardi o perché aveva preso un impegno sette mesi prima di ricevere… Ferruzzi (Well, it seems to me, and I was asking you to confirm, if you felt a duty to wake up at 7.30 because they had given you 5 billions or because you had been committed seven months before to receive… Ferruzzi).

While saying: “Ooh, a mme sembra, e le chiedevo a lei conferma” (Well, it seems to me, and I was asking you to confirm), DP moves both hands open, with palms up and fingertips to CP, forward in a curved line, as if kindly offering something. At the same time, with eyes open wide, and eyebrows raised with horizontal wrinkles on his forehead, he conveys perplexity about the hypothesis mentioned by words. He also bends his trunk, as if bowing to CP in an act of submission. So, gesture and trunk display exaggerated politeness, just like the parallel words (“I was asking you to confirm”). But exaggeration is a typical cue to irony (Poggi et al., 2008). Moreover, the perplexed face contrasts with this. It is as if DP were saying: “My hypothesis (“a mme sembra” = it seems to me) is that it is odd to invite people so early in the morning, but I politely ask you if you confirm my hypothesis. Yet, while showing sincerely ready to accept your disconfirmation, I display perplexity about your version (that you invited Ferruzzi at 7.30 a.m. only for a commitment of seven months before)”. A blatant contradiction between apparent trust (I am ready to accept your disconfirmation) and perplexity (I don’t believe your version) that alerts to irony through para-communication across modalities.

As to the persuasive structure of this multimodal act (Fig.2), like for the previous irony, the final goal is to have the Judge condemn CP, by demonstrating that he was aware he was committing some transgression. So, DP’s first goal (G7) is to convince the Judge that receiving guests at 7.30 a.m. is strange, with the supergoal (G6) of letting the Judge suspect CP has something to conceal and is not telling the truth, thus letting him infer that CP knew he was transgressing (G5).

Figure 2
receiving guests at 7.30 is strange

A2: DP is ironic about receiving people at 7.30

The two ironic acts above, A1 and A2, together converge toward the common goal of the judge condemning CP (Fig. 3). A1 has the goal (G2) to demonstrate the factual event (that CP had received 5 billions for the elections), while A2 has the goal (G5) to demonstrate his awareness (that he did so even knowing he was transgressing). Both G2 and G5 – the goals typically aimed at in judicial argumentation – are pursued through the sub-goals G4 and G6 of challenging the credibility of the accused.
In conclusion, the function of Di Pietro’s irony in the cases analyzed is to question the credibility of the accused: a typical move in judicial persuasion.

6. Ridicule

Let us now see a case in which Cirino Pomicino is ridiculing, making fun of Di Pietro. To understand it, it is important to keep in mind some background information about the two characters of this plot. Paolo Cirino Pomicino is, at the time of the trial, a very powerful Neapolitan politician from the Christian Democrats, while Di Pietro is an unknown prosecutor, coming from a peasant family of a poor region in the South of Italy, who has first worked as an immigrant in Germany, and then in Italy as a policeman.

(3) The whole trial is broadcast in Italian TV, and due to privacy norms the persons accused may refuse to be videorecorded. So when Cirino Pomicino enters the courtroom and sits down, before starting the interrogation the Judge asks him: *Le telecamere? Possiamo lasciarle?* (The cameras? May we leave them?) CP looks around, then turns and looks at the Judge and smiles. The Judge interprets his smile by saying: *E’ abituato*. (You’re accustomed to them). CP turns to DP and smiles at him, then tosses his head from right to left and says: *Diversamente...* (On the contrary…) with a suspensive intonation. He stares to DP obliquely, then he looks at the Judge and again at DP and laughs while shaking his shoulders.

Let us “translate” the meanings of these multimodal behaviours. As the Judge asks CP if he accepts to be broadcasted, CP *turns his head from left to right looking far away with open eyes*, showing somewhat puzzled; but then he *half-closes eyes*, meaning “I now want to see (understand) more precisely”. He is again self-confident now: he *turns his head and eyes leftward* to address the Judge, and answers his question by *smiling*, which means “I am at ease, cameras are not a problem for me”. The Judge in fact, by saying “*E’ abituato*” (You’re accustomed to them), interprets his answer as a narcissistic allusion to his being well-known in the media. Then CP *turns right to DP smiling*, thus again showing at ease. His *eyes are squeezed*, generally a cue to a sincere smile – sincere ease, or even amusement. But the *right lip corner is somewhat more raised than the left*: and asymmetrical smile is often a cue to a false smile (Ekman & Friesen, 1986). Moreover, his *gaze directed at DP* might be seen as a defiant gaze. Then he *opens his lips showing teeth* (in apes, a cue to aggressive attitude, according to Van Hoof, 1962) and says: “*Diversamente...*” (On the contrary…), while accompanying this adverb *with a right-left head toss*: a metadiscursive signal (Poggi, 2007) to mention two parallel but contrasting entities – in this case, DP vs. CP. The *raising*
suspensive intonation of the adverb seems to imply, in an allusive way, that DP might not be as accustomed to the media as CP is. Then CP stares to DP, meaning he is addressing him; but he does so obliquely, with eyes looking at him and head slightly bent downward leftward: he conveys a knavish attitude, like a boy who did some mischief but whom you cannot punish; a defiant or teasing – in any case, provocative – attitude. Then he turns to Judge and again to DP (he addresses both) and laughs while shaking his shoulders, now blatantly showing amused at his own joke.

Cirino Pomicino is laughing at Di Pietro’s inferiority, implying: “I am a powerful person, a well-known politician, while you are nothing, one who needs to accuse important people to become famous”.

In another passage, he ridicules DP simply through his nonverbal behaviour.

(4) 
CP has repeatedly denied that he received Sama and Ferruzzi at 7.30 a.m. to thank for sponsoring his campaign. DP says: A me pare più credibile, che questo Signo... che l’Onorevole Pomicino sapesse, avesse ricevuto 5 miliardi, il giorno successivo riceveva coloro che l’avevano aiutato nella campagna elettorale: Sama. (I see it as more credible, that this Mister... that Sir Pomicino knew, had received 5 billions, the day after he was receiving those who had helped him in the campaign: Sama). CP starts to reply, but since DP goes on speaking without listening to him, CP tilts his head back and opens his arms, with raised eyebrows and half-closed eyes. Then he lowers head again while raising his right lip corner. He looks at the judge, then scratches his head and directs gaze to DP again, with eyes blinking and external parts of eyebrows up.

Pomicino’s head tilted backward, raised eyebrows with half closed eyes, and open arms, express helplessness, conveying “There is nothing you can do with him!”: he implies that DP is stubborn (even if he is wrong), because he goes on talking without even listening to CP: no way to convince him. But the right lip corner raised conveys that CP is laughing at DP for his stubbornness. After this, CP gazes at the judge as if searching for approval. Then, probably seeing the judge is not on his side, he scratches his head as showing embarrassment, and finally starts again to look at DP talking, with blinking eyes expressing surprise and raised eyebrows expressing interest: an ostentated, but manifestly feigned, expression of interest. Pomicino is thus ridiculing Di Pietro, and calling for complicity from the audience.

In examples (3) and (4), CP’s goal is to show that he still has more power than DP has, and to do so he ridicules him. As mentioned, ridicule is attributed to some person that has some pretence for some goal, and is not adequate to it, but whose inadequacy is innocuous, and does not scare you: you still have power over it, while it is worth nothing. To ridicule someone implies remarking his lack of power, by laughing at him in front of others. This gives you a sense of power and superiority. Such a need to demonstrate one’s intact power can be perfectly accounted for in the “Clean Hands” trial: a degradation ritual, in which the politicians accused of corruption are challenged not only form the judicial point of view, but in terms of their morality, their identity, their face, their image. People used to deference and respect are obliged to sit on the bench of the accused, must answer interrogations by an unknown prosecutor and see their misdeeds publicly pointed out. To rebel to this, the accused Pomicino replies to the prosecutor’s challenge through the arm of ridicule, to demonstrate that he still has more power than the other.

As argued by Giglioli et al. (1997), two issues are at stake in the “Clean Hands” trial: the judicial issue of punishing illegal actions, and the moral issue – the degradation ritual of people who took advantage of their power to care their own interests – which is also political, since it has more long lasting political effects. Pomicino gave up to escape the judicial punishment, but he doesn’t accept the degradation: he does not resign to lose his power.

7. Truth and power, irony and ridicule
We have seen that Di Pietro’s irony is devoted to challenge the credibility of the accused, while Pomicino’s ridiculisation aims at abasing Di Pietro and re-affirming one’s power; of course, this is the only route open for Pomicino. But also Di Pietro, besides irony, makes use of ridiculisation: and he does so just to reply to Pomicino’s challenge. Let us see this example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DP: Vediamo adesso… se ancora Sama l’ha rivisto un’altra volta ancora.</th>
<th>DP: Let us see now... if again you saw Sama again once more.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CP: Ho rivisto Sama nel… subito a ridosso delle elezioni politiche del ’92.</td>
<td>CP: I saw Sama in... immediately after the political elections in ’92.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP: Dove?</td>
<td>DP: Where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP: A casa mia.</td>
<td>CP: At my home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP: Ancora di prima mattina, perché questi…</td>
<td>DP: Again early in the morning, because these guys...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP: No, c’è un motivo; anche perché eh…. Io abito vicino all’aeroporto di Ciampino.</td>
<td>CP: No, there is a reason why: also because well... I live near Ciampino Airport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP: Allora, come scendono, via, a prendere il caffè. [people laugh in the courtroom, and DP smiles amused. CP laughs too].</td>
<td>DP: So, as they get off, come on, let’s have a coffee. [people laugh in the courtroom, and DP smiles amused. CP laughs too].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While saying “Let us see now... if again you saw Sama again once more”, DP, with hands open, relaxed, palms to himself, fingertips facing each other, rotates them forward twice: a symbolic gesture meaning “again and again”, but with a nuance of a boring repetition. This indirectly alludes to his hypothesis that CP received money many times, and thus many times did he need to thank Sama. At the same time DP looks to right and to left, as if searching for attention or approval: typically, as you make an allusion you want to be sure the other understood it. CP, while saying “I saw Sama in...”, bends his head rightward and looks upward leftward, conveying he is trying to remember; then he turns head, and directs gaze, leftward to the Judge, and finally says: “immediately after the political elections in ’92”. DP asks “Where?”, and CP, while answering “At my home”, with head bent leftward, turns head and gaze to DP and nods to him obliquely. This nod means that the answer is positive, since it confirms DP’s expectation; but its being oblique seems to convey incredulity about the question, hence meaning his answer is obvious (and DP’s question, pointless). DP says: “Again early in the morning, because these guys...” and starts smiling, then bends head down and looks down to his papers. DP seems to be covertly laughing at Pomicino but not wanting to display his smile. A rhetorical device: when Pomicino’s answers speak out by themselves, DP’s victory is even too clear, and he doesn’t need to remark it blatantly: his ostentated carelessness does. Again, as in (2) above, DP implies that Sama’s visits were somewhat furtive because connected with money received. CP bends his head first to left then to right and smiles, thus displaying embarrassment. Then he tries to explain: “No, there is a reason why... also because well... I live near Ciampino Airport”. While saying “near” he moves his right hand, with thumb and index finger touching, forward: a precision grip, because he lives “just” near the airport; finally he smiles. DP completes CP’s account: “So, as they get off, come on, let’s have a coffee’”. The first part of the sentence is a narrative in third person, while the second part (come on, let’s have a coffee) seems a reported speech. In fact, his intonation mimics someone who is merrily and speedily soliciting other people to go have a coffee.

All people laugh in the courtroom, and DP smiles amused. CP laughs too. Typically, if you don’t laugh when people are laughing, you cut yourself off the group.

Fig.4 represents Di Pietro’s persuasive strategy.
Di Pietro is seemingly complying with CP’s account, by completing it (A1). But his amused smile (A2) meta-communicates he is being ironic (G5), and showing incredulity himself (G4) he invites the judge not to believe CP (G3) and to condemn him (G1). But the smile, beside unmasking irony and then challenging CP’s credibility as in other cases, here is also making fun of CP’s childish account (G8), aiming at the other goal of the “Clean Hands” trial: not only to punish illegal actions, but to sanction the immoral behaviours of the accused politicians, through public degradation (G2 through G7). The sentence (A1) and the smile (A2) aim at the judicial and at the moral goals, respectively.

8. Conclusion

In the Clean Hands trial, irony and ridiculisation are both used as a persuasive strategy of pathos: to make people laugh may favour their accepting your position. Irony is mainly used by the Prosecutor to challenge the credibility of the accused: a classical goal in judicial rhetoric. But in this trial the Prosecutor also aims at a degradation ritual: abasing people who took advantage of their position for their illegal actions. On the other hand, the accused aims at contrasting abasement, by claiming one’s power is intact. Ridiculisation, making you feel superior and the other inferior, is a perfect weapon for the goals of both contenders. In fact Di Pietro uses it both to question the credibility of Pomicino’s account and to ridicule him as a person, while Pomicino ridicules Di Pietro because it is the only way to feel superior to him, to still maintain his power.

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