

# Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Campbell, David and Durden, Mark (2015) On the Use of Comedy in Art as a Form of Social Critique. In: Politics and Humour: Theory and Practice, 16th - 17th January 2015., The University of Kent.

URL: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/arts/drama/news-summary.html...>  
<<http://www.kent.ac.uk/arts/drama/news-summary.html?view=703>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/21349/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria**  
**University**  
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

# **Politics and Humour: Theory and Practice**

**A two-day interdisciplinary conference  
at The University of Kent**

**Friday 16th and Saturday 17th January 2015**

Organised by:

Dieter Declercq  
Tory Gillespie  
Dr Shaun May  
Maja Milatovic-Ovadia

With the support of:

The Centre for Popular and  
Comic Performance  
The Graduate Studies Committee

## **Politics and Humour: Theory and Practice**

<b>Conference schedule</b> .....	4
Schematic overview .....	4
Detailed overview.....	6
<b>Abstracts and bio's</b> .....	10
<b>Conference organisers</b> .....	10
Dieter Declercq.....	10
Tory Gillespie.....	10
Dr. Shaun May.....	10
Maja Milatovic-Ovadia .....	10
<b>Keynote</b> .....	12
<b>Workshop 1</b> .....	13
Hannah Ballou, Feminist comedy.....	13
<b>Panel 1: British political stand-up comedy</b> .....	14
Emma Bennett, The Man Who Taught His Asshole to Talk: Stewart Lee. ....	14
Prof. Jane Arthurs, Russell the Revolutionary.....	15
Antoinette Burchill, Testing Agonism with Mischief - Mark Thomas and 100 Acts of Minor Dissent.....	15
<b>Workshop 2</b> .....	17
Dr. Ian Saville, Magic as Political Action.....	17
<b>Panel 2: Political Comedy in an International Context</b> .....	18
Mette Møller (Chair) .....	18
James Nixon, "You Think I'm Joking": The Weaponized Comedy of President Obama's Stand-Up Addresses at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. ....	18
Dr. Morgan Daniels, Satire and Childishness. ....	19
Ivan Nunes, The Ambivalence of Political Commitment in the Films of Nanni Moretti....	20
<b>Panel 3: Visual strategies in political humour</b> .....	21
Pip Gregory, Cartooning Politics in the Great War: Making Public Comedy Daily. ....	21
Anastasia Denisova, Online Memes as a Means of the Carnavalesque Resistance. ....	22
<b>Panel 4: Political comedy and the issue of gender</b> .....	23
Dr Susanne Colleary (Chair).....	23
Dr. Anne Graefer, Producing Laughable Femininities - Celebrity Gossip Blogs, Ridicule & Affect. ....	23
Erdogan Sekerci, Broadening political territories of transgenderism in Turkey through autobiographical stand-up performances: The Case of 'Esmeray Ozadikti'.....	24
<b>Stand-Up Comedy Night at Aphra Theatre</b> .....	26

Kate Fox .....	26
Anthony Mitzel .....	26
<b>Roundtable of invited speakers .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Dr. Sophie Quirk (Chair) .....	27
Prof. Delia Chiaro, “Don’t ask me, I’m a comedian!” and the importance of not being earnest in the contemporary world.....	27
Dr. Oliver Double, Alternative comedy from the archive .....	28
Dr. Brett Mills, ‘A Special Freedom’: Regulating Television Comedy.....	28
Dr. Louise Peacock, Political comedy on the London Stage: educating or entertaining its audience? .....	29
<b>Workshop 3 .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Prof. Mark Durden & Prof. David Campbell, On the Use of Comedy in Art as Social Critique.....	31
<b>Panel 5: Political comedy and British politics .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Paula Keaveney (Chair).....	32
Dr. Jill Marshall, Scotland's Referendum Debate - The Use and Expression of Humour in Opposing Media Campaigns.....	32
Dr. James R. Walters, Words and Values: Comedy, Politics and Vocal Performance in <i>The Thick of It</i> .....	33
Augusto Soares, "The Digital Politics and Satire of Loyalists Against Democracy (LAD) in Northern Ireland: Tensions between parody and sincerity, and social media engagement".....	34
<b>Workshop 4 .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Jon Davison, Political Clowning .....	35
<b>Panel 6: Satire as critique and citizenship in global capitalism.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Chair: Dieter Declercq .....	36
Dr. Simon Bell, Humour and the Narcisism of Advanced Capitalism.....	36
Gina Rosland Eide, Daily News and Views. ....	36
Joanna Doona, Young Political Comedy Audiences and Their Citizen Identity in Sweden. ....	37
<b>Panel 7: (Re-)defining the boundaries of satire .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Eve Smith, Comedy as Social Conscience in Terry Pratchett's <i>Discworld</i> .....	39
Henry Powell, What a Failure!? A Practice Based Enquiry.....	39
Bernadette Plageman, British Pantomime: Staging Satire and “Punning” Politics. ....	40

## Conference schedule

### Schematic overview

#### Friday 16 January 2015

09.30 - 10.15	Registration (Grimond Foyer)	
10.15 - 10.30	Word of welcome and practical arrangements (Aphra)	
10.30 - 11.30	Keynote (Aphra)	
11.30 – 11.45	Break (Foyer)	
11.45 – 13.15	Workshop 1 (Lumley)	Panel 1 (Aphra)
13.15 – 14.00	Lunch (Foyer)	
14.00 – 15.30	Workshop 2 (Lumley)	Panel 2 (Aphra)
15.30 – 15.45	Break (Foyer)	
15.45 – 16.45	Panel 3 (Lumley)	Panel 4 (Aphra)
16.45 – 17.00	Break (to walk over to Gulbenkian Café)	
17.00 – 18.00	Official Launch of the British Stand-Up Comedy Archive (Gulbenkian Café)	
18.00 – 20.00	Break (no dinner provided – suggestion: Gulbenkian Café)	
20.00 – 22.00	Stand-Up Comedy Night at Aphra Theatre	

Saturday 17 January 2015

09.00 – 09.30	Registration (Grimond Foyer)	
09.30 – 11.30	Roundtable (Aphra)	
11.30 – 11.45	Break	
11.45 – 13.15	Workshop 3 (Lumley)	Panel 5 (Aphra)
13.15 – 14.00	Lunch (Foyer)	
14.00 – 15.30	Workshop 4 (Lumley)	Panel 6 (Aphra)
15.30 – 15.45	Break (Foyer)	
15.45 – 17.15	Panel 7 (Aphra)	
17.15 – 17.30	Plenary Session (Aphra)	

## Detailed overview

Friday 16 January 2015

09.30 - 10.15	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Foyer</b>
10.15 - 10.30	<b>Welcome</b>	<b>Aphra</b>
10.30 - 11.30	<b>Keynote</b> Dr. Sharon Lockyer 'It's Really Scared of Disability': Disabled Comedians' Perspectives of the British Television Comedy Industry.  Chair: Dr. Oliver Double	<b>Aphra</b>
11.30 – 11.45	<b>Coffee Break</b>	<b>Foyer</b>
11.45 – 13.15	<b>Workshop 1</b> Hannah Ballou: Feminist Comedy	<b>Lumley</b>
	<b>Panel 1: British political stand-up comedy</b> Chair: Tory Gillespie  Emma Bennett The Man Who Taught His Asshole to Talk: Stewart Lee. Prof. Jane Arthurs Russell the Revolutionary. Antoinette Burchill Testing Agonism with Mischief: Mark Thomas and <i>100 Acts of Minor Dissent.</i>	<b>Aphra</b>
13.15 – 14.00	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Foyer</b>
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Workshop 2</b> Dr. Ian Saville Magic as Political Action.	<b>Lumley</b>
	<b>Panel 2: Political comedy in an international context</b> Chair: Mette Møller  James Nixon "You Think I'm Joking": The Weaponized Comedy of President Obama's Stand-Up Addresses at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. Dr. Morgan Daniels Satire and Childishness.	<b>Aphra</b>

Ivan Nunes  
The Ambivalence of Political Commitment in the Films of Nanni Moretti.

15.30 – 15.45      **Coffee Break**      **Foyer**

15.45 – 16.45      **Panel 3: Visual Strategies in Political Humour**      **Lumley**  
Chair: Dieter Declercq

Pip Gregory  
Cartooning Politics in the Great War - Making Public Comedy Daily.  
Anastasia Denisova  
Online Memes as a Means of the Carnavalesque Resistance.

**Panel 4: Political Comedy and Gender**      **Aphra**  
Chair: Dr Susanne Colleary

Dr. Anne Graefer  
Producing Laughable Femininities - Celebrity Gossip Blogs, Ridicule & Affect.  
Erdogan Sekerci  
Broadening political territories of transgenderism in Turkey through autobiographical stand-up performances: The Case of 'Esmeray Ozadikti'.

16.45 – 17.00      **Break (to walk over to Gulbenkian Café)**

17.00 – 18.30      **Launch of the British Stand-Up Comedy Archive**      **Gulbenkian Café**

18.30 – 20.00      **Dinner Break**  
Dinner is not provided, but we recommend the food at the Gulbenkian. Delegates receive a 10% discount.

20.00 – 22.00      **Stand-Up Comedy Night**      **Aphra**



Saturday 17 January 2015

09.00 – 09.30	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Foyer</b>
09.30 – 11.30	<b>Roundtable of Invited Speakers</b> Chair: Dr. Sophie Quirk  Prof. Delia Chiaro “Don’t ask me, I’m a comedian!” and the importance of not being earnest in the contemporary world. Dr. Oliver Double Alternative comedy from the archive Dr. Brett Mills ‘A Special Freedom’: Regulating Television Comedy Dr. Louise Peacock Political comedy on the London Stage: educating or entertaining its audience?	<b>Aphra</b>
11.30 – 11.45	<b>Coffee Break</b>	<b>Foyer</b>
11.45 – 13.15	<b>Workshop 3</b> Prof. Mark Durden & Prof. David Campbell On the Use of Comedy in Art as Social Critique.  <b>Panel 5: Political comedy and British Politics</b> Chair: Paula Keaveney  Dr. Jill Marshall Scotland’s Referendum Debate - The Use and Expression of Humour in Opposing Media Campaigns. Dr. James R. Walters Words and Values - Comedy, Politics and Vocal Performance in <i>The Thick of It</i> Augusto Soares The Digital Politics and Satire of Loyalists Against Democracy (LAD) in Northern Ireland: Tensions between parody and sincerity, and social media engagement.	<b>Lumley</b>  <b>Aphra</b>
13.15 – 14.00	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Foyer</b>
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Workshop 4</b> Jon Davison Political Clowning	<b>Lumley</b>

**Panel 6: Satire, Critique & Citizenship in Global Capitalism**      **Aphra**

Chair: Dieter Declercq

Dr. Simon Bell

Humour and the Narcissism of Advanced-Capitalism.

Gina Rosland Eide

Daily News and Views.

Joanna Doona

Young Political Comedy Audiences and Their Citizen Identity in Sweden.

15.30 – 15.45

Break

15.45 – 17.15

**Panel 7: (Re-)defining the Boundaries of Satire**

**Aphra**

Chair: Dr. Shaun May

Eve Smith

Comedy as Social Conscience in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*.

Henry Powell

“What a failure!? A practice based research enquiry that explores the concept and aesthetics of failure as it appears within my own devised work.”

Bernadette Plageman

British Pantomime: Staging Satire and “Punning” Politics.

17.15 – 17.30

**Closing Plenary**

**Aphra**

## **Abstracts and bio's**

### **Conference organisers**

#### **Dieter Declercq**

University of Kent  
PhD in Film Studies  
dd298@kent.ac.uk

Dieter Declercq is a PhD student and Graduate Teaching Assistant at The Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Film and the Moving Image, University of Kent. He has a background in literature, philosophy and film & television studies. His doctoral research investigates satirical comic cartooning as moral critique and he has published on the satire of *The Simpsons* as ethical truth-telling in the philosophical journal *Ethical Perspectives* (2013), as well as on the moral responsibilities of film and television history in the edited collection *Cinema, Television and History: New Approaches* (CSP, 2014).

#### **Tory Gillespie**

University of Kent  
PhD in Drama  
tg233@kent.ac.uk

Tory Gillespie is a stand-up comedian and PhD student at the University of Kent. Last year she performed her first solo show, 'Permission to Laugh' which premiered at the Gulbenkian Theatre in Canterbury. Her research interests include the social and personal benefits of using stand-up comedy to begin to explore tragic or serious events. She is currently working on her new show, 'Therapy LOL'. Website: [www.torybits.com](http://www.torybits.com). Follow her on Twitter: @torybits

#### **Dr. Shaun May**

University of Kent  
Lecturer in Drama  
S.R.May@kent.ac.uk

Shaun is a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre at the University of Kent, where he teaches popular performance, comedy, and performance philosophy. Prior to joining the faculty at Kent he was a Postdoc in the department of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool and a Visiting Lecturer at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Royal College of Art. He is currently co-editing a special issue of *Performance Research* on the theme of anthropomorphism, and his books *A Philosophy of Comedy on Stage and Screen* (Bloomsbury) and *Rethinking Practice-as-Research and the Cognitive Turn* (Palgrave) will be published later on this year.

#### **Maja Milatovic-Ovadia**

University of Kent  
PhD in Drama  
mm695@kent.ac.uk

Maja Milatovic-Ovadia is a freelance theater director and PhD researcher at Kent University. She directed over 20 productions in Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia and UK. From 2009 she also works in Bosnia & Herzegovina using theatre to support process of reconciliation. Her research interest includes the use of humour and comedy within applied theatre practice in post war societies. Previously she was Associate Director for New Writing – *NADA Project* at National Theatre in Belgrade and *Balkan Art Season* at Blue Elephant Theatre. [www.majamilatovicovadia.com](http://www.majamilatovicovadia.com)

## Keynote

### Dr. Sharon Lockyer, 'It's Really Scared of Disability': Disabled Comedians' Perspectives of the British Television Comedy Industry

Dr Sharon Lockyer  
Brunel University London, UK  
Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Communications  
Sharon.Lockyer@brunel.ac.uk

*'It's Really Scared of Disability': Disabled Comedians' Perspectives of the British Television Comedy Industry*

Since the creation of the Broadcasters' Disability Network in 1989, the British television industry has explored and addressed ways to improve the representation of disabled people in television programmes and to increase the recruitment and retention of disabled staff across the television industry. This has resulted in a number of broadcasters, such as the BBC and Channel 4, introducing a range of initiatives and strategies to address these issues. Although there is some quantitative evidence to suggest that improvements have been made in relation to the representation of disability on television (OFCOM 2005) and the number of disabled television industry staff (Creative Skillset 2012), little academic research focusses on the lived experiences of disabled television writers, producers and performers working within the television industry. This paper rectifies this gap by specifically focusing on the everyday working experiences of disabled comedy writers and performers working in the comedy industry who have, or are trying, to work in television comedy. Through thematic analysis of a series of one-to-one interviews with disabled comedy writers, producers and performers, this paper explores the institutional, social and political opportunities and limitations experienced during the television comedy commissioning process. It also examines their critical perceptions of the representations of disabled people in recent television comedy programmes, such as *The Last Leg* and *I'm Spasticus*.

**Sharon Lockyer** is the Founding Director of the Centre for Comedy Studies Research (CCSR) and a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences, Media and Communications at Brunel University London. She is the editor of *Reading Little Britain: Comedy Matters on Contemporary Television* (2010) and co-editor of *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour* (2005/2009), *Controversial Images: Media Representations on the Edge* (2012) and *Screening the Undead: Vampires and Zombies in Film and Television* (2014). She is also the author of over 25 book chapters and journal articles on comedy and humour. Her research focuses largely on the sociology of mediated culture, critical comedy studies and media controversies. She is currently working on a project funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust and in partnership with the Big Difference Company which explores the relationship between comedy and disability.

## **Workshop 1**

### **Hannah Ballou, Feminist comedy**

Hannah Ballou

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, UCL

[hannah.ballou@cssd.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.ballou@cssd.ac.uk)

Participants will engage with methods of creating feminist humour via games in performance. The ideological position of the gendered comic body is interrogated via the manifestation of a dissonance between funniness and sexiness... all before we've even had lunch!

Hannah Ballou is a comedian, performance artist, writer, and visiting lecturer (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of Kent, Arts Educational Schools London, ISTA) She contributes to *Comedy Studies* journal. She is also the Senior Personal Assistant to art celebrity, Marina Abramopug. Recent collaborations include GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN's 2014 Spill Festival commission and Stacy Makishi's *Uncivil Union*. She trained at the Dell'Arte School in California.

[www.hannahballou.com](http://www.hannahballou.com)

<http://marinaabramopug.tumblr.com/>

## Panel 1: British political stand-up comedy

**Emma Bennett, *The Man Who Taught His Asshole to Talk*: Stewart Lee.**

Emma Bennett  
Queen Mary, University of London  
PhD student in Drama  
em.bennett@hotmail.co.uk / e.l.bennet@qmul.ac.uk

*The Man Who Taught His Asshole to Talk: Stewart Lee's 90's Comedian*

Conceived as a response to the right-wing Christian campaign against the supposedly 'blasphemous' *Jerry Springer the Opera* (which he co-wrote and directed), Stewart Lee's *90's Comedian* begins with a visceral account of his treatment for an intestinal disorder, and ends with an extended, graphic and obscene depiction of a drunken, vomit-soaked encounter with Jesus Christ. Writing about the career-defining success of *90's Comedian*, Lee explains that his aim was to achieve the seemingly impossible: to transform this highly dubious material from being merely offensive into 'something funny, something sometimes even moving or cathartic'.

The abject body is an unavoidable element of *90's Comedian* be it in visceral evocations of Lee's own physical vulnerability (be it through illness, public exposure, or the shame induced by rectal examination), a seemingly throwaway 'your anus' joke, or explicit references to the intimate orifices of Jesus Christ. Drawing on the work of J.L. Austin on 'performative utterances' and its subsequent readings by Stanley Cavell and Judith Butler, I will examine the performative and ethical project that Lee unfolds in *90's Comedian* in proximity to questions of the body. Lee's work here, I argue, amounts to a practical philosophical exploration of the nature of speech. Speech in this sense is not merely a description of, or inducement to political action, but can be considered *as* an embodied political action, in and of itself.

By adopting this philosophical approach to stand-up performance, I aim to formulate a critical response that avoids the polarizing tendency of much current discussion of comedy, religion and free speech. I suggest that we look for the political value of Lee's work not in its espousal of a viewpoint, or even its satirical critique of conservatism or bigotry, but in its problematisation of the relationship between the verbal and the corporeal: between speech and body, word and flesh.

Emma Bennett is a third-year Drama PhD candidate at Queen Mary, University of London. Her thesis project, provisionally titled 'Verbal Slapstick', is concerned with speech-based performance that destabilises the boundaries between literal and figurative, between the comic and the serious, and between practice and theory. This is also something she explores in her work as a performance artist, for example in her piece *Slideshow Birdshow* (2012) in which her taxonomic description of various birds is chopped and rearranged by a faulty powerpoint projection, resulting in a speech that sounds like a birdsong. She has performed at performance festivals and poetry readings across the UK, and on BBC Radio 3's *The Verb*.

**Prof. Jane Arthurs, Russell the Revolutionary.**

Prof. Jane Arthurs  
Middlesex University  
Professor in Television  
J.arthurs@mdx.ac.uk

*Russell the Revolutionary*

Russell Brand's legitimacy as a radical political commentator is frequently challenged on the grounds that he is merely a comedian but our analysis shows how he has used his cultural capital – the comedic, linguistic, and performance skills that are essential to his success in both fields - to counteract this symbolic annihilation. In the past year Brand has orchestrated a series of staged events designed to promote his radical political agenda, moving from a nationwide tour of his new stand-up show *The Messiah Complex* to co-editing a special edition of the *New Statesman*, interviews on *Newsnight*, appearances on *Start the Week* and *Question Time*, the production of a daily 10 minute YouTube news show called *The Trews*, and culminating in the an interview with Guardian political journalist Owen Jones streamed live to 200 cinemas to launch his book *Revolution*. Brand's cross-media diversification and migration from the field of comedy to politics relies not just on his celebrity capital (Driessens 2013) but also the degree to which the mediatization of politics has enhanced the importance of emotion and charisma. This paper draws on a detailed analysis of how Brand uses comic disruption to undermine the conventional roles, registers and turn-taking routines of political discourse in the *Newsnight* interview, and conversely how he uses comic techniques of autobiographical story-telling, hyperbole, bathos and ridicule to raise the audience's political consciousness in his *Messiah* stand-up show. We will also demonstrate how Brand's political activities have been integrated into a modified celebrity brand to maintain the perceived authenticity that is essential to both stand-up and charismatic political leadership (Street 2003).

Jane Arthurs has published previous research on celebrity branding and comic performance in *Revolting Women: The Body in Comic Performance* in *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression* (1999) and in *Sex and the City and Consumer Culture, Feminist Media Studies* (2003), and more recent research on Russell Brand's celebrity persona in *Celebrity, Gender and Reputation Management at the BBC*, in *Gender and Public Relations* (2014). Her co-researcher, Sylvia Shaw, has conducted research into language and politics, particularly women's participation in political institutions and debates, including a study of the ways in which irony and humour are used in political discourse. She is currently working on a monograph for CUP entitled 'Women, Language and Politics'.

**Antoinette Burchill, Testing Agonism with Mischief - Mark Thomas and 100 Acts of Minor Dissent.**

Antoinette Burchill  
Loughborough University  
Ph.D. Researcher in art and politics



a.e.burchill@lboro.ac.uk

*Testing Agonism with Mischief: Mark Thomas and 100 Acts of Minor Dissent*

Antoinette's paper views Mark Thomas's year-long participatory project *100 Acts of Minor Dissent* through the lens of political philosopher Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonism. Agonism is defined by Mouffe as the 'relations between adversaries' (2000, p.52). Antoinette proposes agonism demarcates not only the performances of dissent, but the relationships that develop between protagonists and the targets of their satire. Mouffe highlights agonism's 'critical dimension consists in making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate' (2013, p.93). Mouffe specifies the characteristics of agonism are required to deliberate legitimate and therefore viable political demands within a democracy. It is the dual nature of agonism, of criticality and visibility that is significant to the theory and practice of Antoinette's research.

Antoinette argues humour alongside agonistic participation and mischief operates to activate participatory dissent. She will consider the function humour plays in the transmission, reception and dissemination of dissent. Is Mark Thomas just a comedian, or does agonistic participation and humour reveal a significant political function?

Antoinette will draw upon: *100 Acts of Minor Dissent* – Mark Thomas's touring stand up show, the project's finale show at Sheffield's Leadmill venue and the *Art of Dissent* exhibition at Sheffield's Millennium Gallery.

Antoinette Burchill is an artist, writer, street performer and second year practice-based Ph.D. researcher at Loughborough University. She received a Masters with distinction in Art and the Public Sphere in 2013. Her current research addresses mischief, situating it within art, politics and performative satirical dissent.

[www.misachievement.co.uk](http://www.misachievement.co.uk)  
[www.antoINETTEburchill.com](http://www.antoINETTEburchill.com)

## Workshop 2

### Dr. Ian Saville, Magic as Political Action.

Dr. Ian Saville  
Middlesex University  
Lecturer in Theatre Arts  
ian5@mdx.ac.uk

*Politics and comedy by any other means: Magic as political action.*

This illustrated paper/workshop will examine my own practice as a socialist magician, looking at the varying contexts in which I have performed my work, and the expectations of different audiences. I shall describe the path which led me to a particular and unusual performance genre, illustrating this path with excerpts from my act and shows. Along the way I hope to give: a very subjective description of the development of "alternative" comedy; the changing political landscape; and radical definitions of theatre, from agitprop to the postdramatic.

Ian Saville began doing magic tricks at the age of 10 or 11. Since then he has studied Drama at Exeter University, worked with the touring political theatre group Broadside Mobile Workers' Theatre, and in community theatre. Around 1979 he started developing a "socialist magic" act, using magic tricks and ventriloquism to present and celebrate a socialist view of the world. This act, in its several variations, has been performed in theatres, cabaret clubs, festivals, as well as conferences, demonstrations and on picket lines throughout Britain and abroad. He has developed a number of full-length one-man shows from this material, including Brecht on Magic, in which a ventriloquist's dummy of Bertolt Brecht takes Ian through the basics of socialist conjuring. Ian has also trained with Augusto Boal, and worked as a performer with forum theatre group Arc. Ian's PhD looked at the development of workers' theatre in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. As well as continuing to perform, Ian teaches on the Theatre Arts degree at Middlesex University.

## Panel 2: Political Comedy in an International Context

### Mette Møller (Chair)

University of Copenhagen  
PhD Fellow in Rhetoric at  
rqj853@hum.ku.dk

I am nearly halfway through my PhD studies and the working title of my research project is: "Political humor or humorous politics – an examination of humorous arguments' functions and effects". I will work with four cases of comedians, who have gone into politics, either by creating political campaigns, by becoming politicians or forming their own political party. I am particularly interested in examining how the use of humor can promote public interest and involvement in political matters. How does it change our view on political processes when a comedian enters the political arena? And does it in fact change anything at all? At University of Copenhagen I teach basic rhetorical theory on bachelor level. This semester I co-designed and co-taught a Master's level course called "Political rhetoric and humor".

### James Nixon, "You Think I'm Joking": The Weaponized Comedy of President Obama's Stand-Up Addresses at the White House Correspondents' Dinner.

James Nixon  
University of Glasgow  
PhD Student in American Studies  
james.a.nixon@hotmail.com

*"You Think I'm Joking": The Weaponized Comedy of President Obama's Stand-Up Addresses at the White House Correspondents' Dinner.*

"Comedy in the United States has long been revered as a significant form of cultural and political resistance, and one that is regarded as being used against the powerful, and not by them. However, its critical stance has been compromised in recent decades through its utilisation by political agencies such as the White House. Contemporaneously, President Obama's stand-up comedy addresses at the White House Correspondents' Dinner are a significant example of this, where comedy is politically utilised to deflect and normalise political resistance and criticism. I will argue that the highly-strategized make-up of President Obama's stand-up comedy chose to address these issues within an unofficial (comic) medium in the hope of reinforcing a narrative of acceptance, mockery, deflection and hopeful normalisation. Examples will include his addressing and mocking of the controversial Correspondents' Dinner, right-wing theories about himself, to his administration's drone programme. Although critics such as New York Times correspondent Mark Leibovich have argued that President Obama doesn't enjoy performing these addresses, it provides a "humorous outlet" to address opponents and controversial issues, a unique opportunity that performing within the comic mode allows within his capacity as president. Credence to this aspect of the President's stand-up comedy addresses was

reinforced by stand-up comedian Dean Obeidallah, who argues that President Obama has “weaponized wit”, marginalizing the self-deprecatory humour of previous presidents’ stand-up comedy addresses for a strategy far more advantageous. With reinforcement from commentators such as Leibovich and Obeidallah, I will argue that a more complex strategy is at play within President Obama’s stand-up comedy addresses than is typically recognised. The power of President Obama’s stand-up comedy address lies in its unique ability to permit mockery and deflection of political resistance and criticism and expectantly normalise controversial policies. Far from popular opinion that comedy is a naturally subversive cultural form, I will demonstrate how it can readily form complicity with political power to pacify resistance and adversarial opinion, exemplified in President Obama’s stand-up comedy addresses at the Correspondents’ Dinner.”

James Nixon is an American Studies PhD student at the University of Glasgow. His thesis examines contemporary political stand-up comedy in the United States and its role as a subversive and conservative cultural agent towards political power. He presented two conference papers in March and May 2014, both of which focused on President Obama’s stand-up comedy addresses within the political-journalistic associations the Gridiron Club Dinner and White House Correspondents’ Dinner and his utilisation of comedy to deflect political criticisms and controversies. He recently presented a third paper on his research at the British Association for American Studies postgraduate conference at the University of Sussex in November 2014.

#### **Dr. Morgan Daniels, Satire and Childishness.**

Morgan Daniels  
Arcadia University, London Center  
Lecturer, History  
morgandaniels@gmail.com

#### *Satire & Childishness*

‘One of the myths of the satire boom of the 1960s’ wrote Richard Thorpe, ‘was that the Establishment metaphorically quaked in their beds at night. They did nothing of the kind.’ This assessment, presented more or less in passing with little by the way of supporting evidence, troubled me greatly when I read it first in 2006 and provided the impetus for an (admittedly eccentric) research project on the effects of post-1945 satirical programmes at the BBC. It has been my obsessive aim to collate as much archived material as possible detailing MPs’ concerns with broadcast comedy so as to forcefully present a history of the reciprocity between politics and culture quite opposite to Thorpe’s version.

This paper has two central themes relating to the above. The first is satire’s being derided as ‘childish’ by detractors, a curious trend that recurs too frequently as to be ignored. Could it be that, like the small child in Andersen’s tale about the emperor’s new clothes who, being ‘just’ a child, has all the more the power to make meaning because it is not expected of him, because the shock of comedy comes from its popular perception as ‘just’ entertainment, i.e. not really a repository for truth? This implies a second theme: how seriously is academic research into such trifling subjects as comedy and television taken? Maybe we, too, are like

children, sat on the periphery of academe and, thus, able at times to radically upend the pretensions thereof?

I was awarded my PhD by Queen Mary, University of London, in 2011. My thesis was concerned with the effects of political satire at the BBC c.1939-73. At present I teach British history and media at Queen Mary and Arcadia University, London Center. Forthcoming is "'No flowers": performative interventions "at the moment of" Margaret Thatcher's passing', *TDR: The Drama Review*, T225, Spring 2015 (with Sophie Bush).

### **Ivan Nunes, The Ambivalence of Political Commitment in the Films of Nanni Moretti.**

Ivan Nunes  
University of Kent  
PhD student in Film Studies  
in28@kent.ac.uk

#### *The Ambivalent Engagement with Politics in the Films of Nanni Moretti*

Ever since his first feature was released, almost 40 years ago, the Italian filmmaker Nanni Moretti has acquired a strong reputation as an auteur of political comedies, and yet the genre of his films, both as political and as comedies, is debatable. While most of Moretti's works deliver explicit commentary on current events, the stance they express towards political commitment is at best ambivalent; indeed, this ambivalence is arguably their central subject. On the other hand, ever since the very successful release of *Ecce Bombo* (1978), Moretti has repeatedly expressed surprise at his work being perceived as predominantly comical. Making complex use of irony, pastiche, parody, and self-irony, the targets of Moretti's satire are not always obvious, which raises the question whether satirical is what they are predominantly trying to be.

I will be discussing these problems with special reference to *The Caiman* (2006). Released in Italy only two weeks before a crucial general election, the film was widely expected to be a well-timed intervention in the political situation, an indictment of then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. And yet, I shall argue that *The Caiman* is not so much a film about Berlusconi, but rather a film about two fictional characters who want to make a film about Berlusconi. Furthermore, there is one character in *The Caiman* who delivers a sharp criticism of the very project of making a film denouncing Berlusconi; that character is "Nanni Moretti", and he is played by none other than Moretti himself.

I am conducting my dissertation, on "The Ambivalent Engagement with Politics in the Films of Nanni Moretti and João Cesar Monteiro", under the supervision of Professor Murray Smith. I have previously completed an MA in Cinema Studies at New York University, in 2011. I was also a visiting scholar in the Italian departments of Yale University (2012-13) and New York University (2013-14).

### Panel 3: Visual strategies in political humour

#### **Pip Gregory, Cartooning Politics in the Great War: Making Public Comedy Daily.**

Philippa Gregory (Pip)  
University of Kent  
History PhD student  
pg251@kent.ac.uk

#### *Cartooning Politics of the Great War: Making Public Comedy Daily*

Since the Great War, comedy and humour have been deemed necessary features of life for combatants and civilians alike. Much comedy was received by the public on a daily basis through their local and national newspapers, with images of political figures transformed to create humour around their politics. The daily cartoon by the start of the twentieth century was a feature in almost all newspapers and in many ways can be said to have helped them continue to sell throughout the war. As the war progressed additional books of cartoonists' work were published despite severe paper shortages. Meanwhile cartoonists consistently utilised politicians as fodder for their art work. For example, David Lloyd-George was depicted as a master of munitions, a bulldog guardian of national utilities and funds, or merely as a man in the mirror appreciating his own value. Similarly, within these depictions public spirit, or at least the cartoonists and their publishers' opinions thereof, may be seen, such as Asquith rapidly shrinking in size and aging in caricature as his policies became less popular. Cartoon comedy and satire in the UK had become common place with the advances of *Punch* and its consistent satirical depictions since the 1850s, but how significant was the cartoon to the viewing public and to the politicians they mocked? Was it simply a daily comedic fix for the masses as the war progressed, or was there greater meaning and legacy in their political influence? These are all questions that this paper seeks to address.

The route I have taken to my current research is circuitous to say the least. My path towards PhD studies in visual culture has been formed by a patchwork of experiences including a BA in Theology, followed by an MA in Medieval studies taken at Bristol University. Both of these degrees looked at characters in certain ways from religious personalities such as Krsna and how they were depicted, to literary stars in medieval romance when they were seemingly doing the wrong thing within the Tristan legends. After this I went back into education with a PGCE and then began teaching RE for three years which landed me in an exam hall alongside my students sitting a GCSE in History, something I had not previously considered. I then returned to university at Kent for another MA in modern history which passed me in the direction of First World War cartoons and the humour in them. As yet I have not left this path and will be following it for the next few years at least. However, I maintain that I blame my initial interests in cartoons on my father for getting me addicted to the Pink Panther and specific Wagner related Bugs Bunny features. Then as I became older, he would generally present me with the *Times* daily cartoon whenever I went home (which incidentally I now get by email from him...)

## **Anastasia Denisova, Online Memes as a Means of the Carnavalesque Resistance.**

Anastasia Denisova  
CAMRI, University of Westminster  
PhD Researcher in Social Media  
anastasia.denisova@my.westminster.ac.uk

### *Online Memes as the Means of the Carnavalesque Resistance in Contemporary Russia*

This research is focused on the recently emerged civic protest in Russian social interactive media. The study is particularly interested in the highly creative way the online community discusses political issues. Resistance communication in social networks employs Internet memes - artful images, texts, slogans, videos - that go viral, entertain and spread the political message at the same time. Satirical by nature, these texts create an alternative political discourse and are studied from the grounds of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) theory of the carnival. Carnival is a form of dissent, a legal activity that allows for the promotion of alternative discourse, multiplicity of styles, and an intentional polyphony. It opposes media propaganda and the state's spectacle by providing joyful satirical texts, a kind of playful mockery that helps to build the unconventional discussion. In the digital era the carnivalesque resistance has been studied as the "e-carnival" (Boje, 2001).

In the 2010s Russian government has imposed a number of highly restrictive laws on the freedom of speech and assembly including those on censoring the traditional and online media; almost prohibiting criticism of the government and implementing controlling devices on social networks. In this media ecology memes are becoming an essential part of the remaining resistance communication as they help to avoid censorship and generate alternative political discourse, provide a commentary to the official politics' wrongdoings and promote a discussion among like-minded users.

Assumingly, memes have become a new coded language of dissent communication in the Russian Internet. Memes are studied from two sides: as the produce and at the same time as the "glue" that helps to build social networks and affinity spaces with a strong sense of community and solidarity among its members. In addition to Bakhtin's work, theories on tactical media and Dadaism, framing and storytelling are used to analyse the structure and function of online memes in the current Russian political resistance online.

Before starting her academic research three years ago, Anastasia had been working in broadcasting and publishing in Russia for over ten years. Her job assignments included editor-in-chief, deputy editor, columnist and reporter for various magazines. She also had been working for five years as the international news editor and reporter for one the major television companies in Russia. Anastasia was recently involved with UNICEF in the Balkans giving her insights to create an efficient and interactive online presence of the innovative tech department – Innovations Lab in Kosovo. Anastasia is currently interested in the challenges faced by the civil society in the restricted media environment of contemporary Russia and the role of digital networks in empowering dissent communities and promoting alternative political discussions.

## Panel 4: Political comedy and the issue of gender

### Dr Susanne Colleary (Chair)

Susanne Colleary is Assistant Lecturer/Practitioner in the Humanities Department at Sligo Institute of Technology (SIT) and as Adjunct Lecturer in Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Her previous publications include chapters in *The Theatre of Conor McPherson* (ed. Jordan & Chambers, 2012), *Performing Feminisms* (ed. Fitzpatrick, 2012) and *For the Sake of Sanity: doing things with humour in Irish performance* (ed. Weitz, 2014). She has worked as an actor in both amateur and professional fields and has published articles on Irish theatre, stand-up comedy and televisual satire. She is currently working on practice-based research focused on contemporary and historicised understandings of Irish popular theatre and performance.

### Dr. Anne Graefer, Producing Laughable Femininities - Celebrity Gossip Blogs, Ridicule & Affect.

Dr. Anne Graefer  
University of Leicester  
Teaching Fellow  
ag391@le.ac.uk

#### *Producing laughable femininities: Celebrity Gossip Blogs, Ridicule & Affect*

As highly visible public figures that are both admired and mocked, female celebrities play a crucial role in the cultural production and circulation of ideas about femininity. Celebrity gossip blogs like Perezhilton.com or Dlisted.com are by now influential players in the production and consumption of celebrities and as such important sites through which these ideas become circulated and (re)negotiated. Their happily provocative and deliberately offensive online content is up-dated several times throughout the day, supplying gossip hungry audiences with stories about the everyday life of stars and the alleged failures and downfalls of mainly female celebrities. This paper maps out some of the affective workings of the humour that is used in these blogs. It argues that humour can be understood as an affective-discursive tool which does not only help to represent ideas of 'proper' and 'improper' femininity but rather it is generative of them, producing 'abject' femininities worth of social derision. By bringing critical studies in humour into dialog with feminist writings on affect and new media this paper illustrates how humorous celebrity gossip blogs often intensify the affective investments which already travel along classed, racialised and gendered discourses and practices of everyday life. Thus, this snarky online humour does not necessarily function to critique and deconstruct the narrow standards of a sexist celebrity industry, but rather it can be seen as an affective vehicle to repackage and resell them to audiences.

Anne Graefer is a post-doctoral teaching fellow in the Department of Media & Communication at the University of Leicester. Her research interests are located at the intersections of celebrity culture, new media studies and affect theory. Most of her work is



concerned with the affective ways in which media representations mediate and generate ideas about gender, race and sexuality and is published in *Celebrity Studies* and the *European Journal of Popular Culture* (forthcoming). Recently Anne has been focusing on the relationship between participatory online media and affective capitalism.

**Erdogan Sekerci, Broadening political territories of transgenderism in Turkey through autobiographical stand-up performances: The Case of ‘Esmeray Ozadikti’.**

Erdogan Sekerci  
Bilkent University, Ankara, TURKEY  
Graduate Student in Media and Visual Studies  
erdogan.sekerci@bilkent.edu.tr

*Broadening political territories of transgenderism in Turkey through autobiographical stand-up performances: The Case of ‘Esmeray Ozadikti’*

Esmeray Ozadikti is a transgender stand-up performer, who makes a living by performing her life story on theatre stage. Her theatrical performances possess political potentialities, which is more than visibility of transgender females in Turkey. Moreover, her staging reserves a unique mode of individual resistance against transgender discrimination in Turkey.

As queer theoretical framework argues, gender is something done rather than been. Every particular gender is performatively constituted through acts and expressions, which indicates that gender implies unique and subjective modes of presence. Therefore, queer perspective of gender holds back full theatricality because of dwelling on the idea of that gender is an outcome of performativity.

In this paper, Esmeray Ozadikti’s stand-up shows are discussed as ‘performance of gender performativity’, which is the queer way of performing her transgenderness. Moreover, this paper explores the political contributions of trans-autobiographical configurations to stand-up performances in Turkey.

Her stand-up performances based on her experiences involve both humorous and serious expressions. She blends her unique mode of staging through borrowing remarkable techniques from stand-up and cabaret performances. Moreover, Ozadikti’s staging is considered as social event and political manifestation on transgenderism. Therefore, both the unique method and the content of staging allow us to examine her stand-up performances as politicization of humor.

I was awarded full scholarship for my bachelor degree to study economics at Bilkent University. From the beginning, the ideas regarding the fundamental relationship between culture and economy have always intrigued me. After my graduation with a high-honor degree from economics, I have been accepted to Media and Visual Studies graduate program at Bilkent University. I have been awarded full scholarship and teaching assistantship as a result of my academic and intellectual background in economics, gender, culture, media and art. The subjects I have studied included fundamental social and cultural theories, film theories, consumption theories, everyday life and identity theories, musical theatre history and Shakespeare’s plays and cinematic adaptations of these plays. I work on my master thesis recently, which examines the transgender theatrical representations and

the political contributions of autobiographical implications. The politicization of these theatrical representations and its impacts to the social in Turkey is one of the preliminary concerns of this research. Esmeray Ozadikti as a transgender stand-up performer contributes to this research in order to analyse the relationship between transgender autobiographies and performance studies.

## **Stand-Up Comedy Night at Aphra Theatre**

### **Kate Fox**

University of Leeds  
PhD Performance and Cultural Studies  
pckef@leeds.ac.uk

Kate Fox originally qualified as a radio journalist. She became a full time stand up poet in 2006 and has been a Poet in Residence on Radio 4's Saturday Live, doing satirical and topical poems since 2007. She's also been Poet in Residence for the Glastonbury Festival and Great North Run. Her comedy show "Good Breeding", about not wanting children, was at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2013 and is being produced for a Radio 4 comedy slot in May 2015. She holds a practitioner processes PhD studentship at the University of Leeds and is looking at resistance to marginalisation in solo stand up performance, particularly in Northern comedy and spoken word. [www.katefox.co.uk](http://www.katefox.co.uk)

### **Anthony Mitzel**

University College London  
PhD candidate/researcher in Italian  
Institutional email: [anthonydion.mitzel@unibo.it](mailto:anthonydion.mitzel@unibo.it)

Anthony Mitzel has been a self-imposed exile on the Italian peninsula since Bush, the Decider was re-elected in 2004. He grew up in and around Youngstown, Ohio (USA), a city known for abandoned steel mills, dive bars, wedding soup and organized crime boasting one of the highest per capita murder rates in the US. He is also a PhD researcher at University College London and has taught at the University of Bologna. #anthonydmitzel @anthonydmitzel #thelifepodcast"

## Roundtable of invited speakers

### **Dr. Sophie Quirk (Chair)**

University of Kent  
Lecturer in Drama  
S.Quirk@kent.ac.uk

Sophie Quirk is a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre at the University of Kent where she primarily teaches popular and comic performance. She is the author of *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*. The book explores the social and political influence of contemporary British stand-up comedy, and is due to be published by Methuen in September 2015.

### **Prof. Delia Chiaro, “Don’t ask me, I’m a comedian!” and the importance of not being earnest in the contemporary world.**

Prof. Delia Chiaro  
University of Bologna  
Professor of English Language and Translation  
delia.chiaro@unibo.it

*“Don’t ask me, I’m a comedian!” and the importance of not being earnest in the contemporary world.*

Comedy and politics are and always have been a dynamic combination in the media but with the birth of smart technology and Web 2.0 there has been a proliferation of ‘do-it-yourself’ entertainment with a political twist. Comedians transmute into politicians and political activists like Beppe Grillo and Russell Brand while professional politicians indulge in self-promotional comedy like Obama’s performances on talk shows. Of course, not being professional comedians, humour in the wrong hands of politicians may well however backfire, (see Berlusconi and Farage).

I would like to explore the blurred lines of seriousness versus non-seriousness, but above all the importance of humour and its frontline position society today.

Delia Chiaro is Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Bologna’s Department of Interpreting and Translation.

Born, bred and educated in the UK, Delia has spent her entire academic career in Italy where she has combined her passion for film and TV with her interest in visual and verbal ambiguity and duplicity – an interest which has provided her with the perfect excuse to study humour in all shapes and sizes, but especially how it is perceived in translation and its cross-cultural impact.

Since publishing *The Language of Jokes: Analysing Verbal Play* (Routledge 1992) she has written extensively on diverse aspects of language and humour, most recently *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives* (with Raffaella Baccolini, Routledge, New York: 2014) while *The Language of Jokes in the Digital Age* is forthcoming with

Routledge in early 2015. She has been invited to lecture on humour across Europe, Asia and New Zealand.

Beyond academia, her hobbies include running, socialising and socialism.

### **Dr. Oliver Double, Alternative comedy from the archive**

Dr. Oliver John Double  
University of Kent  
Senior lecturer in Drama  
o.j.double@kent.ac.uk

#### *Alternative Comedy from the Archive.*

The alternative comedy movement that sprang to life in 1979, with the founding of Tony Allen's Alternative Cabaret group and the opening of the Comedy Store, offered a significant challenge to what had come before. Rooted in youth culture, openly political, often aggressive, obscene or confrontational, it claimed stand-up for the Left, with a spectrum that encompassed Marxists, anarchists and feminists. Alternative comedy established the roots of today's UK stand-up scene, which is often seen as a tamer but much more commercially successful inheritor. Various histories of this radical moment in UK stand-up have been written, perhaps with a tendency to mythologize. In the light of this, unpublished recordings and documents relating to alternative comedy are of particular interest, and this paper will present a range of these, mostly taken from the British Stand-Up Comedy Archive at the University of Kent. Of particular interest is a recording of the first ever stand-up set performed by the seminal Tony Allen, dating from shortly before the opening of the Comedy Store, and excerpts of this will feature prominently.

Oliver Double is a senior lecturer in drama at the University of Kent, where his teaching of stand-up comedy has gained national attention. He has written widely on stand-up comedy and popular performance, notably the books *Stand-Up! On Being a Comedian* (Methuen, 1997), *Getting the Joke: The Inner Workings of Stand-Up Comedy* (Methuen, 2005), *Britain Had Talent: A History of Variety Theatre* (Palgrave, 2012), and *Getting the Joke: The Inner Workings of Stand-Up Comedy, 2nd edition* (Bloomsbury, 2014). Before becoming an academic, he was a professional stand-up comedian on the national alternative comedy circuit ('Delightful' –*The Guardian*), the founder member of Red Grape Cabaret ('Whoever it was that wrote off alternative comedy, they forgot to tell Red Grape Cabaret' –William Cook, *The Guardian*), and for five years he ran and compèred the Last Laugh, Sheffield's longest running comedy club. Media appearances include *Fry's English Delight* (Radio 4), *Little Howard's Big Question* (BBC1), *100 Greatest Stand-Ups* (C4) and *Funny Business* (BBC2).

### **Dr. Brett Mills, 'A Special Freedom': Regulating Television Comedy**

Dr Brett Mills  
University of East Anglia  
Senior Lecturer in Film and Television Studies  
brett.mills@uea.ac.uk

*'A Special Freedom': Regulating Television Comedy.*

Comedy is commonly understood as a socio-political phenomenon, bringing people together through laughter. National television broadcasting systems similarly imply a collective view of the world. Thinking about comedy and television, therefore, can be a useful way into exploring how societies think about themselves and collective identities. This paper will explore these ideas through discussion of how comedy is regulated in British television. Regulators have always had difficulty in defining what is and is not acceptable humour; one British regulator noted that comedy has 'a special freedom' which mitigates against what it does. But why is comedy thought about in this way, and what are the assumed limits of this 'freedom'? How does this 'freedom' relate to the specifics of broadcasting and the social roles comedy is required to play by television? And what are the cultural and political consequences of such a 'freedom'?

Brett Mills is a Senior Lecturer in Film and Television Studies at the University of East Anglia. He is the author of *Television Sitcom* (British Film Institute 2005) and *The Sitcom* (Edinburgh University Press 2009) and co-author of two editions of *Reading Media Theory: Thinkers, Approaches, Contexts* (Pearson Education 2009, 2012). His books *Creativity in the British Television Comedy Industry* (Routledge 2015) and *Dumb Animals: Animals on Television* (Palgrave 2016) are forthcoming. He is currently undertaking the three-year (2012-15) AHRC-funded research project, 'Make Me Laugh: Creativity in the British Television Comedy industry' ([www.makemelaugh.org.uk](http://www.makemelaugh.org.uk)).

### **Dr. Louise Peacock, Political comedy on the London Stage: educating or entertaining its audience?**

Dr. Louise Peacock  
University of Hull  
Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Practice  
[L.S.Peacock@hull.ac.uk](mailto:L.S.Peacock@hull.ac.uk)

#### *Political Comedy on the London Stage: Educating or Entertaining its Audience?*

Political satire often relies on topicality, lending itself more readily to print outlets, to television and, increasingly to the internet. In her 2011 blog Lyn Gardner asked why theatre is afraid of satire, suggesting there was a paucity of 'home-grown theatrical satire'. Perhaps she was ignoring the output of playwright Alastair Beaton who wrote four critically acclaimed satires between 2001 and 2010. Nor was he alone. Steve Thompson, Lucy Prebble and Richard Bean have all created satirical comedies in the years leading up to following on from Gardner's 2011 dismissal of the significance of satire on the British stage.

This paper will explore some of the ways in which comedy can be used to facilitate a consideration of key issues relating to politics. The techniques of political comedy, including the use of satire, caricature, stereotype and verbal wit will be examined. By analysing a number of plays including Beaton's *Feelgood* (2001) and *King of Hearts* (2007), Thompson's *Whipping It Up!* (2006), Prebble's *Enron* (2009) and Bean's *Great Britain* (2014) this paper seeks to demonstrate how complex plotting can be used within satire to destabilise the audience's understanding of relationships between characters. The resolution of elements of

confusion can then be used to create comedy. The establishment and resolution of confusion is also pertinent to political satire's intersection with farce which will also be considered here by exploring plays such as Patterson and Swash's *The Duck House* (2013) and Bean's *In the Club* (2007).

This paper will be explore the various ways in which the success of a satire might be measured, including considering the extent to which contemporary satire can both educate and entertain.

### **Workshop 3**

**Prof. Mark Durden & Prof. David Campbell, On the Use of Comedy in Art as Social Critique.**

Prof. Mark Durden  
Professor of Photography  
University of South Wales  
mdurden@btinternet.com

Prof. David Campbell  
Professor of Fine Art  
Northumbria University  
campbell123@btinternet.com

*On the Use of Comedy in Art as a Form of Social Critique.*

Working collaboratively as part of the artists' group Common Culture (since 1996) comedy has become important in our exploration of national and regional identities, as well as enabling us to address the problems arising when we have been commissioned to make art intended to socially engage with specific local communities. We will introduce our involvement with comedy in terms of both our artistic practice and our current curatorial work for a 2016 show addressing Deadpan traditions of comedy in art from Marcel Duchamp to the present.

Mark Durden and David Campbell, together with Ian Brown, work collaboratively as Common Culture. Durden is Professor of Photography at University of South Wales and Campbell is Professor of Fine Art at Northumbria University. Campbell and Durden co-authored *Variable Capital* (Liverpool University Press, 2007) and are currently preparing a major curated exhibition to take place at both Bluecoat, Liverpool and the MAC Belfast in Spring 2016, *Double Act: Art and Comedy*.



## **Panel 5: Political comedy and British politics**

### **Paula Keaveney (Chair)**

University of Edge Hill  
Lecturer in Public Relations and Politics  
Keavenep@edgehill.ac.uk

Paula Keaveney is a Lecturer in Public Relations and Politics at Edge Hill University. She is a former journalist and PR practitioner and the co author of "Marketing for the Voluntary Sector" published by Kogan Page. Paula has been involved in politics since 1981. She's been leader of the opposition on Liverpool City Council and has stood for Parliament four times (this time will make it five). She recently appeared on the BBC Mastermind programme answering questions about The Thick of It and is glad to report that her appearance was far from being an "omnishambles".

### **Dr. Jill Marshall, Scotland's Referendum Debate - The Use and Expression of Humour in Opposing Media Campaigns.**

Dr. Jill Marshall  
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh  
Lecturer, Media, Film & Television  
jmarshall@qmu.ac.uk

*Scotland's Referendum Debate: Using Humour in Opposing Media Campaigns.*

"I think half the country will have had their dreams and hopes destroyed, so it will be pretty much business as usual for everybody." (Frankie Boyle)

Scotland is experiencing a time of political upheaval and argument, some of it bitterly divisive. In the referendum debate of 2014, dissemination of 'head' and 'heart' publicity, polemic, debate, "scaremongering", caricature and parody were all deployed in the service of the "yes" and "no" campaigns in traditional and social media.

This paper explores key political communications and debates to see what significant patterns exist in the strategic use and apparently spontaneous expression of humour in the 'professional' and 'amateur' debate campaigns.

The theoretical framework draws on interdisciplinary humour scholarship (Palmer 1987; Purdie 1993; Lockyer, Mills & Peacock 2011), on the scholarship of political humour, concerning the social capital of a "sense of humour" (Friedman 2011; Medhurst 2007) and the historical forms of political comedy in the UK (Wagg 1996; Pickering & Lockyer 2009).

It also draws on a large body of scholarship in communication studies and critical public relations concerning persuasion and the roles of fear and humour in advertising, social issue and political campaigns, including its engagement on social media (Nabi, Moyer-Guse & Byrne 2007; Eisend, 2009; Yoon & Tinkham 2013; Baumgartner 2012, 2013; Becker 2014)

The key discourses of the media campaigns have been partly about the restructuring of nation and identity but even more about the perception of risk, the personalisation of the political, given their need to target the undecided voter.

My long-ago PhD thesis was on women and comedy (specifically Victoria Wood and Jennifer Saunders) and after a research hiatus I have recently presented a paper called "Comedy and Alterity" on interdisciplinary theories of comedy at QMU and a paper called "The Cosmology of Victoria Wood's Television Comedy" (part of a two-part text and production project with Douglas McNaughton at Brighton) at the *Re-imagining regional television drama: women as agents of cultural change* symposium, Edge Hill University. I'm currently working on both the Victoria Wood project, a paper on comedy and textual analysis and a longer project with research partner Ann Turner on humour and persuasion in media campaigns.

**Dr. James R. Walters, Words and Values: Comedy, Politics and Vocal Performance in *The Thick of It*.**

Dr James Walters  
University of Birmingham  
Head of Film and Creative Writing  
J.R.Walters@bham.ac.uk

*Words and Values: Comedy, Politics and Vocal Performance in The Thick of It.*

*The Thick of It* (BBC, 2005-12) offers a bleak portrayal of British political life, constructing a fictional world in which values such as truth, loyalty and respect are rendered almost entirely meaningless. In this way, it has characteristics in common with political dramas such as *House of Cards* (BBC, 1990 & Netflix 2013-) and *State of Play* (BBC, 2003 & Universal, 2009) that seek to expose the deception and dishonour of political life.

Unlike these dramas, however, *The Thick of It* is funny, and much of its humour derives from the connecting of political power to vocal eloquence. It is inevitable that a series centred upon political spin should have an interest in words, yet *The Thick of It* goes further by making comedic vocal performance the prime currency within its fictional world. Likewise, whilst the delivery and exchange of witty lines is a straightforward convention of situation comedy, *The Thick of It* extends this pattern to present scenarios in which power is acquired solely through a character's ability to handle complex verbal insults. As a result, the series is full of inventively abusive phrases involving elaborate metaphor, simile, hyperbole and personification, employed to maintain or acquire dominance in any given scenario.

This paper analyses this language-for-power relationship in *The Thick of It* and reflects upon how converse failures in vocal performance can equally leave characters adrift in their fictional world. The discussion will therefore focus on the central character Malcolm Tucker (Peter Capaldi), contrasting his virtuoso spoken performances with his gradual silencing, and subsequent fall, in the series' final episodes.

James Walters is Senior Lecturer in Film and Television Studies and Head of Film and Creative Writing at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema* (Intellect), *Fantasy Film* (Berg/Bloomsbury) and co-editor of *Film Moments: Criticism, Theory, History* (British Film Institute/Palgrave). His next book is the BFI Television Classic on *The Thick of It* (British Film Institute/Palgrave).

**Augusto Soares, "The Digital Politics and Satire of Loyalists Against Democracy (LAD) in Northern Ireland: Tensions between parody and sincerity, and social media engagement".**

Augusto Henrique Gazir Martins Soares  
Queen's University Belfast  
MA in Social Anthropology  
augustogazir@gmail.com

*The Digital Politics and Satire of Loyalists Against Democracy (LAD) in Northern Ireland: Tensions between parody and sincerity, and social media engagement.*

This presentation will discuss the politics and satire of Loyalists Against Democracy (LAD), an anonymous online profile that has been a social media phenomenon in Northern Ireland (NI) for the last two years. LAD appeared during the loyalist/unionist protests and riots related to flags. Its musical videos, memes and posts satirising the demonstrations became a hit in NI. Since then, in dealing with the NI divide, the profile has reworked sincere messages of others into comedic pieces, hacked the journalistic format into parody news, mined the internet to break stories, and advocated in favour of gay rights and against racism, for example. This presentation is based on online research, offline observation and interviews undertaken for a Masters in Social Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast. It will show how sincerity and parody are in constant tension in LAD and assess how such ambivalences manifested themselves in the profile's output. It will also argue that key to understanding LAD's performance is its entrepreneurship towards social media engagement. That is, the initiative it takes to interact with other users and remix online material as part of its content production and circulation.

Augusto Henrique Gazir Martins Soares is a journalist and has worked for the BBC, Reuters and various Brazilian outlets. He holds an MSc in Latin American Politics from the University of London, has taught Journalism at Rio de Janeiro's Federal University, and has just finished an MA in Social Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast.

## **Workshop 4**

### **Jon Davison, Political Clowning**

Jon Davison

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, UCL

jon.davison@cssd.ac.uk

This workshop will begin by using a simple exercise in training clown-audience dynamics: a 'flop' exercise where the clown performer's failure to convince an audience becomes what proves their success. This success, signalled by laughter, seems to have no explicit content, for it produces a clown who knows nothing and knows not why they laugh. Innocent, if you like. But what happens when we overlay this dynamic with content drawn from the world of meaningful, worldly actions? What will be the relationship between the obstinate unknowingness of the persona of the clown and the evidently political nature of the clown's script?

Jon Davison has been a clown performer, teacher, director and writer for more than 30 years. He trained at the École Philippe Gaulier and Fool Time Circus School (Bristol). As co-founder in 1993 of Companyia d'Idiotes, he has toured festivals, theatres, tents, streets and bars throughout Europe from Sicily to the Arctic. As well as performing solo, he is now part of the four-person clown/circus/pantomime company, Stupidity, currently touring Not A Real Horse.

He taught clown, improvisation and acting at the Institut del Teatre de Barcelona from 1996-2006, when he became co-founder and co-Director of Studies at the Escola de Clown de Barcelona, one of the world's leading centres offering comprehensive clown training programmes covering both practical and theoretical aspects of the clown arts. From 2007-2010 he was an AHRC-funded Creative Fellow investigating contemporary clown/actor training at Central School of Speech and Drama, where he is now Visiting Lecturer and researching discourses of contemporary clowning.

His first book, *Clown: Readings in Theatre Practice* was published in 2013 by Palgrave Macmillan, for whom he is now preparing a *Clown Training: a practical guide*.

## **Panel 6: Satire as critique and citizenship in global capitalism**

**Chair: Dieter Declercq**

### **Dr. Simon Bell, Humour and the Narcisism of Advanced Capitalism.**

Dr. Simon Paul Bell  
Independent researcher/ Lecturer at Anglia Ruskin  
Lecturer in Performance  
simonbell@hotmail.com

#### *Humour and the Narcisism of Advanced-Capitalism*

This paper proposes that humour has ceased to be a site of resistance to power, and has instead become a tool of cynical late-capitalism.

In *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdijk posits that the cynic is no longer the outsider position, but the default point of view in advanced-capitalism, whereby cynicism and irony allows space for those who laugh to collude with the ideology they mock. In *the Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek writes: 'In contemporary societies, democratic or totalitarian, cynical distance, laughter, irony, are, so to speak, part of the game. The ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally'. This is odds with Simon Critchley's view of humour-as-resistance, wherein power is recognised as the Emperor's new clothes. That may be so, but in late-capitalism the emperor stands beside us in the crowd laughing at himself. Advanced capitalism anticipates its own critique. Capitalism has proved itself adept at assimilating the rebel or the outcast within its formula of commodifiable narratives. The fetish of individualism is the fuel of contemporary capitalism, which is therefore validated by conventional oppositional narratives.

This paper proposes that strategies such as over-identification, the process of taking a system more seriously than it takes itself, as advocated by the Dutch cultural activist group BAVO and the Slovenian collective the NSK, provides an alternative to humour's collusion with late-capitalism, and reflects a necessary shift from pragmatic political resistance to a resurrection of the utopian drive in the Left.

Educated at Reading University and trained at Guildford School of Acting, with a PhD in Eastern European performance from Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. Since 1993: a freelance theatre practitioner and director of over 140 theatre productions, co-founder of the Regenerator Theatre Company, resident director of the Theatre of the Wheel, and for the past 19 years associate director of the Cambridge Shakespeare Festival. Currently lecturing in Performance at Anglia Ruskin University.

### **Gina Rosland Eide, Daily News and Views.**

Gina Rosland Eide  
Independent Researcher  
MA in Media Studies  
ginaroslandeide@gmail.com

## *Daily News and Views*

For the last decade, *The Daily Show* has been a source of both entertainment and information for many. The self-proclaimed "fake news show" has inarguably had a considerable impact on the political conversation in the U.S., with its host, Jon Stewart, even being voted the most trusted man in news. The show's success has led many scholars to investigate the impact of the show on its audience, and the rhetoric of its host.

This study, however, focuses more on the show itself, and is a reaction to the many insinuations and claims that the show is journalistic. It draws on the work of Geoffrey Baym, who analyzes *The Daily Show* in its broader context of contemporary media. My examination is, however, more narrowly concentrated to the specific relation between satire and the normative model of journalism. Through an in-depth reading of the show, the study explores the space between satire and journalism that *The Daily Show* has been said to inhabit.

The research shows that *The Daily Show* encompasses traits from both satire and journalism. The study challenges the work of Liesbet van Zoonen, who asserts that satire, with its cynicism, undermines politics. I employ Stig Hjarvard's theory on mediatization, which describes how politicians have adapted to the personalization of journalism by communicating through prepared talking points. In opposition to van Zoonen, the study argues that, because of this development, satire can be an important counterweight in public discourse.

Gina Rosland Eide started her education with a bachelor's degree in Media Studies from the University of Bergen, in Norway. She recently graduated with a master's degree in Media Studies at the University of Copenhagen, with the thesis, "*Daily News and Views*". The thesis questions the role of satire and journalism in current public discourse. She is currently working within music licensing in Copenhagen.

### **Joanna Doona, Young Political Comedy Audiences and Their Citizen Identity in Sweden.**

Joanna Doona

Lund University, Department of Communication and Media

PhD student and teacher in media and communication studies

joanna.doona@kom.lu.se

*"You're kind of forced to have an opinion" – Political comedy and cultural citizenship*

The rising popularity of political comedy and other types of political entertainment spurs scholarly concerns regarding civic values and growing cynicism among young citizens (cf. Jones 2010). Simultaneously, news habits and preferences among younger audiences are changing (Marchi 2012), which add to the concerns. With the exception of the effects studies that focus on issues like knowledge diffusion and voting behavior, political comedy audiences are under-researched within relevant fields; humour studies have fallen short in its audience perspective; and audience studies has lacked in its focus on comical content. This paper concerns young political comedy audiences and their citizen identity, in relation to community construction. Drawing on the analytical framework of cultural citizenship, as defined by Hermes (2005), the study focuses on production of distinctions as community

construction. Through analyzing data from in-depth interviews and focus groups with Swedish young adults (18-35 years; self-described audiences of either the Swedish public service radio programme *Tankesmedjan* or the internationally popular *The Daily Show*, the paper attempts to answer the question of how we can conceive of political comedy through the perspective of citizenship as cultural, whilst focusing on the audience. The analysis shows that audiences are very much engaged in the political, but tend to downplay their abilities to analyze or even debate political issues. This is connected to an unwillingness to associate oneself with *any* community, and if one has enough knowledge to participate; making political comedy a space where this interest or passion potentially accommodated.

Joanna Doona is a PhD student and teacher in media and communication studied at the Department of Communication and Media at Lund University in the south of Sweden. Her thesis project focuses on young political comedy audiences, identity and citizenship.

## **Panel 7: (Re-)defining the boundaries of satire**

### **Eve Smith, Comedy as Social Conscience in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*.**

Eve Smith

Liverpool John Moores University

Sessional Lecturer in Media Culture and Communication/PhD Candidate

E.D.Smith@ljmu.ac.uk

#### *Comedy as social conscience in Terry Pratchett's Discworld – Satire as a means not a mode*

For 30 years Terry Pratchett has been writing books in the hugely successful *Discworld* series. Generally shelved under fantasy Pratchett's writing has been likened to comedic writers in the realist mode such as Wodehouse and Waugh (*Independent*, cited in Pratchett 1996), and is often described as a satirist. This paper will attempt to differentiate between satire and political comedy using the *Discworld* as a worked example.

Satire is often simplified as political humour, and much of the confusion around satire lies in the vagueness of such terms. Condren (2012) suggests that definitions of satire are inadequate, but that ideas of ridiculing in a censorious nature are core to satire. In the case of the *Discworld*, there is much that is ridiculous, but very little that is ridiculed. While there is a strong sense of characters learning and growing, inappropriate behaviour is worked through rather than censored. While satire is satirical of an object, the *Discworld* is an inclusive space with affection for even its most wayward citizens, even a dragon falls in love. This paper will place current writing on satire in opposition to Pratchett's *Discworld* and use Critchley's (2001) notion of humour as superego II to suggest the nurturing nature of Pratchett's comedy in opposition to the censorious nature of satire.

Eve Smith is a sessional lecturer in Media, Culture and Communication at Liverpool John Moores University where she is also undertaking doctoral research on Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*. Her research has been published in *Diegesis*, *Participations* and *Comedy Studies*.

### **Henry Powell, What a Failure!? A Practice Based Enquiry.**

Henry Powell

Kingston University London

Practice-based-research PhD Student

Hpowell98@gmail.com

*"What a failure!? A practice based research enquiry that explores the concept and aesthetics of failure as it appears within my own devised work."*

This paper seeks to explore the concept of failure and discuss its potential for political efficacy in contemporary performance. Drawing from Margret Irving's PhD study and my own practical research base I will first offer a working definition of the traditional clown



figure before going on to examine the clown that appears within the styles, codes and conventions of postmodern performance. Historically, the clown's comic failures have always been a highly recognisable aspect of his performing methodology, used to entertain, ridicule and subvert the social order.

However, recently the clown has lost many of his most recognisable features to appear fragmented, alien and insidious to his audience. This has led the scholar Ashely Tobias to propose a new category of 'postmodern theatre clown' which undermines our conventional understanding and affinity with him. Bruce Nauman's disturbing art installation, *Clown Torture* (1987) will serve as a case study in which to test out Tobias's ideas surrounding this new typology of clown and the changing perception and aesthetic of failure.

The second part of my paper examines the ways in which I am currently exploring these ideas through a series of upcoming scratch performances.

Henry Powell is a second year PhD student at Kingston University London. His practice based degree explores the concept and aesthetic of failure seen within paradigms of popular performance (though paying close attention to the figure of contemporary clown). Henry graduated from Winchester University with an MA in devised performance 2011. Since this time Henry has been a regular comic performer and live art artist. He is also the co-founder of 'Un-intentional Theatre', a devising company which explores paradigms of clowning, storytelling, and live art. ([www.unintentionaltheatre.com](http://www.unintentionaltheatre.com))

### **Bernadette Plageman, British Pantomime: Staging Satire and "Punning" Politics.**

Bernadette Plageman

University of the Sorbonne, Paris, France.

Play critic for *Interlignage – l'anti-zapping culturel*

bernadetteplageman@ymail.com

*British Pantomime: staging satire and «punning» Politics.*

The British are famous throughout the world for their sense of Humour. One of the longest-lasting theatrical genres which is still popular today is the Grand British Pantomime. Its popularity is certainly due to the huge amount of laughs, the audience gets during the performance. And one of Pantomime's cleverest tricks, in this domain, is its ability to include humorous remarks about the current political situation.

Political satire and punning are a tradition in Pantomime performances. Historically speaking, this genre had most certainly reached its highest level of comedy when Joseph Grimaldi introduced Clown as a major character in the Harlequinade performances of Pantomime. But political satire and punning have continued to evolve since the Grimaldi era, up to the present day.

The paper will examine the different techniques for presenting satire and its effect on the public by first taking a look at the Grimaldi era, at its height of political satire. Then its use in present day pantomimes will be examined by giving concrete examples. The paper will explore not only the use of words to create a comical effect but also how body language contributes to the humour of political satire and punning. These observations will lead to investigating the similarities that occur between the mimicry of the actor on stage and the mime-like behavior depicted by political cartoonists. By exploring the different aspects of

political humour in British pantomime, the paper could also include a demonstration on the effects of staging comic body language associated to political satire and punning.

Bernadette Plageman is the author of two theses at the Sorbonne Nouvelle: *Le Mime Corporel Dramatique d'Etienne Decroux dans la lignée du Théâtre d'Art: L'école laboratoire – Centre de Création* (2010) in Theater Studies. *Buster Keaton, le mime ou la mécanique du corps de l'homme caméra* (2013) in Film Studies. Author of the film *Le Mime Autrement* (2008) (*Mime Otherwise*). I am also a mime performer based in Paris and the United States. I have studied and collaborated with the famous French mimes Etienne Decroux and Maximilien Decroux. My repertoire as a “mimographer” and performer includes over twenty major mime shows which often cover very exotic themes such as retracing *The Poetic culture of Uzbekistan* and *The traditions of the Massai Warriors in the Rift Valley*. My performing experience also includes organizing events at the *Institute of Political Studies* in Paris, in connection with different Embassies on current political issues. Many of the mime plays include comedy as well. Through my training, performances and academic activities, I have acquired a vast knowledge of the body and its artistic and comic resources for the stage. And finally, researching and writing on Buster Keaton has obviously contributed immensely to my understanding of comedy. I am also a « journalist culture » for *Interlignage: l'anti-zapping culturel*, covering theatre, mime, comedy, dance, music, art as well as photography. I have also contributed to the Paris based journal *Mime*, published by the *Center for Modern Mime*. My interest in the body has led me to cover sports such as figure-skating and swimming in a cultural perspective. My experience in Politics is vast and at an International level. At the Sorbonne, I am currently finishing a thesis in « Littérature comparée » on Paul Claudel's last piece written for the stage which is a modern version of the Way of the Cross.