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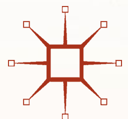
SATIRE AND POLITICS

THE INTERPLAY OF HERITAGE AND PRACTICE

EDITED BY JESSICA MILNER DAVIS



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Satire and Politics

The Interplay of Heritage and Practice

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Cover credit: “Deuced funny!”, 1897, by Phillip (Phil) William May.

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This book is dedicated to
Rachel Alexandra Davis
who taught me all I know about editing

Note on "Deuced funny!"

The cover image for this book, "Deuced funny!", is taken from *Phil May's Sketch Book* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1897). It depicts Melton Prior, UK war correspondent, and A.C. Corbould, a *Punch* artist, sharing some amusing political gossip. It was drawn by self-taught English cartoonist Phillip William May (1864–1903), who went to Australia in 1885 to work on the influential magazine, *The Bulletin,* and continued to contribute to its pages after he returned to Europe in 1888. His accomplished style earned him recognition as one of the great cartoonists of the ninteenth century. May's work is discussed in Chapter 1, by Jessica Milner Davis and Lindsay Foyle.

Foreword

Rodney Marks

There are some politicians and political events that outdo satire itself. US satirical songster Tom Lehrer commented that awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Henry Kissinger in 1973 made satire obsolete[1] and the remark by British satirist Peter Cook that "the heyday of satire was Weimar Germany, and look how it stopped Hitler!"[2] kills all laughter. The USA's forty-fifth president, Donald Trump (elected November 2016), and the President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte (elected June 2016), are both self-parodying leaders with anti-establishment rhetoric. Many satirists find them beyond intelligent humorous criticism, and resort to blunt insult comedy.[3]

Richard Nixon, US President from 1969 to 1974, made an appearance on *Laugh-In* (16 September 1968) in order to soften his image and make himself more electable: it seemed to work well. Since then, every US president and many candidates for office have used satirical TV programmes to humanise themselves, to demonstrate self-deprecation and to show voters that they are just regular folk. Barack Obama, US President 2009–2017, appeared seven times on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* up to 21 July 2015, just before Jon Stewart left his 16-year tenure as host on 6 August 2015. Stewart has been accused of being in love[4] with Barak Obama and more seriously of giving the President easy access to the show's demographic and endorsing Obama's policies on air.[5]

The annual White House Correspondents' Dinner with the president of the day has been hosted by the White House Correspondents' Association since 1924. From 1983 onwards, it has taken the form of

a “roast” or send-up of the president and also of the media, delivered by one or more comedians. Presidents have also been involved in delivering comedy directed at the media and at themselves. Whilst usually very funny, the event has been criticised by the fifth estate (bloggers and other alternative media) for its “coziness” between the fourth estate (the mainstream media) and the president. Using the best comedy writers available, the president typically hilariously lampoons the media and himself, but clearly for a political purpose: the satire makes him more likeable and promotes his policies and programmes.

In Australia, satire is often associated with television, but most especially with the national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), aligning the establishment with the voice of satire. In theatre, something similar occurs with the Sydney Theatre Company’s annual satirical *Review at the End of the Wharf*.[6] This has been going on since 2003 and become part of the arts establishment. As with victims of political cartoonists’ jibes in newspapers and online, political and societal leaders know they are making an impact if they are the subject of the joke in such venues.

The current prevailing culture of the ABC has been shown to be left-leaning (to the Green and Labor Parties).[7] The Greens in Australia have never formed or contributed to a government and see themselves as the voice of dissent, to the left of Labor. The current Liberal-National Party coalition is conservative, more to the right. How is it then that employees of the Sydney Theatre Company and the ABC, with salaries and entitlements provided by government funding, are allowed to bite the hand that feeds them? How fearless, intelligent and effective can these satirists be? Studies have shown that under Soviet rule, the KGB employed joke writers to disseminate gags against the regime as a deliberate safety valve.[8] The same appears to be true in democratic societies like the USA and Australia. So, satirists and their audiences are not undermining government power and policies: satire in fact sustains those governments. A little rebellion with laughter prevents a more dramatic upheaval and the last laugh is on the satirists.

Reflections on Practice

Satire is not only attractive for individuals as expressions of opinion and entertainment, it is also valued for organisational purposes. Is this the ultimate co-option of satire, to have commercial sponsors rather than

political allies? I do not think so. I am a comedian myself, performing as a comic hoaxer at business events within the genre of the corporate impostor. I employ satire in every performance I do. Based in Sydney, I am Australian, and have performed all over Australia but also in a dozen or so other countries. Since 1991, I have had about 2500 performances, for the private, public and the non-profit sectors alike. My satire is enjoyable, both for me and my audiences, but it is also playing with fire. I enjoy that. Its true purpose is instructive and liberating—at least from some corporate and personal straightjackets. This is what I am paid to do.

I arrive at an event—in the persona of a plausibly real character agreed in advance with whoever is hiring me in the hosting organisation—and I work the room, schmoozing with attendees. If it is a conference, I will attend a regular seminar on offer along with other delegates and ask a question; if it is a dinner, I will attend pre-dinner drinks and socialise normally. This mixing and mingling establishes the credibility of my comic character. At some agreed point, often one advertised in the formal programme of the event, I will be called to a lectern to deliver a keynote address. I tailor my remarks carefully and with months of preparation to the particular institutional culture and language. Business being what it is, that often involves appalling jargon and I pursue this and other aspects of the received wisdom to their logical ends. It is painful for the audience and sometimes risky for me—certainly risky for my hosts who are in on the secret and paying me good money for the act.

At the conclusion of the speech, the performance continues with a Q&A session. These questions are not set up or organised in advance. Those in-the-know about the hoax remain passive observers. This time gives other people in the group with the capacity to be funny and who have tumbled to the secret of the impersonation a chance to have some revenge—not really on the corporate impostor, but on those who booked him.[9] Sometimes it takes time before the impostor is unmasked, but the impact is correspondingly magnified when that eventuates. This is what happened for a client of mine—a brick-making company—at a corporate event they held at a large hotel in Melbourne on Saturday 26 June 1993. For this company (let us call it Goodbrik), I portrayed Mr. B. Rick Wall, Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive, Advance International Limited (we shall call it), the US company that owns little Australian Goodbrik.

At the event, I attended a seminar as a US impostor and was welcomed like this: “Rick would like to say a few words to us now about

Advance's proposed new management style: including their approach to [a] subsidiaries' performance appraisal, [b] T[otal] Q[uality] M[anagement],[10] [c] reporting, and [d] corporate communication. Over to you, Rick." I spoke some corporate gobbledegook for a while, just long enough to establish the character's credibility. A pre-prepared "outro" (opposite of intro) was then read by someone in a position of authority: "Thank you, Rick, for those comments. We appreciate you taking the time out from your busy schedule to join us this afternoon and look forward to your keynote after-dinner address this evening. Thanks again, Rick." Surprisingly, no-one saw the joke in the name. I was asked if I was related to the Walls of Bendigo [a local country town], and responded: "No, the Walls of Jericho". "Oh", was the reply.

My after-dinner speech was introduced this way: "It is once again my privilege to introduce Mr. B. Rick Wall, executive assistant to the new chief executive at Advance. As Advance is the ultimate 'owner' and controller of Goodbrik, we thought that it might be useful to obtain a view from above. Rick was a senior general manager at Esso prior to his being head-hunted across to Advance. He is a qualified engineer, and has a background in turn-around management, downsizing, and restructuring organisations. He informs me that after the presentation he would be pleased to take questions. Please join me in welcoming Mr. B. Rick Wall".

There were 500 people at 50 tables of ten: a full house. Things had been going badly for the company. There was a recession and hundreds of people were being laid off. Morale was low as evidenced by high levels of petty theft and absenteeism. People felt that they would be the next group to be "let go". So I drew some predictive scenarios or "word pictures" for the audience. There were, I falsely claimed, rows of staffed tables just outside the banquet room doors, with pay-out packages for everyone, listed alphabetically. I talked suitable MBA talk at great length and issued veiled threats about the need for legal action. Silence ensued. A young woman began to cry.

Next, a succession of four heroic workers stood up to defend Goodbrik. The first, from the finance department, said, "I know what you're talking about—the $30,000 that went missing. Well, we found the guy. He needed a bridging loan following a messy divorce. We retrieved the money and sacked him. But we didn't go to the police as required by law". I said no, that wasn't the issue. The confessor looked crestfallen. A second executive stood up and said: "I know what you're alluding to. That overseas deal that ended up with a great loss. We had a

go and bribed the local officials but to no avail”. No, I said, that wasn’t it either—and did he know that bribery was a crime? A third executive took the floor and said, “Look, I know we’ve lost profitability, but in a price war it is market share that counts. When the recession lifts we’ll be sitting pretty”. No, it’s not that either, I said, and added that I was until now unaware that Goodbrik was unprofitable, and did he know that this was a career-limiting move?

I looked across at the advertising department table, the people who booked me to improve morale and hence productivity. They had their faces buried in their hands, thinking that this was all disastrous. But as the satiric performer, you have the best “feel of the room” since you are at the focal point and everyone’s attention is tightly held. I felt that I could pull it off, so I kept on ramping up the mood without letting slip my mask.

A fourth and final questioner stood up. He was the sales manager, an important figure in the chain of command. This was the target I wanted.[11] The sales manager started counting on his fingers: “Let me get this right. One, we’ve put our financial house in order. Two, we’ve given the international thing a go, as directed. Three, the market share battle is being won”. He went very red in the face and also on his bald head—and he got it! He swore loudly and laughed. My recollection then is of 500 people standing as one, yelling not at me but across the tables at each other: “I knew it”, “Nonsense!”, and much swearing. Pandemonium ceased when the MC read the outro I had prepared: “In case you haven’t guessed by now, we have been witness to a comic hoax. Mr. B. Rick Wall—or BRICK WALL—is corporate comedian Rodney (Hoaxes and Jokeses) Marks. Along with many of us here at Goodbrik, he believes that we should be more sceptical of outside experts, especially when we have the talent, skills and experience within our own ranks to solve our own challenges. Thank you, Rodney Marks.”

My opinion of the quality of this show was at odds with the views of the booking executives: they had suffered greatly and it took a long time for me to receive payment—a form of punishment for making their advertising department squirm on the night. But to me it was a success, albeit a risky one, and the report in at least one national magazine endorsed my judgement.[12] My style of satirical hoaxing is different to many comedians’ who work this same circuit, but comedians in demand have much in common.[13] What is essential is mentioning and satirising key individuals, organisations, management language and fads, products and services. This tailoring to the individual organisation gives each

performance a one-off appeal so that the audience members feel special, even as they are being critiqued in a very targeted way.

Subtly, a number of messages are delivered:

1. That criticism is acceptable, as long as there is evidence to support it (for this I have to prepare as realistically as an MBA student seeking top grades).
2. That results are more important than personal ego (I too have suffered failure).
3. That being human (having fun) is compatible with being an employee.

Certainly, I do enjoy my work.

Conclusion

Maybe satire does have a bite, even when it is paid for or co-opted by its targets. This book is a collection of scholarly studies reflecting the serious research that has taken place here in Australasia and elsewhere into the satirical mode, its origins and impact. These scholars are my friends and colleagues and I have followed their arguments with great interest over the years. I recommend their work to you and hope to see you at a corporate event in the future.

Sydney, Australia
November 2016

Notes

1. Todd S. Purdom, “When Kissinger Won the Nobel Peace Prize, Satire Died”, 30 July 2000.
2. “Political Satire: Fringe Benefits”, 24 August 2000.
3. Sarah Lyall, “When Reality Tops Parody”, 5 November 2016, p. B1. See also Chap. 9 by Robert Phiddian.
4. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, Christina Littlefield opined: “Rewatching President Obama’s appearances on ‘The Daily Show With Jon Stewart’ is like watching a love story unfold, with the initial meet-cute, the excitement of the initial courtship and the snipes that come after the honeymoon period wears off and the relationship reaches a comfortable security” (“When Barak Obama Met Jon Stewart: A Love Story”, 21 July 2015).

5. Kyle Smith, "Jon Stewart's Secret Obama Meetings Reveal He's a Partisan Hack", 29 July 2015.
6. The name refers to the Wharf Theatre, home of the Sydney Theatre Company, a government-funded arts entity.
7. Pia Akerman, "It's Easy Being Green at the ABC", 21 May 2013.
8. "Author Interview: Christie Davies (*Jokes and Targets*)", 2011.
9. For more detail of how this works, see Rodney Marks' personal website at: www.comedian.com.au.
10. A notorious buzzword at the time in management circles.
11. Sometimes a comic hoaxer is booked by the boss, sometimes by middle management. Being booked by the boss can be tricky: it is important not to be seen as an instrument of authority. Being booked by middle management as in this case allows the performer to roast people up and down the chain of command.
12. Lenore Nicklin, "Stand-up Chameleon", 13 December 1994.
13. Most see themselves as comic hoaxers, not amateur pranksters. On the distinction between hoax and prank, see Rodney Marks and Jessica Milner Davis, "Hoax and Prank", 2014.

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Notes on Author

Rodney Marks is an Australian comedian, hoax speaker and corporate impostor (www.comedian.com.au). Since 1991, he has presented faux invited keynotes at business events. Rodney holds a BA from the University of New England, Armidale, Australia, an MBA from the Australian Graduate School of Management(AGSM), and an MPA from Harvard University's Kennedy School. He has been artist-in-residence at the AGSM and at Harvard, and visiting professor-at-large at the University of New South Wales. He has given more than 3,000 satiric performances, mostly in Australia but also in New Zealand, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Mauritius, England and the USA. He is a founding member of the Australasian Humour Studies Network and his publications include: *The Management Contradictionary* (with Benjamin Marks and Robert Spillane, 2006, and a completely revised and updated version, *Funny Business: Management Unmasked*, 2017), and (with Jessica Milner Davis) "Hoax and Prank" in *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (Sage: 2014).

Editor's Preface

Jessica Milner Davis

This book originated in papers presented in a panel offered by the Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) at a 2015 conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL). The panel comprised many of the authors in this book: Mark Rolfe, Nicholas Holm, Rebecca Higgie and Lindsay Foyle, with Jessica Milner Davis as Chair and Rodney Marks as Discussant. We were grateful to ASAL for its broad interpretations of the term "literature" and also "Australian", permitting us to range widely over many satirical formats and materials in New Zealand as well as Australia. The lively debate that followed our Discussant's concluding remarks quickly made clear that the past and present connections between satire and politics could not easily be constrained to any specifically Australasian context and that additional studies were needed to complete the exploration.

Clearly the historical practices involving satire that attach to the Westminster democratic tradition demand examination in a US as well as an Anglo-Australasian context. The importance of a wider ambit was confirmed when some of the material (by Higgie and Milner Davis) was presented to an international audience at Brunel University London's Centre for Comedy Studies Research. Indeed, the research and examples now canvassed here have a truly trans-Atlantic perspective. Thus, while the resulting book remains focused upon the Anglosphere, its international frame of reference means that its insights—well summed up in the final overview here provided by Robert Phiddian in Chap. 9—have general relevance. This wide applicability is timely when one considers that,

not just in Western democracies but around the world, political satire has never been more freely available and consumed than at present. It is a tool in the kit of every cartoonist, writer, news-reporter, advertising creative, corporate leader, campaign manager and everyone who runs for office. Even the notoriously po-faced former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, found himself cracking jokes (admittedly rather heavy-handed ones) at the dinner he gave on 15 December 2010 for members of the UN press corps.

Modern media have altered but also expanded ordinary citizens' access to satirical commentary on everyday news and events. Satire has even invaded the corporate world, as well as fuelling that of entertainment and the Internet. Satire is in fact big business. While cultural (and political) conventions may differ about what is and is not permissible as its targets and forms of expression, there is a universal and unchanging human desire to unmask hypocrisy, to criticise duplicity, corruption and failure and to ridicule the self-important. And there seem to be increasing amounts of all this crying out for satirical attention. Whether it is expressed in humorous or serious terms (for serious satire is not always funny), satire derives its justification from the freedom proclaimed by democracy. The list of cartoonists and satirists who exercise that freedom only to find it opposed by economic censorship or worse grows each week (many cases are recorded on the website, Index on Censorship 2015, at: http://ioc.sagepub.com/site/includefiles/Comedy_and_Censorship.xhtml, accessed 19 October 2016).

Despite such counter-pressures, satire continues to attract practitioners and audiences alike, and not merely in wealthy Western democracies. Around the world, satirical TV news-shows outstrip serious information channels in their vast and growing outreach, particularly to younger Internet-savvy generations—although the precise nature of their impact remains debatable, as is explored by a number of the present chapters. Not surprisingly, satire's economic and practical effects are increasingly the topic of scholarly enquiry around the world. Since satire is so often bound up with politics, a particularly salient issue is *cui bono*? Again, this is a theme that several chapters explore in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Those who earn their living from satire are not often asked for their opinions on these vital topics. When this does happen, however, an interesting perspective emerges that meshes very well with the scholarly studies. Hence the significance of the Foreword contributed by my esteemed AHSN colleague, Rodney Marks. His experiences show that satire *can*

bring about change, but that achieving this may well exceed the limits of what is feasible when the audience is the general public, whether via page, stage or screen. Marks's account speaks tellingly of his client's discomfort at the extremity of means pursued to achieve the brief for the business organisation Marks was hoaxing. He certainly succeeded in his commission to produce individual and organisational behavioural change; but it seems unlikely that his patrons fully understood in commissioning him just how deeply the satirist's knife must penetrate if it is to produce results. One feels the Human Resources Department was unlikely to have approved such goings-on.

In terms of style, the following chapters vary quite widely, from those in the traditions of literary and cultural history (chapters by Mark Rolfe, Conal Condren, and myself and Lindsay Foyle), through visual and media studies (chapters by Nicholas Holm, Rebecca Higgie and Lucien Leon) to reports and discussions of quantitative research (chapters by Alison O'Connor and co-authors Khin Wee Chen, Robert Phiddian and Ronald Stewart). Integrating the perspectives and conclusions offered by both the social science and the humanities chapters is a challenging task, but can be richly productive of new insights—a central purpose of undertaking a book in this form. Both established and emerging scholars have contributed to this aim, as is made clear in the final overview chapter by Robert Phiddian which supplements the introductory one (by Davis and Foyle).

Despite these rewards, curating the combination of authors and perspectives and approaches involved a number of challenges for the editor, as well as for the writers themselves. Reviews informed by large numbers of short multi-author studies have their own requirements; literary chapters have different ones. The combination proved not well served by slavish adherence to any one conventional style of referencing. Accordingly, while most chapters in this book follow a normal humanities style of citing their sources, those that of necessity list large numbers of studies (frequently multi-authored) have followed a carefully evolved "combination style" that is designed to preserve the flow of the argument but omit no essential details, while being space-saving. It is set out clearly in the first note to each of the chapters concerned. For the reader's convenience, complete lists of references are appended to each chapter; and in view of the many Internet and video sources under consideration, these are divided into print and online sources (and manuscript ones where applicable).

It remains for me to thank all who have contributed to this book: the authors; the cartoonists in Australia and the UK who have so generously given permission for their work to be reproduced; the editorial staff at Palgrave Macmillan and Springer Verlag who have supported me through the process (despite their own demanding period of corporate change); the artists and custodians who have generously afforded permission for the reproduction of vital art-works and, above all, my family, whose patience with yet another book on humour is deeply appreciated. I hate to say it, but there may be another one coming.

Sydney, Australia
November 2016

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CHAPTER 1

The Satirist, the Larrikin and the Politician: An Australian Perspective on Satire and Politics

Jessica Milner Davis and Lindsay Foyle

The Australian tradition of political satire is one in which few holds are barred. Since colonial times, Australian politics itself has always been a fairly naked struggle for power.[1] Although some New Zealanders might claim their politics to be somewhat more civilised (or perhaps just better run) than that of their uncouth cousins across the Tasman Sea, by and large the two countries share a frank approach to governance and also to the vital role of satire in rendering its frustrations tolerable for the electorate. While many other nations have an equally robust satirical discourse about politics (France, for example), this chapter invites the reader to adopt a particularly Australasian perspective; reflecting partly the book's origins, and partly the richness of material for study.

The term "Australasian" is used here, not to indicate a relationship with the countries of North and South-East Asia, but to refer to

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commonalities in the polities and cultures of Australia and New Zealand. Both inherited their political and economic systems from Great Britain, accompanied by cultural influences which have been modified only a little by multicultural immigration and by the aim of better recognition of their different Indigenous peoples. As Nicholas Holm points out in Chap. 4, among the many things that the two nations have in common are a wide permit for the use of humour in daily life and a particular taste for the deadpan and levelling kind. To these can be added a preference for what is practical and down-to-earth and a fixed distrust of leaders and politicians.

In Australia, many of these traits are embodied in "the larrikin", a male figure (almost exclusively) that has long served as a national self-image. It looms large in political cartooning, even if its power is waning somewhat today. Typically, larrikins delight in rule-breaking behaviour, often masked as humour or leg-pulling, and mostly of the forgivable kind. This chapter describes the evolution of the larrikin image in Australian cartooning history and its use in political satire. It also introduces the book as a whole by relating its different chapters to each other and to the general topic of satire and politics. It begins with a brief account of Australian humour and of the nature of satire and political cartooning, before turning to the larrikin and cartooning.

Australian Humour

Like other Anglophone countries, Australians like to see an ability to laugh at themselves as a national trait. Others are also good targets—especially the English and the cousins in New Zealand. But as a rule, Australians do expect to be taken down a peg or two by their own compatriots. Humour as practised in Australia effectively acts as an equalising force and the habit of "taking the mickey" (taking the piss) is nearly universal, serving a normative function across all levels of society and between various cultural groups.[2] It has even been termed a democratic right.[3] Cockney and Irish traditions have both contributed to shape this permissive culture about the use of inter-personal humour. Post-war immigrant cultures have mostly absorbed the practice, with remarkable numbers of successful self-styled ethnic ("wog") comedians, including some Indigenous stand-ups.[4] This insistence on putting down the newly arrived and mocking not only incompetent or self-important leaders but also one's own friends has been seen by one historian as sharing something with the rich tradition of satirical name-calling and mimetic mockery found in many Australian Indigenous cultures.[5]

Literary scholars nevertheless point out that despite its assertive irreverence, Australian humour is "usually an acknowledgement of the status quo",[6] frequently displaying uncertainty and bravado rather than confidence and finesse.[7] As with the larrikin, rebelliousness is contained within and limited by the humour. The prevalent style delights in crudity, valuing it somewhat childishly as a form of rebellion against propriety. Collecting Australian jokes for publication, Adams and Newell decided that Australians must in fact "fear the 'other', what we deem to be foreign or alien, and so tell savage, uncivilised jokes about Aborigines, Jews, migrants … Jokes that are bigoted, blasphemous or phobic outnumber all other categories".[8] Davies found a unique corpus of Australian "dirt and vomit jokes".[9] Almost anything goes, it seems, excused as humour.

This permissive culture of humour use extends even to satire with its openly critical intent compared to more happy-go-lucky jokes and general humour. Satire can be applied very freely in Australia, both to individuals and to political as well as other topics. Politicians have effectively been regarded as fair game from the early days of white settlement when they were frequently third sons or ne'er-do-wells sent out to the colonies from Great Britain. Despite current debate about the limits of free speech and increasing hesitation over cultural sensitivities (in the wake of religious terrorism, for example), political figures continue to be pilloried in satirical cartoons without much reprisal.[10] In fact, Australian satire enjoys unique legal protection from copyright, if not from defamation law.[11] One eminent jurist well versed in tackling corruption in Australia describes satire as "the most important form of public humour", designed to make society "examine itself critically and confront its deficiencies".[12]

Satire, Politics and Cartooning

The marriage of satire and politics seems natural. Both set out to say—perhaps even to do—something serious about life. Satire's name derives from a literary tradition of *serio ludere* (to play in earnest) that dates back to Lucian of Samosata (*c*.120–180 CE). Its playfulness can range from sunny and light to a savage indignation (Jonathan Swift's *saeva indignatio*)[13] that is so bleak that it barely functions as humour.[14] When the term "satire" is used loosely (as often today) to apply to anything funny or amusing, its defining moral aspect is undercut: it is essentially humour with a critical purpose.[15] Applied to politics, its purpose can be intentionally partisan, either in pursuit of a particular political agenda or to comment on politicians individually or collectively. Despite the views of

some critics, its agenda may be of either the left or right, since hypocrisy (among its other targets) recognises no political boundaries.[16] Sometimes the topic may be the folly or confusion of the electorate or of the system as a whole, but more often it is the failings of those who claim to lead the nation and make decisions on its behalf, in the best interests of "the people".

Since classical times, cartoon drawing has been linked to political satire, exploiting the fact that one image is worth a thousand words.[17] While literature, drama and polemical writing have all played their parts in advancing satire, the encapsulation of a message into an image, whether performed or printed, gives satire an immediate bite. Cartoons are an exceptionally condensed form of imagery which means that they also benefit more readily than long texts or performances from mass distribution, enhancing the outreach of the satire. It could be said that they play a leading role in the creation of satire, whether purely as images, or employing words and action as well. From satirical paintings on ancient Greek vases to English eighteenth-century broadsheet cartoons like the one in Fig. 2.1 (see Chap. 2), the essential features of cartooning—caricature, compression and ambivalence of meaning—have served to amuse and inform their audiences. When cartoons began to be regularly included in newspapers and journals as part of journalistic and editorial commentary upon the times, their outreach and impact grew enormously.

Today, as the role of the press changes under the pressure of new media, cartoons about politics and daily life are no longer a compulsory newspaper feature.[18] At the same time, however, satirical commentary about politics and other things has been taken up by broadcast and electronic media. Combining moving images with static ones, and performance satire with visual as well as written texts, the new kinds of e-satire explored by later chapters in this book continue to rely on the same basic features of cartooning, caricature, compression and ambivalence of meaning. Such continuity is not surprising, given the extraordinary power of a single cartoon to encapsulate complex messages via its brevity and reduced outline. For admirers of the 1980s UK TV series *Yes Minister*, the satirical brilliance of the entire show is evoked by one of Gerald Scarfe's images shown in Figs. 8.1 and 8.2 (discussed by Conal Condren in Chap. 8). Each of these meta-cartoons recalls by means of a few unrealistic and stylised images the fully realised dramatic satire-series, with its multiple characters, plots and dialogue. Such is the power of cartooning and hence their importance to this chapter and the book as a whole.

Despite this—perhaps because of it—the academic study of cartoons, especially political ones, spreads across many different disciplines, making

it difficult to define as a research topic. As creative works, cartoons in general are too sketchy to fit well into art history and theory; as part of communication studies, they are confusingly ambivalent in their meaning and impact. In cultural history, their topicality makes them quintessentially ephemeral and difficult of access without the precise requisite knowledge (the older cartoons discussed in this book are necessarily accompanied by background explanations). Vivid and eye-catching objects, they are worthy of study as much for what they can tell us about politics and society as for their own skill and artistry. Exploring and mapping the field is the subject of Chap. 5 by Khin Wee Chen, Robert Phiddian and Ronald Stewart, who have assessed a wide range of disparate types of research, seeking to locate appropriate methodologies and collate firm findings about the nature of political cartoons in general.

As a result, the authors identify six major subfields: meta-studies or surveys of political cartoons, the properties of political cartoons, their function as cultural mirrors, the impact of political cartoons, audience reception, and the cartoon ecosystem. Focusing principally on static images in print news media—editorial cartoons, caricatures, strip and pocket cartoons—that are used to comment on newsworthy events and figures, the authors distinguish work on political cartoons from contiguous work on non-political cartoon books and animations and on political satire in prose and/or TV and digital media. Their chapter not only provides a theoretical underpinning to a book in which cartoons play an important evidentiary role, but essential guidance for future researchers in the fields of both cartooning and satire.

This approach is taken a step further by Lucien Leon in Chap. 6 as he examines how individual cartoonists work today, and how in composition technique and method of distribution they respond to the emergence of new media and new ways to reach audiences. Leon points out that, while it is now easier for amateurs to enter the field, neither they nor the professional cartoonists can be assured of access to a lasting and loyal audience when instant choice increasingly rests with the consumer, not the producer and publisher. His case studies include practitioners from Australia, the USA and the UK, who have successfully transitioned from print to digital media via animation and social media. Their experience demonstrates not only the continuing importance of cartooning technique, but how all would-be political cartoonists must recognise and embrace the challenge of maintaining a constant engagement with digital technology if this traditionally significant input to the democratic conversation is to be maintained in the new media. Even if political satire is in some ways shape-shifting under the combined

impetus of the Internet and today's instant communications, it is evidently not dying out.

Satire and Politics: The Westminster Inheritance

Despite the changes noted above in media and formats of expression, the role of satire in today's political discourse may in fact be stronger than ever. In Chap. 2, Mark Rolfe traces the descent of a tradition of satirical imagery inherited from the early days of emerging party politics in the British Isles that passed first to America and thence to Australasia. He identifies a close nexus between the Westminster parliamentary tradition and the freedom to ridicule the battle for political power that takes place between parties and individuals. All claim to speak for democracy and equality but may be equally unsavoury in their private lives if not their public dealings. Politics being the art only of the possible, the election of candidates who promise something new—a fresh beginning and a change at the top—rarely fulfils voter expectations in practice. That feeds a pervasive disillusion with politics and politicians as a breed. Such tensions, Rolfe concludes, are inherent in representative democracy and satire about the topic both reflects and contributes to the disillusionment. Satirists do not so much speak truth to power as reflect this legacy view of politicians as participants in a dirty, slippery game of spin and dubious language. Since the game shows no signs of changing, satirists will continue to feed on it.

The vexed issue of whether political satire thus creates, reinforces, or merely reflects public disillusion with democratic politics is foregrounded in several chapters. In different ways, both Conal Condren and Rebecca Higgie explore the attraction that satire holds for its own victims and how in some circumstances they can successfully find their own uses for the humiliation that satiric mockery seemingly delivers to them. In Chap. 8, Condren shines a new light on the fame attained by the British TV series *Yes Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*, by carefully dissecting its verbal tropes and their relation to the universally familiar "language of politics and government". From archival sources, he reveals that it was the firm belief of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that the show aided her own agenda of public service reform. It exposed accurately enough the realities of Whitehall and the Byzantine evasions of its mandarins as they sought to frustrate changes proposed by elected ministers. The public was assumed to be amused and entertained, but also made indignant and thus more likely to back real-life reform. Yet in most

episodes, the laugh is on the Prime Minister—the very figure that one might suppose to represent Mrs Thatcher herself (and which she herself acted on one famous occasion). Condren concludes that putting too much weight on well-worn binary abstractions like theory and practice, satire and political reality, leads to a simplistic interpretation of these political satires—and perhaps of satire in general. Integrated into political discourse, satire achieves not a singular but a variable relationship to actual political practice and the promotion of specific policies. It may raise issues of political accountability and ministerial responsibility, differing notions of representation, and Orwellian dogmas about political language, but satire also creates its own vision of the nature of politics. As always with humour, simple answers are unsafe.

The Impact of Satire

What can we know about the actual impact of satire on its audiences? Does it support the workings of a democracy, or does it undermine them by encouraging cynicism among voters? In Chap. 3, Rebecca Higgie explores the process of real-time political co-option being practised in contemporary satire, whereby politicians successfully adopt the satirical vehicle for their own purposes in a way that diminishes or even neutralises the possibility of satirical critique. Celebrated as a form of criticism that holds politicians to account, satire must surely compromise its own raison d'etre when it behaves in this way. But even as contemporary media satirists have gained public trust and prominence, so politicians have appeared more frequently on their programmes. They are interviewed by comedians, they play along in quiz or panel show games, appear in scripted skits and even participate in public self-satirisation. Evidence surveyed by Higgie from both the UK and the USA shows how this redounds to the benefit of the politician. She brings to bear theories of how a dominant culture can absorb and reframe counterculture as merely a consumer product, developing her own theory of the political co-option of satire. The result convincingly demonstrates how satire's oft-celebrated critical edge is blunted when politicians are able to use it to their own advantage as a public relations tool.

This vital and contested issue of the effects of satire on its audiences is also pursued by Alison O'Connor in Chap. 7. She focuses on the Internet and other new media methods allowing researchers to garner self-reported voter reactions to actual candidates standing for office. The issue is one of substantial economic as well as political significance, since

advertisers, political parties and educators all consider that choices being made by younger audiences especially can be shaped by what they view. O'Connor's research, first reported here, involved both US and British respondents and was designed to control for two aspects not normally taken into account in experimental work on satire. The first is the self-selecting nature of an audience and the second, the fact that any satire will have a straightforwardly educational effect in providing information about its target, over and above the accompanying ridicule. Her results demonstrate that in evaluating a candidate, the effects of viewing satire about that person did not differ substantially in impact from the effects of exposure to negative news coverage about them. This suggests that any impact is due to the simple acquisition of information rather than to any unique effect of satire. In fact, under some conditions, even critical satiric coverage improved the evaluation of the candidate in comparison to results from a control group that viewed more benign humorous material about the same candidate. Underlining the importance of careful experimental design, one vital factor turned out to be whether audiences were allowed to be self-selecting in what they viewed. If not, the results suggest that all publicity may indeed be good publicity from the point of view of the candidate. O'Connor's discussion of methodologies for exploring and testing these kinds of real-life effect from satire, particularly in the context of electioneering, offers important guidance to future researchers.

The Nature of Satire

How then does satire work in practice, and what is its relationship to irony and to other comic forms? In Chap. 4, Nicholas Holm explores both filmic and textual construction in the so-called "deadpan irony" found in the work of so many Australian and New Zealand satirists. The figure of the larrikin adopted a nonchalantly ironic stance, conveying the message: resist authority, kow-tow to none, play the game to suit your own convenience and frame your rebellion as humour to avoid retaliation. Holm points out that in postmodern times, this traditional style of ironic humour has evolved to take shape as deadpan. While the appeal to anti-authoritarianism persists, ambivalence has deepened and the resulting satire is bleaker and more bemused. Its message is multi-layered, reflecting today's uncertainties.

Although Australasia can scarcely claim sole ownership of deadpan as a comic mode (straight-faced humour is certainly found elsewhere), Holm

argues that the style's prevalence indicates an Antipodean affinity for and perhaps an expertise in it. As a comic mode, it is characterised primarily by emotionless comic delivery. Looking closely at the work of individual satirists in this vein, Holm brings to bear recent work on critical affect and "public feelings" to show that deadpan is in fact more than just a matter of facial expression: it is better understood as a mode of comic aesthetics (both visual and verbal), characterised by a flattening of comic affect. The result is to complicate how satire is thought of as a political mode, especially when specific political intentions and corrective purposes are attributed to it. In some cases, what is recognisably satire is *so* deadpan that, as with Hašek's character of the Good Soldier Schweik who over-literally complied with his orders with catastrophic results,[19] it is impossible to know whether the chaos is intentional or the satire should be classified as dissent.

In the book's closing chapter, Robert Phiddian connects these lines of exploration with the nature and operation of satire and its audiences. A scholar of classical Augustan satire, Phiddian has also made a longitudinal study of political cartoons accompanying recent Australian election campaigns. In Chap. 9, he carefully assesses the evidence for and against satire as reflecting or as influencing political outcomes. Since it is the most obviously worldly of artistic modes, satire must comment directly on real-world events and people. Phiddian correctly sums up our affective response to it by observing that whenever we read or view a really good satirical piece, we come away confident that its targets must be cringing, shamed into changing their ways to avoid further humiliation. And if not, then surely they were subsequently rejected by the electorate. Despite our conviction that these are the results of a good satire, Phiddian concludes from the evidence that our intuitive reactions are wrong.

It does not follow that satire achieves nothing at all. The genre clearly functions to mobilise and vent the harsh emotions of anger, contempt, disgust and disdain on the part of both creators and audiences. Phiddian argues that the interplay of shaming and shamelessness generated by the practice of satire must surely bolster the robustness of free political expression in liberal democratic traditions. Reviewing current scholarship, including the significant findings of this book itself, he sums up what can reliably be concluded about the affective and cognitive charges of satire and concludes that for political satire, its emotional and cultural effects will provide benefits to any democracy that permits it, even if

the immediate instrumental results from exposure to it are not easy to demonstrate.

Australian Political Cartooning

Turning to specifically Australian cartooning, it is no surprise that the history of the press in Australia shows cartoons being employed to comment satirically on local politics from its earliest beginnings. This usage probably exploited the effective independence of what were then small townships of white settlement, remote from colonial government. It also profited from the talents of many free settlers who were spatially and artistically gifted rather than high academic achievers. As early as the 1840s in Tasmania, the small town of Launceston (population around 50,000)[20] published two bi-weekly papers: one was *The Cornwall Chronicle*, founded in 1835, and the other, the more conventional *Examiner*, founded in 1842.[21] It was the former that pioneered the publication of political cartoons[22] and earned a reputation as an "extremely scurrilous newspaper".[23] *Melbourne Punch* began publishing in 1855, but it was *The Bulletin*, first published in Sydney in 1880, that set the standard for cartooning as a permanent feature in Australian newspapers. That year also the first Australian art society, the Art Society of New South Wales, was launched by the Collingridge brothers, George (1847–1929) and Arthur (1853–1907), who were cartoonists as well as artists. Other founding cartoonist members were Alfred Clint (1842–1923) and William Macleod (1850–1929), both of whom contributed to *The Bulletin*.[24]

The emerging agenda of Australia's national identity was closely tied to this cartooning activity and the work of cartoonists helped shape self-definition. Their communities were allied to but distinct from purely artistic circles, and their work—bolder and more direct than that of their artist colleagues—addressed a much broader audience. While Melbourne and Perth had sketch clubs and art societies that helped support their artists and cartoonists in their social and professional lives, Sydney led the way in cartooning. *The Bulletin* employed only a few cartoonists, but drew on a large number of freelancers. *Smith's Weekly,* established in 1919, had a large art department with only a few freelance cartoonists. These two outlets made Sydney one of the best cities in the world for cartoonists to live and work. The Society of Australian Black and White Artists, dedicated to Australian cartooning, was launched in Sydney in

1924.[25] It was entirely acceptable to combine cartooning with "high" art, and this approach was reflected in Australian art school curricula. Julian Ashton (1851–1942), also a contributor to *The Bulletin*, was an influential early member of the Art Society of New South Wales. When he began his own art school in Sydney in 1886, he instructed students in all forms of painting, sign-writing, newspaper illustration and cartooning, and this pattern was copied by many later professional art schools, ensuring a solid base of training.[26]

Australia has produced many great cartoonists, some of whom have practised solely in Australia and some overseas as well. Together, they have created what is admitted to be an "Australian School" of black-and-white comic art.[27] Their cartoons contributed importantly to the formation of a national sense of identity, especially after the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, but also more recently. A key part of that process of self-definition was the emergence of the cartoon image of the typical Australian rebel against social niceties: the larrikin. Perhaps because of its connection with emerging national identity, this image proved particularly fruitful for Australian political satire. Other media such as novels, poetry, TV and comic drama on film and stage also played a part in shaping and disseminating the figure of the larrikin, but its developmental trajectory is best illustrated by the work of the talented artists who gave it visual shape.

A Brief History of the Larrikin

The term "larrikin" originally identified a hooligan, a dangerously misbehaving young male. Yorkshire dialect records it as a verb that combines with "about", meaning to lark about or to be up to youthful mischief, as in someone who "goas laracking abart ower mich fur my fancy [goes laracking about over much for my fancy]" (*English Dialect Dictionary* sv Larack).[28] In Australia, it was current in this sense during the early growth of the city of Melbourne, which experienced considerable social disorder in the aftermath of the 1870s gold rush.[29] This negative identification with uncontrollable young males gradually changed over time, particularly in response to the return of soldiers from the First World War. Even as early as 1899, an Australian larrikin (so spelled) had come to be seen as "someone who defied social or political conventions in an interesting and often likeable way".[30] The brave young men enlisting to fight in the First World War evidenced this in the deliberately sloppy

way they wore their uniforms and evaded Army regulations. Studying the evolution of the larrikin, Melissa Bellanta noted that "the archetypal image of the Anzac [member of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] was of an ordinary working man given to drunkenness, irreverent humour, anti-authoritarianism and nonchalance in the face of adversity".[31] Other quintessentially Australian words connected with the larrikin are "The Digger" (a mate, also a war veteran, particularly of the First World War),[32] and "ocker", meaning something that is typical of the average Australian (particularly male).[33]

Today's larrikin is someone who is to be admired for challenging social conventions. This notion plays to the (somewhat fictional) self-image that Australians are essentially rebellious and anti-authoritarian.[34] Apart from various sportsmen and women who parade their bad behaviour of one kind or another under this banner, artists, film stars, crooks and business leaders have all revelled in the larrikin image. It has even been asserted that "large numbers of respectable Australian men have always liked to feel they are really larrikins at heart".[35] Whether consciously or not, many Australian politicians resort to this image when appealing for the popular vote.[36] Its longevity as a national self-image renders it a useful motif for cartoonists attacking both social and political targets, but its visual interpretation has changed greatly from its origins.

The Larrikin's Cartooning Origins

Livingston Hopkins (1846–1927), a US cartoonist working for *The Bulletin* in the 1880s, required a visual image that would capture the Australian self-image, fervently loyal to the British crown but with an emerging sense of difference. The symbols of the American Uncle Sam[37] and the English John Bull both had something that made them instantly recognisable as national symbols. To provide the Australian equivalent, he selected a little boy—not a particularly bold but certainly a loyal one. In 1885, public subscriptions had been solicited to support a contingent of soldiers from New South Wales to travel to Egypt and the Sudan to help put down the uprising led by The Mahdi (Al-Mahdi, 1844–1885), whose forces had besieged General Gordon in Khartoum.[38] The public spirit was pro-British and anti-Arab, and a keen 10-year old called Ernest Laurence wrote to the state's premier offering the contents of his money-box: £25. He described himself as "a little boy from Manly" (a seaside suburb of Sydney).[39] The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported this

touching story on 7 March 1895 (p. 14), quoting from Ernest's letter: "How I longed to be with them and help punish the wicked Arabs who killed poor General Gordon".

Inspired by this story, Hopkins created the figure of The Little Boy from Manly shown in Fig. 1.1, dressed in fancy pantaloons and a frilled shirt. The image had the pleasing effect of expressing both the impetuosity and the filial devotion of the new country, then a very junior part of the British Empire.[40] Its sub-title however points an ambivalent, satiric moral. "A Story for the Marines" references "Tell that to the marines", an expression that identifies and ridicules a tall story or a leg-pull, meaning that Hopkins's image can also be read as satirising the teacher-pleasing, jingoistic sentiment of the times. Whatever the interpretation, it served to represent young Australia, being copied many times by other cartoonists over the next 50 years and only falling into disuse with the emergence of the somewhat older but still boyish image of The Digger during Australia's military and spiritual coming-of-age at Gallipoli in 1915.[41]

Fig. 1.1 "A Story for the Marines" (or "The Little Boy from Manly"), drawn by Livingston Hopkins for *The Bulletin*, Sydney, 26 September 1885. P-D Art from the library of Lindsay Foyle.

The youthful, authority-defying image of the larrikin emerged gradually over the next half-century. As noted above, by the end of the nineteenth century, such a troublemaker could already be portrayed in a more positive light—and indeed he was in the works of Henry Lawson (1867–1922), especially in his Joe Wilson stories. In 1895, the "bush poet" A.B. [Banjo] Patterson (1864–1941) employed much the same figure as his Clancy the Stockman in two much-loved poems, *The Man from Snowy River* and *Clancy of The Overflow*.

Transitioning from a rural to an urban setting, the literary larrikin reappeared early in the First World War as Bill, an ill-educated layabout (and sometimes labourer) with "a fondness for alcohol, gambling, and fighting".[42] Bill is the unlikely hero of *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, a collection of love-rhymes by C.J. Dennis (1876–1938).[43] The theme is that of the larrikin rescued from his rough life by Doreen, his "ideal bit o' skirt", who civilises him enough to marry and settle down. Published in 1915 with an admiring preface by Henry Lawson, the volume was illustrated by the artist Hal Gye (H.F.N. Gye, 1888–1967), who moved the larrikin image decisively away from that of a small boy. It was immensely popular, selling over 90,000 copies in its first two years, and Dennis wrote, "I created one 'Sentimental Bloke' and he discovered his brothers everywhere he went".[44] Its readers recognised the parody of popular music-hall romantic songs, but took the book to their hearts as an acceptable way of expressing blokey emotion.[45] Despite the dated social background, its continuing popularity in Australia is attested by sequels and revivals—as a ballet, films, TV series and most recently a musical (2009).

From the time of federation in 1901, *The Bulletin,* always pro-Australian, set out to create a unified sense of nationhood. It adopted as a masthead, "Australia for Australians" and saw cartoons as an important part of the mission. Led by the male-dominant founding editor J.F. Archibald (1856–1919),[46] the magazine's few women artists and writers, including May Gibbs (1877–1969) and New Zealander Dorothy Wall (1894–1942), did not really receive the prominence their work deserved, despite the fact that both created national icons. Archibald included children in his mission and these two artists focused on children's cartoons. While Gibbs' work was marked by sentimentality, Wall's creation—a koala called Blinky Bill—was essentially a marsupial version of the Little Boy at Manly (minus the pantaloons). Lovable, well-meaning and loyal, Blinky was always in trouble but never desponding.[47]

The impact of the Great War on national self-image is revealed in a cartoon by Alf Vincent (1874–1915), published in *The Bulletin* on 3 May 1915.[48] This shows a serious young Australian soldier posing the question,

"Well, Dad?", to the portly figure of British John Bull. Significantly, hanging on the wall is a framed drawing of Hopkin's Little Boy from Manly, now relegated to the nation's past. Although the larrikin was growing up under the pressures of combat, the Little Boy refused to die quietly: in 1937, Alex Gurney (1902–1955) drew him in *The Herald*, waiting for the Second World War to start and Harold "Mick" Armstrong (1903–1978) used the same image in the pages of *The Argus* in Melbourne.

Australian soldiers returned from combat with a clear idea about what differentiated them from other nationalities. Having served at Gallipoli and elsewhere, cartoonist Cecil Hartt (1884–1930) was one of the first to reflect this change. Melbourne-born, he had studied art with cartoonist Hal Gye before moving to Sydney to contribute to *The Bulletin*. *Humorosities*, published in 1917, collected his many cartoons about the larrikin Aussie Digger intent on surviving and enjoying himself, despite military duties. Typical are the soldiers shown in Fig. 1.2 being addressed by

Fig. 1.2 Untitled cartoon drawn by Cecil Hartt, from Cecil L. Hartt, *Humorosities: By an Australian Soldier*. London: Australian Trading & Agencies Co. Ltd, 1917, n. p. [p. 12]. P-D Art from the library of Lindsay Foyle.

their world-weary officer.[49] The caption makes clear that he happily connives in bending the rules. Like his soldiers, he places sport above drill, saying, "All those men intending having dying relatives this week-end must apply for leave at once—the football match starts at three!".

The image of the resourceful Australian (and New Zealand) soldier more interested in avoiding tedious rules than in obedient conformity resonated with home audiences as well as with the serving men themselves. Hartt's book sold so well (over 60,000 copies at a shilling each[50]) that it gained him a job on the budding *Smith's Weekly*, and he continued drawing larrikin soldier cartoons for the next decade. The image was perpetuated in the practical self-reliance and mocking anti-authoritarianism of Anzac soldiers during the Second World War and its basis in reality is attested by observers such as John Mulgan (1911–1945), an expatriate New Zealander serving in the British Special Operations Executive, who encountered his former countrymen in the African desert.[51] As late as 1985, it could be noted that "[t]hese qualities, which seem to have emerged during the World War 1 for the first time, have continued to preoccupy artists, writers and film-makers throughout this century as they have attempted to define and redefine Australia's national characteristics".[52]

On the civilian side, the traits of the lovable but self-indulgent larrikin became permanently attached to a new cartoon character whose rapid success resulted in a weekly strip appearing around the country and still drawn today. In 1921, Monty Grover, publisher of the *Sunday Sun* in Sydney, required an Australian comic to run in the children's section, "Sunbeams". Convinced that a local version of the popular US comic "The Katzenjammer Kids",[53] would work, Grover wrote a script with a girl as the central figure. From several candidates, he selected *Bulletin* cartoonist James (Jimmy) Bancks (1889–1952) to illustrate the resulting strip, "Us Fellers", which first appeared on 13 November 1921. When Grover went to Melbourne to launch a new paper, *The Sun News-Pictorial*, Bancks took over the whole strip.[54] He replaced the girl with one of the minor figures, a red-headed boy called "Ginger" Smith, changing his name to Ginger Meggs.[55]

The figure of Meggs embodied all the appropriate qualities of an Australian national image. His clothing and demeanour were well suited

to the climate and casual lifestyle; he was an independent spirit rebelling against authority, laughing when things went wrong and refusing to suffer bullies. He was cheeky but well meaning and lovable. He had no objection to girls but was resistant to feminine requirements to "behave properly".[56] His family had little money but considered "a fair go" more important than gain. Although the cartoons' settings were appropriate for a 10-year-old boy—home, playground and paper-run—Meggs was essentially a juvenile version of the grown-up larrikin. He combined the heroics of Man from Snowy River and his Digger descendants with the hidden soft-heartedness of the Sentimental Bloke. Figure 1.3 shows Ginger in the latter mode, entertaining a motley collection of animals under a full moon, presided over by another Australian icon, a koala in a gumtree.

Fig. 1.3 "Ginger Meggs", drawn by James (Jimmy) Charles Bancks, from *More Adventures of Ginger Meggs*, Sunbeam Book Series No. 13, Sydney: Sun Newspapers Ltd, 1936, n. p. [p. 2]. P-D Art from the library of Lindsay Foyle.

Other newspaper editors demanded their own version of this appealing national image. For the *Sunday News*, Syd Nicholls (1896–1977) created “Fat and His Friends”, first appearing in September 1923. This strip centred on a Billy Bunter type of child, drawn from the English schoolboy stories by Frank Richards (Charles Hamilton) in *The Magnet* (1908–1940). However, Nicholls quickly found that such English models no longer worked in Australia, even when produced locally. Young Fat was replaced with a more Irish-style hellion called Fatty Finn. Better drawn but not as well written as Ginger Meggs, the two heroes were from the same mould: the mischievous, independent-minded but impressionable small boy who is an irritant to his adults.[57] A comparable contemporary figure is the child-terror Bart Simpson, in the US animated cartoon-series *The Simpsons*, created by Matt Groening. Not only its hero, but the philosophy behind the series evokes the Australian larrikin’s attitude towards life. Writing for his young fans in 1992, Groening advised them on “How to Survive and Fight Back”[58]:

1. Take careful notes on all the boring, stupid and unfair things going on around you.
2. Wait 20 years.
3. Use notes as basis for widely successful T.V. series.

Although Bart’s series has proved remarkably long-lived for a TV show, his character has not yet lasted Ginger Megg’s near century. Drawn by five successive cartoonists, Meggs continues today in a range of newspapers under the present artist Jason Chatfield (b. 1984). The cartoon has also entered the digital age, where it is appreciated by youthful fans who “think it is a brand new web comic. They have no idea it is a 94-year-old comic strip”.[59]

The most famous larrikin image of all is that portrayed by Stan Cross (1888–1977) in a 1933 *Smith’s Weekly* cartoon. This shows two men falling off a building-site to (almost) certain death and is captioned, “For gorsake stop laughing—this is serious!”. Dubbed the Australian “epitome of visual humour”,[60] it has probably been re-published more times than any other cartoon in the world.[61] Despite the distance in time and changes in technology, the image still resonates today. It captures the irresponsible dare-devil larrikinism of two ordinary Aussie blokes who are tackling a work-site with typical disregard for regulations and who are more worried about losing their trousers than their lives. It plays to the treasured national myth that, under pressure and in a difficult situation, Australians will always have the ability to find something to laugh at.

With the approach of the Second World War, an adult national symbol was needed to stand for men fighting for their country. Cartoonist Alex Gurney had already worked with cartoons symbolic of Australia, including a series called "Ben Bowyang" (or "Gunn's Gully") for *The Herald* in Melbourne. Written by C.J. Dennis, this had enjoyed a large following for its caricatured scenes of bush life. In 1939, Gurney created two young men nicknamed Bluey (a common Australian name for a redhead) and Curley (that is, balding) and placed them in the Australian army ready to fight.

Descended from Hartt's earlier Digger, this pair had much in common with the irresponsible but lovable Meggs, but were of age. Ready to take on Hitler's army, that of Japan (even the US Pacific Army, when it arrived in Australia for "R & R"), they would much prefer to do so without officers getting in their way. Bluey was a First World War veteran who knew all the tricks and took the younger Curley under his wing (in later strips, the two are the same age). Figure 1.4 shows Bluey in sole charge of an endless line of weary Italian prisoners-of-war, a trope that exploits the traditional stereotype of the Italian soldier preferring to surrender rather than fight.[62] With the mischievous irony of a playground prefect, Bluey bawls out the unlucky prisoner whom, disregarding Army rules, he has picked to carry his heavy rifle, pretending he has conferred on him an honour, not a burden. Like Ginger Meggs, these cartoon heroes are captioned using an Australian accent, lightly indicated here by the elision in "th' sand". Even in addressing foreigners, Australian slang was used, reflecting a social reality at home that took delight in

Fig. 1.4 Single frame from "Bluey & Curley", a nationally syndicated Australian newspaper comic-strip, drawn by Alexander George (Alex) Gurney, and originally published in 1943. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist's family.

embarrassing strangers who could not understand "the lingo". Then as now, new arrivals in Australia were expected to learn what words such as *cripes*, *strewth* and *bugger* meant and how to decode the Australian accent.[63] When Gurney was asked to remove Australian terms so that the comics could be used in US newspapers, he declined: his artistic aim was to reflect local reality.[64]

The sentimental celebration of honest, rough-hewn ocker (typically boorish Aussie) life,[65] whether urban or rural, continued in the work of cartoonists such as Ken Maynard (1928–1998), creator of a long-lived series featuring the "Ettamogah Pub" (public house) that appeared in *The Australasian Post*, beginning in 1959. Replete with clichéd references, these cartoons captured the masculine life of Australian pubs, in both country and city. The Ettamogah was based on a 1957 hit song by Australian country and western singer, Slim Dusty, himself a good larrikin figure.[66] Maynard drew it as a sad, ramshackle affair, allegedly drunk dry by visiting US servicemen on R & R. Although the pub was fictional, such was its fame that a series of real country establishments have exploited the name and image. For 40 years, this larrikin imagery was sustained in *The Australasian Post*, supplemented by other authentically Australian illustrations and cartoons contributed by Vane Lindesay (b. 1920).[67]

Turning to drama, the irresponsible larrikin appeared in Ray Lawler's 1955 play *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, framed around two working class heroes from Melbourne. The home city of the larrikin also produced in 1958 the first of many satirical creations by actor Barry Humphries: Mrs Edna Everage, a kind of anti-larrikin who nevertheless broke social conventions of moderation while appearing to conform to them, and who was later elevated to damehood. Humphries's later anti-hero Barry (Bazza) McKenzie was a wholly plebeian and loutish larrikin who travelled abroad. He featured in a comic strip and the eponymous film, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972; director, Bruce Beresford). Humphries began the strip for the satirical magazine *Private Eye* while he was living in London in 1963. Drawn by Nicholas Garland (b. 1935), Bazza personified the heavy-drinking, foul-mouthed young Australian (and New Zealand) males who took advantage of the advent of the jet plane to travel the world

Fig. 1.5 Barry (Bazza) McKenzie, the post-war drunken Aussie larrikin abroad, 1997, drawn by Nicholas Garland for Lindsay Foyle. Reproduced from the original with kind permission of the artist.

more safely than their forebears had done in wartime (see Fig. 1.5). While the money lasted, they colonised locations such as London's Earl's Court, reverting the larrikin to type as a drunken danger to society and reinforcing the British stereotype of the uncouth colonial, even if clad in suit and tie.

Although he succeeded as much in the USA finally as in Australia, actor Paul Hogan (b. 1939) also exploited the masculine larrikin image. He appeared first on Australian television dressed as a no-nonsense garbage collector, subsequently polishing his trademark laconic style of speaking and improving his character's fictional background until by 1975 he was portraying a shrewd but typical Australian everyman. This image was further refined by adding bravado and croc-handling skills to star in his highly successful film-series entitled *Crocodile Dundee* (1986–2001). Such international fame and stardom tended to undercut any subsequent comedy career based on the persona of an ordinary Aussie bloke. Nevertheless, Hogan's series of TV advertisements, made for the Australian Tourist Board during the 1980s, did much to promote the country, especially in the USA; and they confirmed the lovable larrikin image as an authentic representation of Australia, even as the nation was celebrating its coming of age in 1988, 200 years after the arrival of European settlers.[68]

Post-war development brought Australia ethnic diversity and a culture that celebrates good food, wine and coffee, as well as an active voice for women. Despite its limitations as a reflection of this new contemporary

nation, the larrikin image is still potent, particularly in rural and disadvantaged Australia. When many larrikin icons vanished during the 1970s—Bluey and Curley retired in 1975; Syd Nicholls died in 1977 and with him, Fatty Finn; Stan Cross in 1977—others appeared to replace them. These included a New Zealander called Fred Dagg. Comedian John Clarke (1948–2017, born in New Zealand, died in Australia) originally created Fred as a rural working man, but the same persona succeeded in various guises and on both sides of the Tasman Sea. In Australia, he appeared as a pseudo-expert on *The Science Show* on ABC TV, as well as in his own satirical TV segments as a real-estate agent, for example. In his farmer's costume of sloppy hat, waterproof gumboots, black singlet (vest) and not even the hint of a shirt (frilly or otherwise), Fred's laconic delivery recreated the larrikin for 1980s Australasia.[69] His (and John Clarke's) style of deadpan irony is examined in Chap. 2 by Nicholas Holm. While his vocabulary was adjusted for each new comic role, Clarke's diction invariably captured the hypocritical spin of contemporary professional discourse, speaking to the times in satiric parody.

In 1976, a larrikin image very similar to that of Fred Dagg had appeared in Australia, drawn by New Zealand cartoonist Murray Ball (b. 1939). Ball's cartoon series "Footrot Flats" (a reference to the eponymous sheep disease), featured two main characters: Wallace (Wal) Cadwallader Footrot and his (personified) Dog. Both were independent-minded rebels against authority, good-humoured in adversity and down-to-earth. Although most Australian readers failed to realise it, so similar are the character-types and themes in the two countries, the series was set in New Zealand.[70] Such close resemblances and preoccupations underlie the deadly rivalry in sport between New Zealand and Australia, as well as their bantering relationship and the usefulness of the term, Australasian.

The Larrikin and Australian Politics

Applied to Australian politicians, the image of the larrikin is ambivalent, both celebratory and ridiculing, as is exemplified in cartoons of a highly popular leader like Robert J. (Bob) Hawke, prime minister from 1983 to 1991. Given his background in the trade union movement, Hawke automatically carried an air of rebellion into authority. Although he had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, he made a point of using broad Australian and drinking heavily: in his memoirs he ascribed much of his popularity to the well-known fact that he had won a college beer-drinking

challenge.[71] His nickname was “The Silver Bodgie”, because silver hair did nothing to reduce his virile assertiveness.[72] Hawke looked after his mates, exercising his influence for them (as a larrikin should), but he also displayed concern for ordinary people, declaring for example that all Australian workers should be given the day off to celebrate when Australia won the 1983 America’s Cup sailing challenge.

Hawke’s image as a hard-drinking man of the people is captured in Fig. 1.6, drawn by Dean Alston. Here, larrikin image slides into larrikin reality as the besuited PM convincingly matches the nation’s cricketers, famous for their toping matches, asking “Howzat?”, the cricketer’s appeal to the umpire as judge. The cartoonist’s satirical perspective is indicated however by the caption, “Fig Jam”, Internet slang for the self-regarding expression, “F***k I’m Good, Just Ask Me”. Cartoonist Alston has precisely captured the fatal flaw to which larrikinism is prone:

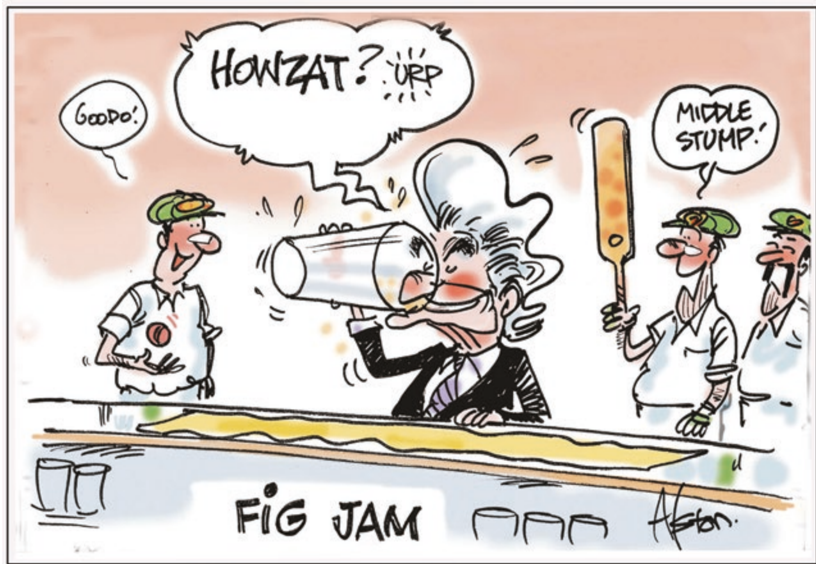

Fig. 1.6 “Fig Jam, or Howzat?”, drawn by Dean Alston. Originally published in *The West Australian*, 10 January 2014. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

over-estimating one's own importance. As with many another successful leader, it was Hawke's sense of self-importance that rendered him fatally reluctant to hand over to his eventual successor Paul Keating.

Serving as Hawke's federal treasurer in 1983 and then prime minister from 1991 to 1996, Keating outdid his populist predecessor not only in colourful and sarcastic vocabulary but also in aggressively effective satirical abuse in Parliament. Leaving school at age 14, he had made his way through the school of hard knocks and, like Hawke, consciously adopted the larrikin mode as a politician. Unlike Hawke's ocker tastes, however, Keating was attracted to high art: he appreciated Gustav Mahler's music and accumulated a collection of antique French clocks. As a true larrikin should, in other matters he delighted in radical rule-flouting and took pleasure in the subsequent political shock.[73] His boasting was more overt than that of Hawke, as when he publicly prided himself on having been "the world's best treasurer". This laid him open to satirical attacks like that in Fig. 1.7, drawn by

Fig. 1.7 "The Radical" [Paul Keating]. Ink and watercolour on paper drawn by John Spooner, 2002. Originally published in *The Age*, 4 May 2002. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist and the collections of The Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria (original donated by John Spooner, 2010, through the Australian Federal Government's Cultural Gifts Program).

John Spooner (b. 1946).[74] The image exploits the essential ambivalence of claiming to be a larrikin while becoming an art connoisseur, and of claiming (like Hawke) to be a man of the people but boasting immoderately. Both Hawke and Keating remain popular as former politicians, perhaps because of their successful political personae; but also for the effective economic reforms over which they both presided. Keating in particular continues in 2016 to enunciate a far-sighted view of Australia's needs which is well received in public. His popularity was crowned in 2005—well after he left office—by the box-office success of an eponymous and satirical musical, *Keating! The Musical We Had To Have* (music, lyrics and book by Casey Bennetto 2005, 2006), which ran for several seasons.

Subsequent Australian prime ministers rather lost the larrikin touch: perhaps it is no longer useful as an Australian self-image. John Winston Howard (prime minister, 1996–2007) celebrated the fact that his father ran a petrol station and that he himself gained his law qualifications the hard way. He certainly was genuine about his love of cricket, but his personal tastes leaned more towards the suburban genteelness mocked by Dame Edna than to the hard-drinking larrikin world of Hawke. As with his predecessors, belief in his own importance contributed to an electoral defeat in 2007 that included the loss of his own seat—a feat no-one had achieved since Stanley Melbourne Bruce was prime minister in 1929.[75]

The millennial Sydney Olympic Games brought a welcome popular revival of the larrikin, courtesy of a gifted comic duo who lovingly satirised the nation's devotion to sport. Roy Slaven (John Patrick Doyle, b. 1953) and H.G. Nelson (Greig Pickhaver, b. 1948) began their larrikin act in 1986 on ABC radio (the youth station, Triple J) with a jokey sports programme called "This Sporting Life". They transferred to TV to provide serious but amusing commentary for football grand finals and other matches. Their daily semi-official accompaniment to the 2000 Olympics was called "The Dream with Roy and HG", featuring their own take on the events of the day and the accompanying hoop-la. Cleverly blending deep knowledge of sports minutiae with irreverent send-ups of absurdities and people taking themselves too seriously, the duo became an international phenomenon that marked the turn of the century. In retrospect, it may have provided

a curtain-raiser for later disclosures of corruption in world sports. Subsequently, these comedian-larrikins moved on, leaving Australasian political satire to other artists discussed elsewhere in this book whose satire is less clearly larrikin.

The Australian self-image that applied for most of last century seems now to be passing. This is a shame. Australians simultaneously loved the larrikin and were embarrassed by it, but now the cringe is proving stronger than the affection. Debate continues about how the new multicultural Australia might conceptualise itself and what represent the true identity and values of a nation that now eyes uneasily both its former colonial masters and its good US friends, as well as China, its new investment partner. Perhaps the larrikin is ageing, losing his hair and his digestion along with his bravado. Occasionally, he is revivified, for example in the personae of several Ginger Meggses in Fig. 1.8, drawn by cartoonist Glen LeLievre (b. 1963). But the mood is too serious, the questions of identity too vexed, the political chicanery too extreme for much laughter. Each figure in LeLievre's time-lapse strip of male figures angrily claims authenticity, but the cartoon is a satire on conformity and ageing and on the difficulties of employment; it is no longer a loving celebration of mischievous rebellion. The series is rightly titled "YesMan".

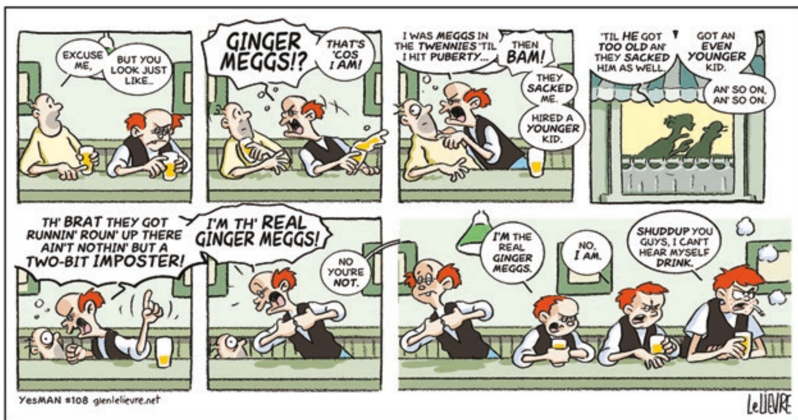

Fig. 1.8 "YesMan" cartoon No. 108, drawn by Glen LeLievre. Originally published in *The Sun-Herald*, Sydney, March 2012. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

Minor Australian political figures still lay claim to a degree of irrepressibility, but they play on the sidelines, not in the main game.[76] Football crowds still chant "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi" and display the Australian flag—some perhaps even the Aboriginal flag. But these are waved less flippantly than before and decorate stylish exercise gear rather than roguish underpants, bikinis and beer coasters, as in years gone by. The nation seems happy to order French fries in a USA-branded fast food restaurant or sushi in a Japanese one, and to watch TV advertisements for Japanese cars manufactured in New Zealand that make use of Australian lingo to induce their cousins to part with their Aussie money; but it is no longer sure how to imagine itself. Bugger: no more larrikin leaders, politics is going to the dogs. And populism is either a spent force or is sleeping on the sidelines till it awakens in a more dangerous guise.

Notes

1. See Chap. 2 by Mark Rolfe.
2. Jessica Milner Davis, "'Aussie' Humour and Laughter: Joking as an Acculturating Ritual", 2009, p. 39.
3. Peter Ryan, "Taking the Mickey", 2000.
4. The term "wog", offensive in origin, remains so in contemporary British culture. In Australia, however, it has long been incorporated into the comic clash of migrant and Anglo-Australian cultures. This first happened in the popular 1957 book, *They're a Weird Mob* (authored by "Nino Culotta"). In the 1980s, the wog theme was appropriated by more authentic Australian migrant voices—young comedians Nick Giannopoulos, Simon Palomares and Maria Portesi—for their comedy, *Wogs Out of Work* (*WOOW*). WOOW made its debut at the 1987 Melbourne Comedy Festival and was followed by *Wog-A-Rama* (1995) and other shows, including the highly successful 2000 film, *The Wog Boy* (director, Aleksi Vellis). See Davis, pp. 42–6.
5. Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 2003, p. 288.
6. Dorothy Jones and Barry Andrews, "Australian Humour", 1988, p. 74.
7. John McCallum, "Cringe and Strut: Comedy and National Identity in Post-war Australia", 1998, pp. 204–5.
8. Phillip Adams and Patrice Newell, eds., *The Penguin Book of More Australian Jokes*, 1996, p. 8. The authors also concluded that the vast majority of so-called Australian jokes are recycled from elsewhere, bearing out the work of Christie Davies and other humour scholars.

9. Christie Davies, *The Mirth of Nations*, 2002, pp. 92–100.
10. A notable exception is Pauline Hanson, a populist politician from conservative Queensland. Her complaint in 1997 against the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) for airing a satirical song about her by a gay political activist, Simon Hunt (aka Pauline Pantsdown), was upheld. Australian politicians readily invoke strict laws on defamation, but cases involving humorous denigration are rare; see Elizabeth Handsley and Gary Davis, "Case Notes. Defamation and Satire: *Hanson v Australian Broadcasting Corporation*", 2001.
11. Conal Condren, Jessica Milner Davis, Robert Phiddian and Sally McCausland, "Defining Parody and Satire: Australian Copyright Law and its New Exception, Part I—Why US Law and Dictionaries Are Unsound Sources", 2008a.
12. Gerald E. [Tony] Fitzgerald, "Telling the Truth, Laughing", 1999, pp. 11, 14. A retired Judge of Appeal, Fitzgerald chaired the Commission of Inquiry into Official Corruption in Queensland, 1987–1989 (The Fitzgerald Inquiry).
13. Swift (1667–1745) applied this term to his own work in a Latin epitaph displayed on his tomb in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. On its origins and connotations, see Robert Phiddian, "The Emotional Contents of Swift's *Saeva Indignatio*", 2016, pp. 54–5.
14. George Orwell's 1949 novel, *1984,* is the classic example of such bleak satire; see Ellen Leyburn, *Satiric Allegory: Mirror of Man*, 1969, pp. 125–34.
15. Conal Condren, Jessica Milner Davis, Sally McCausland and Robert Phiddian, "Defining Parody and Satire: Australian Copyright Law and Its New Exception, Part 2–Advancing Ordinary Definitions", 2008b, p. 413.
16. Alison Dagnes, *A Conservative Walks into a Bar: The Politics of Political Satire*, 2012, argues that satire is necessarily coded liberal and left-leaning. This ignores not only the origins of satire in the Augustan period, but the achievements of conservative writers such as G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and Evelyn Waugh, along with many contemporary satirists in both the USA and the UK.
17. Greek examples are richly illustrated and discussed in Alexandre Mitchell, *Greek Vase Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour*, 2012; Roman ones in John R. Clarke, *Looking at Laughter: Humor, Power, and Transgression in Roman Visual Culture, 100 B.C.—A.D. 250*, 2007.
18. This transformation is discussed in Chap. 7 by Lucien Leon.
19. Jaroslav Hašek, *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War*, translated by Paul Selver as *The Good Soldier Schweik*, 1930.
20. Unpublished MA thesis by Jane Bell 1993.

21. Bridget Griffen-Foley, ed., *A Companion the the Australian Media*, 2014, p. 160. The full title was *The Launceston Examiner and Commercial and Agriculture Advertiser* (now known as *The Examiner*).
22. Marguerite Mahood, *The Loaded Line: Australian Political Caricature 1788–1901*, 1973, p. 27.
23. Bell 1993.
24. William Moore, *The Story of Australian Art*, 1934, p. 162. For some typical cartoons, see the figures in Chap. 2 by Mark Rolfe.
25. Now known as the Australian Cartoonists' Association.
26. Moore 1934, p. 224.
27. Vane Lindesay, *The Inked-in Image*, 1970, p. 1. Significant Australian cartoonists working overseas include: Will Dyson (1880–1938), left Australia in 1909, war artist; David Low (1891–1963), left in 1919, cartooned in England; Pat Oliphant (1935–), left in 1959, US National Treasure; Paul Rigby (1924–2006), left for England in 1969, has cartooned in New York since 1977.
28. *The English Dialect Dictionary*, ed. Joseph Wright, 1898.
29. Melissa Bellanta, *Larrikins: A History*, 2010, p. 8.
30. Australian National Dictionary Centre, *Ozwords* 2016.
31. Bellanta, p. 172.
32. This meaning dates from 1916 and the joint experiences of the Australian Imperial Force and the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the First World War. In both countries, the earlier meaning referred to men working gold and other diggings. In Australia it became the official name for a war veteran after the First World War. See "Australian Words", at: http://andc.anu.edu.au/australian-words/aif-slang/annotated-glossary/d (accessed 9 December 2016).
33. An uncouth, uncultivated, and aggressively boorish Australian male, stereotypically Australian in speech and manner. "Ockerette" and "ockerina", little used feminine forms, date from the 1970s. See "Australian Words", at: http://andc.anu.edu.au/australian-words/meanings-origins/o (accessed 9 December 2016).
34. Historian John Hirst observes that "Australians are a very obedient people. I advise [my visiting overseas students] to keep this secret because Australians imagine themselves to be the opposite of obedient", "The Distinctiveness of Australian Democracy", 2004, n.p.
35. Edgar Waters, "Ballads and Popular Verse", 1972, p. 305.
36. Keith Cameron describes how national identity can become synonymous not just with a language, a political entity or a public figure, but also a fictional image: "From an individual point of view, national identity seems to be a conscious and often an unconscious identification with a symbol, be it language, political system, gastronomic activity, religion etc., which is within that person's perception common to the small or large community to which he or she belongs", *National Identity*, 1999, p. 5.

37. Both images were popularised during the 19th century. John Bull in fact derives from John Arbuthnot's novel, *The History of John Bull* (1712). The image of Uncle Sam was created by James Montgomery Flagg (1877–1960), reflecting a real-life Civil War providore. It was most famously used as a recruiting poster during the First World War. Both images are available at: Library of Congress, *John Bull and Uncle Sam: Four Centuries of British–American Relations.*
38. Gordon was killed and Khartoum lost, despite the belated arrival of British forces. Al-Mahdi also died six months later on 22 June 1885.
39. Laurence (d. 1963) later served as Mayor of Strathfield, Sydney, 1917–1918, see: https://strathfieldheritage.org/local-government/council/mayors-of-strathfield-council/ernest-laurence/ (accessed 13 October 2016).
40. Patricia Rolfe, *The Journalistic Javelin*, 1979, p. 47.
41. Vane Lindesay, *The Inked-in Image: A Survey of Australian Comic Art*, 1970, pp. 8–9; Rolfe 1979, p. 268.
42. Karenlee Thompson, "The Australian Larrikin: C.J. Dennis's [Un]sentimental 'Bloke'", 2007.
43. "Bloke" is an Australian term for man, often paired with "sheila" for woman.
44. C.J. Dennis, "Introduction" (1 September 1916), in *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, 15th ed., 1917, p. iv. Numbers given in the front matter (n.p.) of this edition indicate that over 92,000 copies had been printed.
45. Phillip Butters, "'Compounded of Incompoundables': *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* and *The Moods of Ginger Mick*", 2009, pp. 6–27.
46. After Archibald's departure, the masthead became openly racist: "Australia for the White Man"; see Dorothy Jones, "Setting Limits: Humour and Australian National Identity", 1997, pp. 33–4.
47. A US parallel of the same era, Felix the Cat, was created by Australian film-maker Patrick Peter (Pat) Sullivan (1885–1933), who had grown up reading the pro-federation *Bulletin* in Sydney in the 1890s. While Felix is American in utterance, the humour created by his rebellious mischief is typically larrikin.
48. Vincent tragically committed suicide at Manly.
49. Also appears in Cecil L. Hartt, *Humorosities,* 1985, n.p.
50. Jean McAuslan, "Introduction" in Hartt, n.p.
51. See his posthumously published memoir, *Report on Experience*, 1947, pp. 14–5.
52. McAuslan, n.p.
53. Appearing between 1897 and 2006, "The Katzenjammer Kids" was created by cartoonist Rudolph Dirks (1877–1968) for the Hearst newspapers; see Ron Goulart, ed., *The Encyclopedia of American Comics,* 1990, p. 212.

54. Monty Grover, *Hold Page One: Memoirs of Monty Grover*, 1993, p. 25. Despite the assertion of Grover's editor, Michael Cannon, Bancks remained freelance, never actually joining the staff of the *Sun News*.
55. The name is a reference to the Sentimental Bloke's Best Man, Ginger Mick. Despite the change in focus, the name of the strip only became "Ginger Meggs" 18 years later.
56. For this Australian characteristic, see Dorothy Jones, pp. 40–2.
57. Other Meggs imitations of the period included George Aria's "Aria Kids" and "The Daggs" (later known as Daggsy), drawn by Alex Gurney (see Fig. 1.5 for another Gurney cartoon). A female version, "Fashion-Plate Fanny", was drawn by Will Donald. Most faded away as the newspapers that carried them went out of business in the 1930s.
58. *Simpsons Illustrated*, 1992, n.p.
59. Chatfield, quoted by Cathy Pryor, "Ginger Meggs steps into the Digital Future", 24 July 2015.
60. John McLaren, "'This is Serious': From the Backblocks to the City", 2009, p. 48.
61. On its original success, see George Blaikie, *Remember* Smith's Weekly*? A Biography of an Uninhibited Australian Newspaper*, 1965, pp. 64–66. For an account of the cartoon and its creator, see Vane Lindesay, *Stop Laughing: The Life and Work of Stan Cross 1888–1977*, 2001. For the cartoon, see Trove collections of the National Library of Australia, at: http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-133868430/view (accessed 31 October 2016).
62. For the factors contributing to this stereotype, see Christie Davies, *Ethnic Humour Around the World*, 1990, pp. 189–201. The cartoon also appears in John Gurney, *Gurney & Bluey & Curley: Alex Gurney and his Greatest Cartoons*, 1986.
63. The Australian Government provides an official website-guide to Aussie slang to assist migrants and others at: http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-humour. Commercial tourism websites are more permissive in their collections, e.g.: http://www.australian-information-stories.com/australian-humour.html (both accessed 21 September 2016).
64. Gurney, p. 5.
65. See Note 33 above.
66. See: http://www.thepubwithnobeer.com.au/the-lyrics.html (accessed 21 October 2016).
67. A Melbourne artist and writer, Lindesay has written on the history of Australian cartooning.
68. E.g. Hogan narrates the first video in the Australian Tourist Board's "Come and say g'day" series, popularly known as "Another Shrimp on the Barbie", 1984. Developed by the Australian agency MOJO with American agency N.W. Ayer, this ad ran from 1984 to 1990. Its catch-line has entered the Australian language, despite the fact that shrimp is the US term for Australian prawn.

69. Until his death in 2017, Clarke appeared regularly on Australian TV in political satire sketches with actor Bryan Dawe (b. 1930). For Dagg's gumboots (English "wellingtons"), see Gumboots, Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, NZ, 2016.
70. Ryan 1979, p. 135.
71. Bob Hawke, *The Hawke Memoirs*, 1994, p. 28.
72. Bodgies were 1960s teenage rebels (female equivalent, widgies); see Clem Gorman, "The Bodgies—Acne with Padded Shoulders", 1990, pp. 52–6.
73. For example, the uproar caused by his breaking Royal protocol when Queen Elizabeth II toured Australia in 1992: he placed a guiding hand on her back. For Keating's delight in the ensuing shock-wave, particularly in the British press, see Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia*, 2009, pp. 66–7.
74. The image is also published in *In our Face! Cartoons about Politics and Society, 1760–2010*, 2010, p. 131.
75. For an account of the role of satirists in this phase of Howard's political career, see Chap. 9 by Robert Phiddian.
76. Populist figures such as independent Robert Karl (Bob) Katter (b. 1945, popularly known as "the Kat in the Hat", after the famous Dr Seuss children's books and his trademark Texan hat), and Barnaby T.G. Joyce (b. 1967), colourful leader of the National Party of Australia at time of writing, both of whom have represented country electorates in Federal Parliament.

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Lindsay Foyle began work as a copy boy in the art department of Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. Returning from England in 1967, he became Art Director (later Deputy Editor) of *The Bulletin*, moving in 1992 to *Australian Business Monthly* (ABM) as Deputy Editor. From 1995, he cartooned and worked for *The Australian* newspaper. Freelancing now allows time to pursue the history of Australian cartooning and to exhibit paintings and cartoons—he was a finalist in the 2008 John Glover Prize. Foyle helped establish the Stanley Awards for Australian cartooning and was President of the Black and White Artists Club/Australian Cartoonists' Association, 1994–1997 and 2000. In 1992, he received a Silver Stanley for contribution to black and white art. He is a member of the Australian Journalists Association (now Media and Entertainment Arts Alliance) Federal Council and the Australian Humour Studies Network Review Panel.

CHAPTER 2

The Populist Elements of Australian Political Satire and the Debt to the Americans and the Augustans

Mark Rolfe

In a tribute to the popular American TV show *The Colbert Report*, Australian comedian Charlie Pickering wrote, "All modern satirists … are creative descendants of Mark Twain. He spoke truth to power without fear or favour".[1] This notion of "speaking truth to power" is common to many scholarly analyses of the work of Stephen Colbert and of his counterpart Jon Stewart, often accompanied by a Foucauldian appropriation of the rhetorical term *parrhesia*.[2] For instance, one scholar argues that "Jon Stewart embodies a contemporary form of what Michel Foucault called *parrhesia*, Greek for 'truth-telling'".[3] Another casts Stewart as a risk-taker who tells the truth and takes on the powerful who are "corrupted by untruth", "daring to say what the [mainstream media] would not".[4] Such arguments suggest that this is a radical and new conception of satire.

To the contrary, Stewart and Colbert are in fact part of a line of anti-politics rhetoric that has dominated Anglosphere countries for

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J. Milner Davis (ed.), *Satire and Politics*, Palgrave Studies in Comedy,
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approximately 300 years. Along with many other satirists, cartoonists and comedians, they sit firmly within the mainstream of political life in which a ready-made audience is prepared to believe the worst of politicians and politics. Political satire has in fact been a central not a marginal component of Anglosphere democracies for the last 200 years precisely because it is a highly moralistic discourse that has portrayed a gap between the actualities and the ideals of democracy as a way of criticising politicians. Such attacks have relied on inherent tensions within representative democracy, yet have always implied that such permanent features can be resolved by better occupants of political office.

Such arguments point both to an aggressive form of the incongruity theory of humour in which humourists stake the moral high ground against politicians and also to a romantic strain in representative democracy that is associated with populist anti-politics. In this respect, political satirists, cartoonists and comedians are comrades of those critics in the Fourth Estate who style themselves watchdogs of government and the political classes. Practitioners and critics share a common anti-politics discourse—to such an extent that satire has consistently been mixed with news in democratic countries since the nineteenth century. It is in this tradition of blending that we should place Stewart's *Daily Show*, for example.

This study takes a rhetorical and historical view of political humour that is inspired by three scholarly understandings. The first places political ideas in their historical and linguistic context, and is therefore sensitive to the prevailing shared vocabularies, concepts and assumptions employed to discuss problems and frame legitimate actions or a society's moral identity. In this view, such authors are attempting to enlist a normative language in their cause during conversations with others, and are thus agents participating in politics.[5] Consequently, we should also see the satirists, cartoonists and comedians discussed here as rhetors successfully persuading us about the dismal qualities of politicians. Secondly, these utterances connect to the idea of thematic recurrence,[6] that is, the recurrence of certain rhetorical themes occurs because of representative democracy's characteristic and chronic need to persuade ordinary people, particularly shown in the USA which has the longest history of that form of political society.

Of necessity, this leads to the last theoretical resource. Populism is a dirty word in the everyday and political science lexicons. It is often associated with right-wing xenophobic parties and/or with demagogic

leaders pandering to irrational masses, such as the National Fronts in Britain or France or the Tea Party movement in the USA. Such pejorative views of fallible ordinary folk have been an enduring strain in democratic discourse since the early nineteenth century, when Platonic critiques of Athenian *demokratia* persisted even while representative democracy flourished. They were present in the minds of many political elites in both England and the USA who worried about the participation of the so-called "ignorant masses". Whether reflecting the scepticism of American Founding Father James Madison, who feared the tyranny of the majority, or the more measured views of English philosopher John Stuart Mill, the common answer was the need to provide the right leadership to guide fallible inferiors.

Populism especially acquired its bad reputation when political victors wrote the history of the defeated People's Party that flourished in late nineteenth-century America. It was portrayed as a reactionary movement against modernity that sought refuge in primitive tradition. Historiography was further distorted in the 1950s, says Charles Postel, when Richard Hofstadter and other US writers drew fear-laden connections to this earlier time and filtered their pessimism about irrational masses through both revulsion at McCarthyite paranoia and their memories of fascist totalitarianism.[7] But one need only recall other periods in US history (such as Roosevelt's New Deal, the 1960s or indeed any period at all since the 1830s[8]) or in other countries' experiences (such as Chavez' Venezuela and Morales' Bolivia) to understand that populism has arisen on the left as well as on the right, that it has not always been a force of reaction, and that certain intellectuals of the early to mid-twentieth century held exaggerated fears about ordinary citizens.

In fact, as many scholars have pointed out,[9] populism has no ideological home on a political spectrum that it traverses from the left to the right. It is not some dangerous aberration from democracy but one of its intrinsic elements, using many of the same linguistic features: democracy, justice, the people, the little guy, the ordinary person, the underdog, elites, the powerful and so on. Principally, populism has an anti-establishment position that emanates from a love–hate relationship lying at the very core of representative democracy. On the one hand, the general population is the source of legitimacy, expressed most clearly at elections when one side is sanctified as the winner of the citizenry's ballots. On the other, the general population has no wish to take up the reins of power. There is no widespread desire to revive Athenian direct

democracy with popular participation in executive decision making and legislation, and therefore the citizens need a political class to act on their behalf. Yet always there is a popular antagonism to institutions like parties and to the political class that is willing to take up the reins of power.

Nevertheless, based on this paradox, political aspirants in Anglosphere countries constantly seek at election time to reassure voters that things will be better next time, that this time they will live up to the high ideals held by citizens, and that new people will make all the difference for the public good. Therefore, the focus of such contests is on personalities rather than on those complexities of representative democracy designed to constrain overly ambitious individuals. Despite this, during campaigns, politicians will gleefully traduce each other for letting down the people, hoping to gain some advantage from the widespread disrepute in which their whole kind is held, while at the same time promoting their political idealism to voters.

In other words, as Margaret Canovan notes,[10] there is tension between romantic hopes for a perfect relationship between government and the people, and popular disgust at the often necessary pragmatism of government, with its innate difficulties of power, compromise, institutions and interests. This tension manifests most easily as dismal views of politicians, seeing them as letting down democracy, justice and the people as a whole, and in the process bolstering elites, corruption and the evil manipulations of mass media and language cast as spin. Ironically, the comic commentators under discussion make their names through exactly these despised mass media. Furthermore, rhetoric is the lifeblood of democracy since it is not only a means by which ordinary people participate in discussion but also, in today's representative form of this political society, the means for leaders to gain followers and to get things done. It is also of course a means of the mass media. Moreover, rhetoric is the purveyor of a "political anti-politics" that has been central to Western political culture for more than 300 years.[11]

Explicating this particular discourse is Jon Stewart, who declared on the programme of his Egyptian emulator Bassem Youssef (b. 1974): "I don't like assholes and so I try to speak out against assholes. And isn't that all government is? We all get together and decide as a majority who the assholes are".[12] Australian cartoonists with similar sentiments are easy to find. Patrick Cook (b. 1949) argued that "authority has to be earned, but power can be stolen",[13] therefore the job of cartoonists was to hamper the arbitrary powers of politicians. This was also the stance taken by

Geoff Pryor (b. 1944), who early in his career formed the view that there was no fairness in politics and that "all power resides in the incumbent government, and if not used ruthlessly to its fullest advantage it is not worth having".[14] He went on to say that since spin and hypocrisy are the staples of any government, it is naturally the job of the fourth estate to attack them for those sins. In 2013 his fellow cartoonist Bill Leake (1956–2017) was heard to put the same sentiment more colourfully during the Sydney launch of *Dirt Files*,[15] a book on politics and cartooning: "Who are we going to shitpot but those in power?"

The beginnings of such anti-politics rhetoric are found in England in the early eighteenth century, a period mythologised by sociologist Jürgen Habermas who set his concept of the "rational public sphere" as the standard for twentieth-century public debate, despite basing it on his assessment of the political debates in the coffee shops and newspapers of London at this earlier time.[16] As well as committing anachronism, Habermas managed completely to ignore the role of satire and to overlook the political engagement of the most famous satirists of the time. Satire is never synonymous with the rational and the respectful. Robert Walpole, for example, is commonly regarded as Britain's first prime minister, certainly its longest-serving one, from 1721 to 1742. He attracted fierce opposition, which came especially from Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay and other Augustan writers who excelled in derision, insults and celebrating the humiliation of his Government. Since they were Tories and he was a Whig, they were bound to ridicule him and he could be and was depicted publically in cartoons like the one in Fig. 2.1 below, entitled "Idol-Worship or The Way to Preferment" (1740). This shows an enormous Walpole bending over with his backside fully exposed for an ambitious young man to kiss, while another man rolls through the enormous arch of his legs a hoop inscribed with the words Wealth, Pride, Vanity, Folly, Luxury, Want, Dependance [sic], Servility, Venality, Corruption and Prostitution. Beyond are arches engraved with names of government locations: Saint J[ames's] P[alace], The Treasury, The Exchequer and The Admiralty.

Contemporary readers of Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and viewers of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) were aware that Tory criticism of Walpole's Whig Government formed part of the background to these works. Such mocking and indirect methods were hardly the stuff of idealised and gentlemanly political debate, since satire is an aggressive discourse aimed at destroying an opponent's credibility

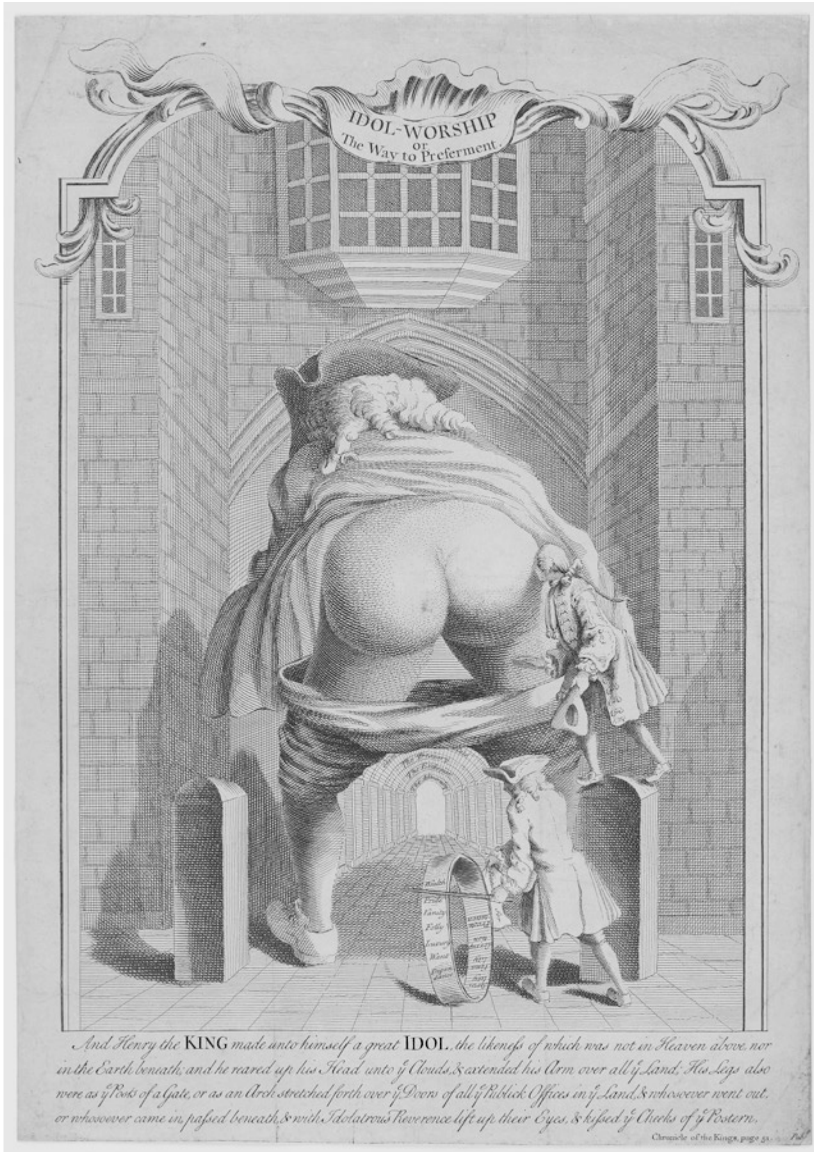

Fig. 2.1 "IDOL-Worship, or, The Way to Preferment", 1740, anonymous etching on paper; © The Trustees of the British Museum, reproduced with kind permission.

through making an audience laugh at the victim's expense. Aristotle had pointed out that laughter was a rhetorical weapon allowing a rhetor to make an audience laugh at, rather than with, another person.[17] The Augustan satirists deemed, as have generations of successors, that there was a moral gap or failing between the declarations and the actions of their targets which justified such ridicule. Ad hominem attacks were combined with claims to the satirists' own moral high ground, portraying themselves as concerned truth-tellers and moralists pointing out the need for reform in a society being brought to its knees by political sinners. When reading these satirists today, we should not accept such claims to virtue at face value but see them as blatant attempts to persuade their contemporaries of political points. Moreover, while Tory wits complained bitterly about the prejudice, deceit and irrational debate of their rivals, they were themselves only too eager to rain insults on these Whigs. Clearly, stones in glass houses were being thrown in both directions—typical of the hypocrisies of the time.[18]

Importantly, accusations of corruption, lies and irrationality are not—perhaps cannot be—advanced innocently within a party system of politics. With the growth of the Westminster two-party model, there developed a rhetoric indulged in by major parties that continues to this day. Each party accuses the other of lies, corruptions and conspiracies—basically, because they profit from them.[19] Generally speaking, then as now, since people are prepared to believe the worst of politicians and politics, politicians and their respective cheer-squads eagerly cater to this belief in order to gain partisan advantage and thus anti-politics rhetoric lives on. Barack Obama is a perfect contemporary example of this method. During his bid for the US presidency he identified with voter anger by declaring his political innocence ("I know I haven't spent a lot of time learning the ways of Washington"), before scorning that capital city as "more corrupt and more wasteful than it was before".[20] His campaign book, *Audacity of Hope*, opened with an anecdote of his first run for public office which served to distance him from the game. He wrote that everyone he met countered his earnestness with a negative: "You seem like a nice enough guy. Why do you want to go into something dirty and nasty like politics?"[21] Similarly, for the Augustans, a crafty, scheming or manipulating person might well be compared to a politician, as Henry Fielding did in his 1749 novel *Tom Jones*, writing that "The Squire … was, however, in many Points, a perfect Politician". In 1776, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith referred to "That insidious

and crafty animal, vulgarly called a statesman or politician, whose councils are directed by the momentary fluctuations of affairs".[22]

Such views leapt across the Atlantic to colonial America. The works of Swift, Defoe, Pope, Addison and Bolingbroke were "regularly on the lists and catalogs of American booksellers and libraries"[23] and served as primary texts in almost all American colleges throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Accordingly, they were primers for George Washington and the five presidents who followed him. That is, all were aware of the dichotomy between patriotism and partisanship and aspired to be the kind of patriot king so powerfully outlined by Tory aristocrat Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke (1678–1751). This was a highly partisan construction of an ideal leadership advanced against the Whigs that would supposedly act against the corrupt cabals of parties, thieves and money thought to be plaguing government at the time. In this scheme, the patriot king acted only for the public good, never for political gain, and would thus return the nation to the people from the grip of the Whigs. Naturally, the lord identified the public good in his own Tory fashion.

Bolingbroke's work was almost compulsory reading until the 1830s, so that his idea became a "commonplace in colonial American rhetoric".[24] It served as the basis for the "presidential fiction" of a ruler who is concerned only with the public good of the people and is above selfish parties and factions. It was and is an impossible formula for any leader to satisfy in a representative system built around political parties that serve as vehicles for a presidential candidate who, upon winning office, must then appear to be above party. A structural gap between expectations and reality was thus built into the system and was therefore bound to cultivate moral critiques of, and popular dissatisfaction with, any current Government. Yet the concept of the patriot king who is above party became an essential element in what Jeffrey Smith calls the imaginative construction of US presidents.[25]

A fiction bolstered by satirists thus became an easy way to perceive a gap between the actions and ideals of leadership. It has been an essential feature of the populism that, as Paul Taggart points out,[26] has dominated US politics since the 1830s:

> It is hard to understand politics in the United States without having some sense of populism. It is impossible to understand populism without having a sense of populism in the USA. The construction of the political system,

> as embodied in the constitution and of the very national identity of the USA has been around principles of representative democracy. Populism therefore, as a reaction to representative politics, runs through US politics like a motif.

Therefore, it is not surprising that populist anti-politics formed the basis of Barack Obama's political campaigns from his first run for the Illinois Senate in 1995 to his landmark 2008 presidential campaign. His pitch to voters was to present the untainted virtue of his political inexperience against the endemic iniquities of the political game, whether it was played in the capital of the state or the nation. Similarly, one can see this persuasive combination reinvented for the perspective of comedy films, from the early *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* of 1939 and *The Distinguished Gentleman* (1992) to the more recent *Dave* (1993). This last movie starred Kevin Klein playing two characters who are identical in looks but not in character. One is a completely unethical and dislikable president who suffers a stroke that leaves him in a coma. The other is the innocent Dave who is inveigled by shady presidential staff into standing in for his lookalike. His innocence and good intentions, however, prove to be refreshing and he is an attractive comic character.

Mr Smith Goes to Washington starred Jimmy Stewart playing Thomas Jefferson Smith whose name combined references to a founding father with a nod to the democratic everyman. Director Frank Capra pitted this newly elected innocent against a corrupt political machine run by a man called Taylor, a character based on a real-life equivalent called Thomas Pendergast.[27] The *Distinguished Gentleman* was directed by Jonathan Lynn, one of the writers of the British series *Yes Minister*,[28] who also referenced Thomas Jefferson in naming his central character. But in the movie, this man turns out to be more of a sinner than an innocent, as the movie-trailer makes clear:[29]

Voiceover: Thomas Jefferson Johnson was no ordinary conman … There is only one place for people like him
Johnson: I wanna tell y'all about a town where the streets are paved with gold
Man: You mean Las Vegas?
Johnson: No, not Las Vegas
Woman: He's talkin' about Washington DC
Johnson: I am running for Congress!

Voiceover: Thomas Johnson conman is Thomas Johnson Congressman … He's going to do to Congress what Congress has been doing to you

According to the movie, this character's transition from crime to Congress was a seamless process.

Overall, these three movies of the twentieth century appeal to the same disdain for politics as did two US humorists and journalists who made their names in the nineteenth century: Kin Hubbard (1868–1930) and Mark Twain (1835–1910). The first wrote, "We'd all like to vote for the best man, but he's never a candidate".[30] Mark Twain's extensive collection of ironical remarks on politics includes such gems as, "Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress; but I repeat myself"; and "There is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress".[31] Laughing at politicians is a game that almost everyone in America has played since the early days of the republic.

Following on from England and America, anti-politics rhetoric settled easily in Australia in the nineteenth century. Historian John Hirst has testified that "the view that parliamentarians are the lowest form of life dates from the early years of democracy",[32] a time when the country was still a colonial offshoot. As proof, he instances an 1866 cartoon in the *Sydney Punch* magazine, appearing several years after responsible Westminster government with adult white male suffrage had been established in the colonies, and when new buildings to accommodate parliaments were being planned. The cartoon (shown in Fig. 2.2) depicted architectural "Designs for New Houses of Parliament" as a range of plans, for a doghouse, a gaol and a pig-trough. Its images of disdain are compelling, even today.

Such disdain attached even to Australia's first (limited) representative legislature. In 1843, some decades earlier, the first Australian libel case was brought by a politician against the editor of *The Satirist & Sporting Chronicle* who had associated the politician's pockmarked face with "the commission of sin in early life and the effects of mercury",[33] a reference to venereal disease and its treatment. Taking his cue from his paper's motto, a snippet of a Byron poem ("Fools are my theme, let satire be my song"), the editor was using such ad hominem attacks as a means to pursue what his journal regarded as political "humbug" (meaning deception, fraud or sham).[34]

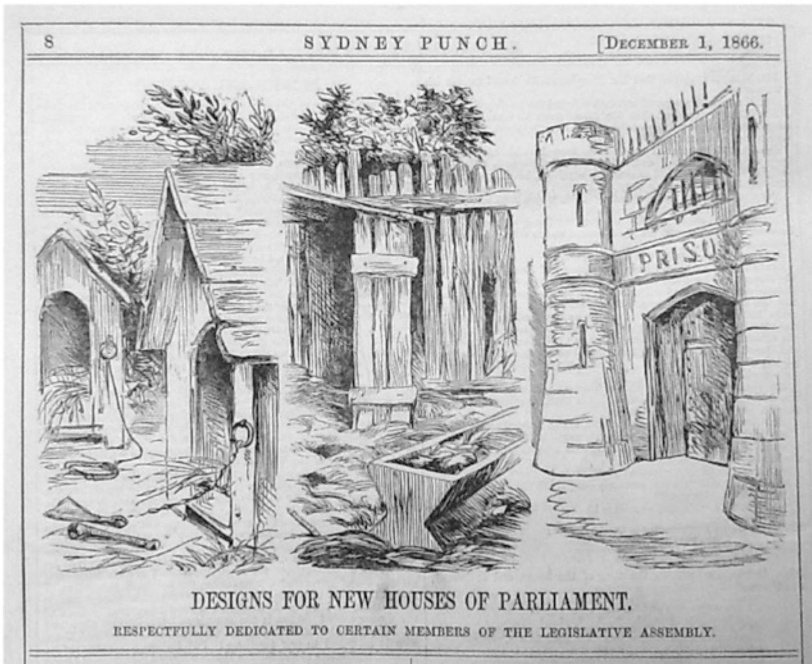

Fig. 2.2 “Designs for New Houses of Parliament”, anonymous drawing, *Sydney Punch*, Vol. 2 (28), 1 December 1866, p. 8. P-D Art from the collections of the State Library of NSW.

Anti-politics attitudes were inherited, it seems, as a component part of the intellectual baggage that arrived in Australia in 1788 with the British themselves; but they subsequently flowered after nurturing with crucial inputs from America. In the 1830s, the populist fulminations of US President Andrew Jackson against elites and banks who worked purely for their own interests found many admirers in Australia and particularly in Australian newspapers of a radical bent.[35] Such people looked to the USA as an exemplar of the representative institutions they sought for their society, especially in regard to what was called “the land question” that dominated politics for most of that century. As in the USA, Australian democrats were contesting elite control of land after it had been taken from dispossessed indigenes. Liberal writers such as Daniel

Deniehy (1828–1865) and Henry Kendall (1839–1882) produced satires in 1864 on behalf of The Poor Man, “a rhetorical figure for the unemployed and propertiless, [who] was denied access to the land”.[36] Siding with the political underdogs, they attacked those deemed powerful and immoral. Deniehy was a politician who, in the parliamentary debate of 1854, effectively ridiculed into stillbirth a proposal by landed elites to create a local hereditary aristocracy.[37]

Despite the work of such tribunes of the people, however, a seemingly widespread populist sentiment might still arise. The editor of one conservative newspaper complained in 1872 that:[38]

> There is a general impression among a section of the working classes that the present state of society is corrupt, and that the whole fabric must be overthrown if justice is to be secured to all. The cry is taken up by a portion of the Press, and we are assured that there must sooner or later be a revolution.

Neither the workers referred to nor the population in general conceived this turmoil in any Antipodean isolation. From early days, the Australian presses were able to keep abreast of international events since newspapers included excerpts from British and US publications. Thus, in the 1870s, Australians were well acquainted with the infamous Tammany Hall of New York and an article from the *Brisbane Courier* of 1888 shows that it was understood as the archetype of the corrupt political machine and “political debauchery”.[39] They also became acquainted with William Tweed (“Boss Tweed”), who was not only the head of this effective but despised patronage system but also the frequent butt of devastating cartoons by Thomas Nast (1840–1902), who dominated cartooning as well as politics in the USA during the nineteenth century. Nast invented the potent image of the “Fat Man”, evident in his depictions of Tweed such as that in Fig. 2.3. Numerous Australian newspapers reproduced his cartoons and gleefully reported Tweed’s hurt observation, “I don’t care a straw for your newspaper articles, my constituents don’t know how to read, but they can’t help seeing them damned pictures”.[40]

The local impact of this image and its US populist influence can readily be seen in cartoons such as Fig. 2.4, featuring the archetypical Australian capitalist, whose political tentacles supposedly controlled right-wing politicians at the time (in the view of the left). Drawn by Cecil L. Hartt (1884–1930) in 1914 for *The Australian Worker*,[41] this image shows a greedy capitalist strutting beneath the flag of patriotism that covers his profit-making while

Fig. 2.3 "The Brains", drawn by Thomas Nast, *Harper's Weekly,* 21 October 1871, p. 992. P-D Art from the collections of the Library of Congress, at: http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a00744/ (accessed 21 October 2016).

Fig. 2.4 "This sort of 'Patriotism' does not appeal to us", drawn by Cecil Lawrence Hartt, *The Australian Worker*, 24 September 1914, p. 3. P-D Art from the Trove collection of the National Library of Australia, at: http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/145944483 (accessed 21 October 2016).

unemployed workers starve in the background. The artist's opinion is made plain by the inclusion of a pseudo-news quotation beneath the image, "Many employers are contributing to the Patriotic Funds and at the same time discharging employees. —Daily fact" and is generalised to the reader by the main caption, "This Sort of 'patriotism' Does Not Appeal to Us".

Figures 2.5 and 2.6, from 1901 and 1910 respectively, convey the familiar popular complaints of politicians being liars, that both sides of politics are as bad as each other and that the level of political discourse is one merely concerned with mud slinging, abuse and misrepresentation. Both cartoons reflect election campaigns in New South Wales. The first cartoon, drawn by Fred Brown (active *c.*1890–1930) for the influential *Bulletin* magazine and entitled "The N. S. W. General Elections—What It Amounts To", portrays the arch-politician as a modish and plausible young Satan who is disillusioning two would-be saintly reformers; while the second, drawn by Hugh MacLean (1875–1951) for a country journal, shows an older politician wilting in the heat as he canvasses for votes and the muck around him begins to stink. Satan's advice aptly sums up the situation: "Now you two, keep your eye on the vote, and don't forget that the biggest liar gets it".

Fig. 2.5 "The NSW General Elections—What It Amounts To", drawn by Frederick A. Brown, *The Bulletin* (Sydney), 29 June 1901, p. 20. P-D Art from the library collection of the University of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 2.6 "Phew! This Heat Brings the Mud Out", drawn by Hugh Maclean, *The Worker* (Wagga Wagga, NSW), 15 September 1910, p. 11. P-D Art from the the Trove collection of the National Library of Australia, at: http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/145735084 (accessed October 21, 2016).

When these cartoons were published, the term "typical politician", with its pejorative associations of self-interest and shiftiness, had been settled in political discourse since at least the 1870s, sometimes used in conjunction with Australian discussions of Tammany Hall.[42] Marcus Clarke (1846–1881), a minor literary figure as well as journalist, used the term in a satire portraying a fictitious minister in the state of Victoria as a dull "beast of burden". In an article written for the *Australasian* in May 1868, Clarke adopted the persona of a waiter whose experiences serving in the minister's house purportedly furnish answers to those "closet naturalists" who want to introduce this species of beast into the Australian continent. Although "cleanly in his habits" and "domesticated", the minister/beast might only "be made a useful animal" that is "in any way politically serviceable" with "great patience and a continued course of instruction". The animal is "not quick to receive instruction" and "any attempt to coerce him into concerted action with others of his species is followed by instant outbreaks of his savage nature". The advice concludes that it would take vast resources to handle the import of "a cageful of these interesting and peculiar creatures" from Europe—or indeed America, where "they swarm".[43]

Clarke can be seen as a precursor to the many political commentators and journalists around the world who now weave satire into their critiques of politics. He was not, however, the first such, as the practice was already firmly established in Australia as well as in the USA and Britain. In a Victorian newspaper of 1855 that had employed satire to ridicule "the absurdity of the latest undertaking of our local municipality" (the town of Geelong), one can find approving editorial comment justifying such a practice[44]:

> [S]atire is a weapon which may be used indiscriminately, and often with equal effect against the silly or the wise. One of the wisest and wittiest of England's writers, the immortal Sidney Smith, has however asserted with equal truth, that there are men against whom no other mode of attack is so efficacious, and as the attainment of a public good must be the sole object of an honest journalist, he must at times accomplish results by means which he would not avail of, were his choice unfettered. When public bodies are impervious to reason, there is no course left but to ridicule their follies.

Australians had enjoyed more than 40 years of parliamentary democracy by 1901, when amalgamation of their separate six colonies into a federation took place, giving grounds for optimism about the new century. But before the year was out, one prominent journalist was mourning a lost and better time of politics. This was David Maling (1854–1931), who regularly injected satire into his columns for the Melbourne *Argus*, written under the pseudonym of Ithuriel—an angel in Milton's *Paradise Lost* who with a touch of his spear exposed Satan's real appearance to Eve. Like many journalists of his time and later, Maling evidently believed he was exposing the real nature of politics. He damned Australia's second prime minister with faint praise as a "master of euphemism".[45] The criticism applies to many a politician, since euphemism is a common means of persuasion, although often dismissed these days as spin. Even before the first federal parliament had reached the end of its term, Maling wrote to its politicians[46]:

> Experience has proved that you are what an auctioneer would describe as a "mixed lot". You comprise some of the strongest, subtlest men in Australia, and others of whom the irreverent Byron would say:
>
> Like the fly in amber, we but stare
> And wonder how the Devil you got there.

There is a direct line of descent from such views and practices in nineteenth-century Australia to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programme *That Was the Week That Was*, popular in both Britain and America in the early 1960s, which mixed news with humour. The lineage belies the alleged novelty of the practice implicit in the label "Satire Boom" affixed by some writers to this decade.[47] Australia had its own examples such as *This Day Tonight* on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the Antipodean equivalent of the BBC. Although primarily focused on current affairs rather than humour, the show blended various types of satire (including animation by cartoonists) to make its point. Equally notorious for its satirical daring was a more humour-focused commercial programme called *The Mavis Bramston Show*.[48] With hindsight, all these examples represent new ways of exploring old issues—further evidence for the argument of thematic recurrence.

Across the Anglosphere, journalists today commonly weave satire into their reporting. Recent Australian predecessors include journalists Matt Price (1961–2007) and Paul Lyneham (1945–2000). The latter especially was known as an even-handed excoriator of politicians on both sides of the political divide, publishing a popular book *Political Speak: The Bemused Voters' Guide to Insults, Promises, Leadership Coups, Media Grabs, Pork-Barrelling and Old Fashioned Double-Speak*. A satirical parody of a manual, it instructed political aspirants that, having chosen their party, "it's time to practise saying one thing while you mean another"; that they should "Tell … the Mugs What They Want to Hear" and "be all things to all voters".[49] Lyneham hoists politicians on their own petards by quoting back what they actually said, illustrating the premise that fiction is not as funny nor as ludicrous as what politicians actually say.

In 1990, the BBC and Harry Thompson (1960–2005), a comedy writer and producer, launched *Have I Got News For You (HIGNFY)*, a television quiz that mixed satire and news. It was an immediate hit and continues to screen today. Thompson's impressive résumé included a biography of Peter Cook (1937–1995), one of the stars of the 1960s purported Satire Boom and a founder of the British satirical magazine *Private Eye*, one of the legacies of that era. Cook's chosen successor as editor of the *Eye* was Ian Hislop, and this job put Hislop on the path to a permanent place on *HIGNFY*. While the line of satirical descent is clear, the original hard-hitting approach was not always sustained. By 2007,

Will Self, an ex-panellist of the show, wrote to mourn the flabby fall of this show from its heyday when it was:

> [I]n the very cockpit of British satire: a prototype kind of reality TV in which unwitting politicians were parachuted into a jungle full of backbiting repartee. The combination of a witty dissection of the week's current events and an opportunity for viewers to see their rulers – or wannabe rulers – excoriated in front of a live studio audience was a must-see.[50]

That time had passed for Self, who saw the team leaders as middle-aged and comfortable rather than as angry young men, making it "hard to credit them as effectively wielding what is traditionally the weapon of the powerless against the powerful, when they're so clearly part of an elite".[51] Self's views reinforce the notion of the persistence of populist expectations about satire. And in terms of format, the formula of satire mixed with news continues to dominate in panel shows led by comedians such as *Good News Week* on Australian TV (1996–2000, 2008–2012), *The News Quiz* and *The Now Show* on BBC Radio 4. In 2014, Al Jazeera US hired Australian comedian Dan Ilic—fresh from his success with comedic injections into the *Guardian* newspaper of a video show called *A Rational Fear*—to attract a younger audience with his popular formula.[52]

With the historical provenance established for this intimate nexus between politics and satire, some topics of satiric thematic recurrence that contribute to anti-politics rhetoric may now be fleshed out, beginning with lying politicians. Conservative US journalist/satirist P.J. O'Rourke started his career with *National Lampoon*, when the renowned humour magazine began in the 1970s and before it grew into the comedic institution depicted in Hollywood films. O'Rourke wrote a parody of a citizen's manual, *Parliament of Whores* (1991), that reached number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In it, he baldly declared, "Of course politicians don't tell the truth … But neither do politicians tell huge entertaining whoppers", and later, "When you looked at the Republicans, you saw the scum off the top of business. When you looked at the Democrats, you saw the scum off the top of politics. Personally, I prefer business."[53] Twenty years later, this comfortable line of critique led to another bestseller by O'Rourke, entitled *Don't Vote! It Just Encourages the Bastards.*

The accusation of lying is closely related to the damning of political rhetoric as spin. This theme features heavily in recent comedic representations of politics in TV series such as Britain's celebrated *Yes Minister* and Australia's *The Hollowmen* and *Utopia*, where politicians and their aides continually substitute words for action. Sharing a title with T.S. Eliot's evocative poem of 1925, *The Hollowmen* aired on the ABC in July 2008 and its first episode set the tone for the series.[54] It portrayed prime ministerial staffers addressing the complaint that their boss is all talk and no action. In response, they create a plan to deal with the social problem of obesity. Most of them are initially excited by a series of slogans that in fact signify nothing and, after a series of political obstacles, they adopt a bunch of meaningless words as their solution. Pursuing a similar theme of political vacuity, the editors of the *Yes Minister* "diaries" (the TV scripts presented in all their glory as putative historical artefacts) take a dig at the tendency of politicians to avoid responsibility through language:[55]

> Years of political training and experience had taught Hacker to use 20 words where one would do, to dictate millions of words where mere thousands would suffice, and to use language to blur and fudge issues and events so that they became incomprehensible to others. Incomprehensibility can be a haven for some politicians, for therein lies temporary safety.

Another theme of anti-politics rhetoric and satire is to exploit antithetical ideas of ideal leadership in a representative democracy: the strong leader or Great Man thesis versus the weathervane thesis. By switching between these two arguments, it is possible to catch out politicians who are unable to adapt to circumstances skilfully enough without being denounced as shape-shifters. In the first conception, the leader is seen as ahead of the people, showing the way forward and sticking to principles. Frequently, caricatures of the careers of great men such as Lincoln, Churchill or F.D. Roosevelt are brought into play. By contrast, the weathervane leader hangs back with the pack of the people, promising to do what they want and reflect their interests and values. In fact, there can be no single formula for leadership success in the huge complexity known as representative democracy. These two conflicting views must be balanced by a leader who changes speed or course while

maintaining credibility amid a variety of different and conflicting political relationships and responding to unforeseen events and urgent demands. Successful examples beyond those named include more recent instances like Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton in the USA, and Bob Hawke and John Howard in Australia.

Despite popular celebration of sticking to principle regardless of consequences, arrogance is a pejorative frequently levelled against prime ministers in Australia. Although a measure of arrogance might be thought necessary for anyone capable of leading a country, the accusation conveys the notion of some sort of distance between the prime minister and the people—a gap that can be leveraged by an opposition leader. But, representative democracy by definition involves separation and distance between the political class and the voters, between the wielders of power and the people who legitimate their rulers. The complexities and difficulties of actually leading public opinion in these circumstances are revealed by the fact that the two judgments (of strength or arrogance) are two sides of the same coin, only separated by the approval or withdrawal of popular favour at any point in time. Popularity is never to be depended on.

Playing upon such widespread conceptions, satirical cartoonists can easily convey arrogance through famous historical analogies of imperial power diverting a leader from concentrating on the national interest. This perspective is powerfully conveyed by the pen of David Low (1891–1953), who ridiculed the tremendous ego of Prime Minister Billy Hughes, popular during the First World War. Hughes is shown literally hogging the limelight in one cartoon (Fig. 2.7a below), and in another (Fig. 2.7b below), measuring up his place in the section of Westminster Abbey reserved for great figures of history. The background for these depictions is behaviour such as Hughes's outrageous treatment of his opponents during the fierce sectarian debates about conscription that divided Australia in 1916 and 1917, and a push by sections of the right-wing press to acclaim him as another Abraham Lincoln saving democracy.[56] Despite Hughes's popularity, this was over-reaching and treated as such by cartoonists and commentators.

More recent uses of the same trope by cartoonists include Patrick Cook (b. 1949) depicting former Australian Labor prime minister Bob Hawke as Little Caesar, and Ward O'Neill (b. 1951), evaluating the

Fig. 2.7 Two plates featuring Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes, drawn by David Low, *The Billy Book: Hughes Abroad/Cartoons by Low* (Sydney: NSW Bookstall Co. Ltd, 1918), pp. 27 and 35. P-D Art from a copy owned by the author.

2003 entry into parliament of Malcolm Turnbull (current prime minister) as yet another Napoleon arriving with a leadership baton in his knapsack.[57] Ron Tandberg (b. 1943) used it to sum up the short tenure of Kevin Rudd (prime minister 2007–2010 and again in 2013 for 11 weeks), whose imperious quality and claimed expertise in all things Chinese is captured in Fig. 2.8 by caricaturing him as an impotent feudal potentate in a litter awaiting ascension to Parliament House (shown in the background). The absence of attendants symbolises desertion by the ordinary people who are of course the means for ascent to power in a democracy. Such links with imperial history offer any country a ready-made way to cut politicians down to size, as do depictions of politics

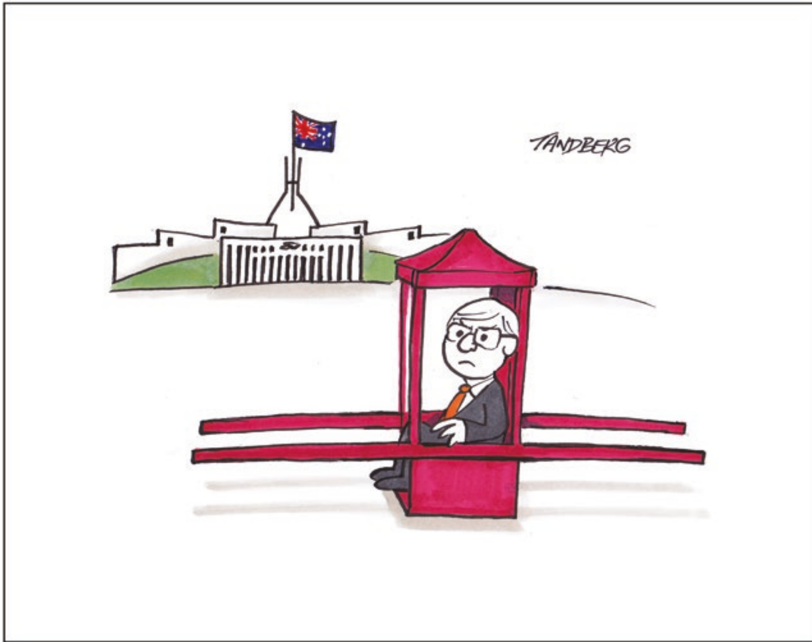

Fig. 2.8 Untitled, drawn by Ron Tandberg, originally published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 2013. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

itself as a Roman arena of cruel and bloody entertainment. The latter is exemplified in Fig. 2.9, a powerful cartoon also by Tandberg, set in Canberra, where Parliament House is commonly described as a three-ring circus in real life. Playing on her declared atheism, it shows Julia Gillard (who in 2010 became as the nation's first woman prime minister by deposing her Labor colleague, Kevin Rudd) being literally thrown to the lions and replaced by Rudd again (seated smugly smiling on the left), with then Opposition leader Tony Abbott on the right watching, with satisfaction. Three months later, Rudd lost the election to Abbott.

Exploiting the two sides of the coin described above, satirists and cartoonists can easily damn politicians as mere weathervanes to public opinion, saying and doing whatever is necessary to be elected rather than being willing to take a brave stand on principle. "The Greasy Pole"

Fig. 2.9 Untitled, drawn by Ron Tandberg, originally published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 2013. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

episode of *Yes Minister* (1981) depicts such versatility—or direction "by the momentary fluctuations of affairs", as Adam Smith put it in his own dismissal of politicians—when the minister, Jim Hacker, rejects approval to build a chemical plant because of community protests. He explains to the furious CEO of the excluded chemical company, "I am their leader, I must follow them". This weak-kneed retort provokes precisely the Platonic contempt for pandering to the masses that was intrinsic to the conservative critique of democracy in the nineteenth century. The statement itself possesses an equally long historical pedigree, the words

having been placed in the mouth of Bonar Law, British Conservative prime minister in 1922,[58] and also attributed to the nineteenth-century French democrat, Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin.[59]

Leaders themselves frequently seek to dismiss any hint of pandering at the expense of principle. Statements about the nature of leadership made by three recent Australian prime ministers all use very similar wording. Each had critical difficulties with public opinion, so perhaps they were making a virtue of necessity by tying their reputations to a common caricature of leadership:

> Leadership is not about being popular. It's about being right and about being strong … it's about doing what you think the nation requires, making profound judgements about profound issues.
>
> Paul Keating (Prime Minister, 1991–1996).[60]

> You can't chase popularity. Chasing popularity is the death of purpose.
>
> Julia Gillard (Prime Minister, 2010–2013).[61]

> Leadership is about making the right decisions for our country's future. It isn't a popularity contest. It's about results; it's about determination …
>
> Tony Abbott (Prime Minister, 2013–2015).[62]

Despite their individual resolve, all three prime ministers suffered political humiliation because they could not sustain enough popularity in the delicate balance of relationships, goals and context that make up that nebulous skill called leadership. Keating experienced a resounding electoral defeat in 1996 because his opponents were able to damn him as arrogant. Gillard and Abbott were both deposed by their own parliamentary parties which desperately sought new leaders to avoid electoral rout.

Regardless of such case histories, the belief generally persists that real leaders do not follow public opinion. Great statesmen such as wartime leader Winston Churchill are resurrected from their graves to haunt current politicians and demean them as less substantial leaders by comparison, ridiculous by reason of their cravenness and self-interest. While this measure of a mythical ideal against a purportedly grubby present is a community resource, it is also the common means by which satirists and humorists persuade us to their views. They construct the incongruities and gulfs between an ideal and a real that serve as the tools of their trade.

The effect is well demonstrated in the first episode of *Yes, Prime Minister*, “The Grand Design” (1986). Although Hacker has only been in office as prime minister for three days, his time is already consumed by a proposal from his scientific adviser to cut spending on nuclear weapons and spend the money on conventional defence while also introducing conscription. By a single measure (it is supposed), he will save money and soak up unemployment. With one hand on his lapel, Hacker addresses the imaginary crowds outside his office window in mock Churchillian style: “I will lead my people from the valley of the shadows into the broad sunlit uplands”. Then he waves—restrainedly but triumphantly—to the imaginary people. Hacker not only lifts phrases from Churchill’s famous 1940 “Battle of Britain” speech, but also assumes the famous stance and gesture: the powerful satirical comparison compels a judgment of Hacker’s ridiculous inadequacy.

As noted above, such comparisons conveniently sidestep complexities in both the careers of the great men being referenced and the mythologies that have grown around their leaderships. For instance, in 1941, Franklin Roosevelt was trying to cope realistically with overcoming an isolationist climate in the USA which was firmly against involvement in another European war. His most intimate political adviser nevertheless remarked critically that “the President would rather follow public opinion than lead it”.[63] Roosevelt’s balancing act ran completely contrary to the beliefs of Keating, Gillard and Abbott: he was in fact constantly using polls to gauge opinion, as any effective leader must do in order to lead while not straying too far from those led.

It seems that two centuries of democratic thought have afforded satirists and comedians a pretty easy time flaying the politicians of Australia, England and the USA. Nor has it required much daring or risk to encourage people to laugh at their leaders. This contradicts the laudations traditionally showered on comedians who are seen as fearless risk-takers confronting the powerful. This view of the role of satirists, as noted at the outset of this study, is also one elaborated recently by scholars using Foucault’s definition of *parrhesia* whereby the rebel speaks uncomfortable truths from the margin against some form of dominating power. According to Foucault, this places the person in some sort of danger to life or reputation. This may have been the case for the speaker telling unpalatable truths to intimidating fellow citizens (the *demos*) in the Athenian democracy, or to a tyrant of ancient Greece, or to an early modern European monarch possessing power over life and

death. Danger lurked in all three situations. As an aside, it is ironic that Foucault recycled conservative criticisms of the troublesome Athenian *demos* into this conception of *parrhesia*, seeing them as resistant to unpalatable truths. Nevertheless, in all three situations, he sees a significant distinction of status between speaker and audience, as well as a sense of moral obligation to truth and a duty to help others that warrants the definition of *parrhesia* as "fearless speech".[64]

Modern criticism of Foucault's reading of classical texts, however, points to more circumstantial and contextual interpretations of *parrhesia*. Certainly, free and frank speech was considered essential to Athenian democracy, and as such it was an attribute of the *polis* rather than a virtue of the individual; but it also co-existed with other concepts in the assembly (for example *isegoria* or equal speech) which were determined by the community and were not individual rights as we might conceive them. The assembly could heckle, jeer and laugh at a speaker (thereby displaying *thorubus*), exercising their rights to free speech and to voice concern that the persuasive power of a speaker was being abused (there were no time limits to speeches, for example). Yet there is little evidence that the *demos* were intolerant of alternative opinions.[65] Athenians were not expected to sit listening silently in assembly: that was considered something expected only by tyrants wishing to silence opposition. So hubbub frequently bubbled from the crowd and was expected.

Such a critique also suggests that Foucault separated ethics from politics, thereby precluding the rhetorical understandings of *parrhesia* held by Aristotle. He cast frankness only into a relation with truth rather than with candour or outspokenness, a quality which may be appropriate or inappropriate, according to the judgements of social, political or private situations. Mulhern points out that such complexity requires any political actor to judge individual circumstances, including "actions, passions, habits, character, customs, laws, citizens, cities and citizenship",[66] before employing *parrhesia*. On occasion, orators may have presented themselves as courageously speaking their minds; but such a claim should not be taken at face value as evidence of *parrhesia*: the orator may merely have sought to enhance their credibility with their audience.

In general, it is not safe to conclude that all satirists and humorists are risk-takers living in dangerous times, worthy of the Foucauldian accolade of *parrhesiastes*, fearless tellers of uncomfortable truths. Some undoubtedly are, such as the unfortunate victims of shootings at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris in January 2015 and many cartoonists

detained and punished for their work under authoritarian regimes, past and present. Judgements should be made on a case-by-case basis. The same caution also applies to those who assert principled stands against so-called "political correctness" (PC). Such claims are often accompanied by absolute and abstract demands for total freedom of speech, when in fact judgements about the practice of this principle are necessarily occasional, circumstantial and often complex. Moreover, the ambiguity and even vagueness of the term complained of allows it to cover a multitude of sins in a variety of situations and allows some rhetors to claim underdog status for themselves as well as the high moral ground of free speech versus censorial oppression.

One such voice is that of controversial French comedian Dieudonné M'bala M'bala (b. 1966), whose anti-Semitic utterances align with those of members of the French Front National and with their populist stance as outsiders challenging the French establishment.[67] Another highly complex instance is the 2009 sacking of an 80-year-old cartoonist for *Charlie Hebdo*, Siné (Maurice Sinet), for alleged anti-Semitism,[68] an event which must be viewed against a background of bewilderingly intricate French political machinations.[69] Such details are usually quickly trampled in the global rush to declare fidelity to abstract principles and to choose sides in a controversy.[70] In effect, some satirists and comedians are not *parrhesiastes*, although historic and widespread expectations about satire can easily lead us to think that they all are. Jon Stewart, for example, has never claimed the title, despite his influential views; and indeed it is hard to think of him as a dangerous rebel when he has so often interviewed President Obama on his show.

Despite this, the power of satire is undoubted. Television programmes like *Yes Minister* and *The Hollowmen* have become such staples of the journalistic critique of politics that their very titles function as slogans, injecting a range of associations into any article or commentary that uses them.[71] As cartoons do, these familiar titles draw on many little universes of communal knowledge that sit just a few millimetres outside their narrow frames—the knowledge resources needed for decoding the humour. The satires and cartoons examined here all tap into what is familiar to their audiences, the long-standing tradition of anti-politics. The thematic recurrence in political satire over the last 200 years has happened for precisely the same reasons that it has occurred more generally in democratic discourse: it reflects unresolved tensions at the heart of representative democracy. To the politicians caught both ways, coming and going, this

tradition undoubtedly seems highly volatile, contradictory and confusing, but in practice this is surely no bad thing. It keeps "pollies" on their toes, supporting a conclusion that laughing at politicians has been essential to the health of our democracies for a very long time.

Notes

1. Charlie Pickering, "'The Colbert Report' Wraps", 19 December 2014.
2. Michel Foucault, "The Word *Parrhesia*", 2001, pp. 9–24.
3. Jamie Warner, "*The Daily Show* and the Politics of Truth", 2010, p. 37.
4. Matthew Jordan, "Thinking with Foucault about Truth-Telling and *The Daily Show*", 2008, pp. 7, 9.
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11. Barry Hindess, "Antipolitical Motifs in Western Political Discourse", 1997, p. 21.
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64. Michel Foucault, "The Word *Parrhesia*", 2001, pp. 13–9.
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CHAPTER 3

Under the Guise of Humour and Critique: The Political Co-Option of Popular Contemporary Satire

Rebecca Higgie

This chapter explores the process of political co-option in contemporary satire, whereby politicians successfully co-opt the vehicle of satire for their own purposes in a way that neutralises the possibility for satirical critique. Studies have consistently found that popular political satires such as the US TV series *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have become trusted forms of political commentary for viewers and citizens worldwide. As satirists have gained public trust and prominence in political media, politicians have appeared more frequently on satire programmes. From presidents to senators, prime ministers to backbenchers, politicians of all political persuasions have been interviewed by comedians, played along in quiz or panel show games, appeared in scripted skits, and even participated in self-satirisation. Recent cases, such as an appearance by then British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg on a programme called *The Last Leg* and US President Barack Obama's co-option of Colbert's segment "The Word", reveal how satire's oft-celebrated critical

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edge is blunted when politicians are able to use it to garner overwhelmingly positive public reactions.

Utilising theories of how dominant culture absorbs and often produces counterculture as a product to be consumed, this chapter will explore the complexity of satire as an oppositional yet incorporated element of mainstream political discourse in several specific case studies. Developing a theory of the political co-option of satire demonstrates how, when politicians play along, their self-interest is often forgotten if they can successfully present themselves as having the traits—good-humour, rebellion, honesty, ironic self-awareness, truth and so on—that are so celebrated by satirists and comedy fans alike. A more critical approach to studying satire will be proposed, which acknowledges satire's possibility for critique but also allows for the possibility of political co-option.

Satire's Cultural Capital: Something Worth Co-Opting

Scholarship on political satire has argued that it is a form of political communication that can engage young voters, provide useful political information and commentary, and call politicians and the media to account (Jones 2010; Gray et al. 2009a; McClennen and Maise 2014; Brewer and Cao 2006; Day 2011; Young and Hoffman 2012; Hoffman and Young 2011 and Xenos and Becker 2009).[1] Viewers of satire have been shown to be more politically knowledgeable,[2] and satire has become integral to how many people learn about and engage with politics, with many young people using satire as a source of news.[3] Sotos (2007) even claims that satire has become a fifth estate, a watchdog over the failing fourth estate, while McClennen and Maisel believe that "satire is saving our nation. It is correcting the misinformation of the news, holding politicians accountable, and helping reframe citizenship in ways that productively combine entertainment and engagement".[4] Though much of the research on political satire has focused on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, other studies have demonstrated how satire in both the UK and Australia functions as critical, politically informative and engaging forms of humour and even as journalism (Harrington 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Lockyer 2006).

When it comes to politics, viewers have been observed to trust satirists. In 2007, one notable Pew Research Centre study found that Jon Stewart, *The Daily Show*'s satiric anchor (1999–2015), was rated the fourth most trusted journalist in the USA, alongside traditional mainstream journalists

(*Pew Summary of Findings* 2007). Two years later, a *Time Magazine* poll named Stewart the most trusted newscaster since the famed Walter Cronkite (d. 2009) (Linkins 2009). In 2010, Stewart and his faux-conservative equivalent, Stephen Colbert of *The Colbert Report*, held a joint rally to "restore sanity"/"keep fear alive" in public debate—a satirical endeavour of disenchantment with the US news media. It drew a crowd of 215,000 to the Washington Monument (Montopoli 2010). Brian Williams, a "real" journalist and anchor of *NBC Nightly News*, acknowledges that "many of us on this side of the journalism tracks often wish we were on Jon [Stewart]'s side. I envy his platform to shout from the mountaintop. He's a necessary branch of government".[5] Elsewhere, I have shown that satirists have cultural capital as "truth-tellers" (Higgie 2014) and that, increasingly, they are invited onto more serious news shows to provide both comedic and earnest commentary (Higgie 2015).

Satire itself appears to function as a sincere, trustworthy medium, especially through its self-aware use of irony. Irony, the "language of satire", may "seemingly maintain a degree of *authenticity* to younger citizens simply because it doesn't seem so closely aligned with the 'manufactured' realities that politicians, advertisers, and news media construct and would have them believe".[6] Amber Day argues that irony has become a "new marker of sincerity", a more self-aware language that seeks to expose both its own construction and the construction of others. She proposes that it provides a sense of authenticity because it "seems more transparent in its willingness to point to its own flaws and fakeries".[7]

These are the dominant narratives in both scholarship and public debate about political satire, which celebrate satire as an art form that enables a more critical, politically aware electorate. Although in my earlier work I provisionally highlighted the possibility that satire could be co-opted by politicians, I have generally held to the narrative that it is a valuable form of political critique. This study acknowledges that satire may indeed provide political information and critical perspectives, but re-examines the validity of this dominant narrative by considering how satire's critique is incorporated in and neutralised by that which it seeks to criticise. It does this by looking at politicians' participation in satire.

As satire has grown in popularity and prominence in mainstream political discourse, so too has the number of politicians appearing on these programmes.[8] At times, this inclusion is unwelcome to the politician, who is ambushed by the satirist while out on the campaign trail, at a press conference or even on a casual walk. Australian satirical team

The Chaser were famous for such tactics, particularly for coming to press conferences dressed as serious journalists but then asking ridiculous or embarrassing questions. Other politicians have willingly participated in satire without realising it, appearing in what they thought were serious news programme interviews. This tactic was often used by Sacha Baron Cohen (performer of comic characters Ali G, Borat and Brüno), and also by Chris Morris of the British TV series *Brass Eye*. In one memorable example, David Amess, a Conservative Member of Parliament (MP), made a very earnest public service announcement on the programme about a (fake) drug called Cake. So seriously did he take the issue that, in Parliament, he asked the Secretary of State for the Home Office what was being done about Cake, seeking to make the drug illegal.[9]

Such instances are dwarfed, however, by the numbers of politicians who willingly and knowingly participate in satire and comedy programmes. Politicians are regularly interviewed by satirists on TV programmes like *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*, or they participate on comedy panel shows like the BBC's *Have I Got News For You* (*HIGNFY*) or The Chaser's *Media Circus*. Here, they are regularly taken to task or made to participate in games that directly mock them and their party, as in the 2014 appearance on *HIGNFY* of Nigel Farage, then Leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Farage was asked to play a game that involved saying whether particular UKIP candidates were "fruitcakes" or "loonies".[10] In almost all instances, politicians play along and laugh at themselves, even in moments when they are ridiculed or embarrassed. They even participate in scripted sketches that satirise themselves, as in 2008 on *Saturday Night Live*, where then Republican presidential candidate John McCain performed a two-handed skit with comedian Tina Fey impersonating his vice-presidential running mate Sarah Palin.[11] Politicians also perform caricatures of themselves in non-scripted appearances, as in The Chaser's *Yes We Canberra* series in 2010, when the then Deputy Leader of the Australian Liberal Party, Julie Bishop, participated in a staring contest (with a garden gnome) that perpetuated her public image as a harsh, steely-eyed woman.[12]

To chronicle every appearance by a politician on a satire programme in the last decade would fill volumes as, for many, participation in satire and comedy has become part of political campaigning (Higgie 2015). Politicians have recognised that satire has a great deal of cultural capital. A rare study of motivations for going on satire programmes interviewed

British and Dutch politicians who had appeared on comedy panel shows *HIGNFY* and the Dutch equivalent, *Dit was het nieuws* (*DWHN*). Politicians reported that they did this to increase their visibility, to provide voters with more multi-faceted images of politicians in general, and to be seen as anti-elitist, just like "ordinary human beings".[13] The study's authors identified three major motivational repertoires for participation: strategic, indulgent and anti-elitist. Most politicians drew on the strategic repertoire, citing their appearance as an opportunity to increase personal visibility and to communicate political messages to a wider audience. They recognised that the programmes were viewed by a large and diverse audience: as one British MP put it, "if you want to get politics out to a wider audience, you've got to show politicians as being humorous, presentable, quick-witted and appealing".[14]

Some politicians listed their motivation as self-indulgent, saying they participated because it was something fun to do. Another British MP said, "Parliament's a rather boring, dull place, but it gives you a chance to go to exciting places. And the one thing about *HIGNFY*, it was exciting".[15] The anti-elitist motivation was linked to a desire to come across as "ordinary human beings, with their ups and downs, their flaws and imperfections".[16] A Dutch MP, for instance, felt that "voters also want to see what kind of man or woman the politician is".[17] For those who drew on the anti-elitist repertoire, the authors report that "infotainment, comedy and other genres of popular culture of which *HIGNFY* and *DWHN* are part, offer sincere and appropriate ways to communicate with people".[18] Though some believed that their image could be damaged if they said something stupid or failed to come across as funny, others appealed to the notion of being human or real, saying, "I think that even if they take the piss out of MPs, it might not do them any harm. It still humanises people. Get the sympathy vote" and also, "it can't do any damage, it shows politicians as human".[19]

Evidently, politicians acknowledge the importance of appearing like ordinary human beings to voters and see political satire and comedy as offering a useful tool in cultivating this more humanised public image. In her book on politics and popular culture, Liesbet van Zoonen argues that the appeal of "celebrity politicians" who participate in popular culture is "built on the impression that they are 'just like us' (a regular guy) and thus deserving to represent 'us'".[20] The celebrity politician then must be able to display competence or authenticity in both political and

private fields. They should project a "persona that has inside experience with politics but is still an outsider"—a public image that "builds on a unique mixture of ordinariness and exceptionality".[21]

Though some studies (for example, Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Morris 2009) have shown that satire *about* politicians can result in negative perceptions of politicians, few have examined how the politician's direct participation in satire may affect audience perceptions. One notable exception echoes many of van Zoonen's arguments regarding the political and the private. Michael Parkin examined viewers' responses to interviews of McCain and Obama on entertainment programmes during the 2008 presidential election. Interviews comprised purely of joking or personal anecdotes were not at all persuasive, while those most likely to persuade viewers mixed personal content with political details. He concluded, "This supports the contention that lighthearted stories make the candidate more likeable while political content gives viewers a substantive base on which to make their vote choices", as exemplified in one interview with Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, where McCain's support ratings significantly increased:[22]

> Viewers came away liking McCain after seeing him play along with Stewart and make self-deprecating jokes about his temperament, but they also seemed to react to McCain's discussion of serious issues, including his plans for the war in Iraq. McCain's personal stories gave viewers a reason to like him without failing to provide compelling policy reasons for earning their vote.

Parkin also found that "low-interest viewers, even those from the opposition party"[23] were those most likely to be persuaded by such appearances. Thus, entertainment talk shows can help candidates "gain ground among non-supporters with limited political interest, who, because of their relatively weak preferences, are susceptible to persuasive appeals".[24] This study demonstrated that, while politicians need to combine humour with political messages carefully, if they can strike that balance, they benefit.

Satire, Incorporation and Commodification

In the extensive scholarship on politics and satire there is little on direct interaction between politicians and satirists and almost none on the idea of co-option. The only relevant work here is Laura Basu's study of the

UK political satire *The Thick of It*, which explores "whether it is possible for dissenting voices to be heard without being incorporated into the mainstream and neutralised".[25] She cites UK Labour Leader Ed Miliband using *The Thick of It* term "omnishambles" in Parliament to describe the Coalition Government's budget. The word was then picked up by other politicians and its use covered in mainstream news reports. Given that "omnishambles" is used by *The Thick of It*'s "spin doctor" character Malcolm Tucker to describe a Labour politician, Miliband's use of the term is remarkable. Basu notes, "It is true that there is nothing novel about politicians taking up catchphrases from popular culture, but there is something both extraordinary and ironic about the leader of a political party brandishing a phrase that was coined precisely to ridicule that party".[26] *The Thick of It*, popular among the politicians and journalists it ridiculed, was consequently "swallowed by the political machine, becoming a celebrated part of the very apparatus it satirises".[27] Basu argues that the critical force of satire is neutralised when it is taken up by that which it critiques, and uses Raymond Williams's idea of incorporation and Foucault's model of the apparatus to explain this process.

Williams's theory of incorporation acknowledges that the hegemony, or the dominant, incorporates and even produces alternative or oppositional forms. Defining hegemony as a "lived system of meanings and values" that constitutes our "sense of reality",[28] he does not present it as a fixed form of ideological domination or manipulation, but as an active social process that regulates, adapts and changes how we understand and operate in the world. Thus, for Williams, the dominant "is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in society". These elements are not just tolerated by, nor do they simply exist alongside, the dominant. Rather, they are tied to it so that "the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture".[29]

Thomas Frank, Jim McGuigan, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter have all extended this argument, although they do not use Williams's idea of incorporation. Frank, for instance, examines how anti-consumerist movements and rhetoric were absorbed into a new "rebellious" form of consumption where, from the 1960s, products were designed "to facilitate our rebellion against the soul-deadening world of products, to put us in touch with our authentic selves, to distinguish us from the mass-produced herd".[30] McGuigan coins the term "cool capitalism" to explain this process, one that is "largely defined by the incorporation, and thereby

neutralisation, of cultural criticism and anti-capitalism into the theory and practice of capitalism itself".[31] Artistic movements, such as impressionism and cubism, first rejected by the academy, only to become accepted and celebrated forms of high art, demonstrate how the formation of dominant culture involves "a dialectic of refusal and incorporation".[32]

This dialectic of refusal and incorporation is illuminated by Williams's concept of the residual and the emergent in a hegemony. He regards a residual element as one which has been "effectively formed in the past, but … is still active in the cultural process", such as the rural community among a cosmopolitan society, constituting values and practices that can be seen as "alternative or oppositional to urban industrial capitalism, though for the most part it is incorporated as idealisation or fantasy, or as an exotic—residential or escape—leisure function of the dominant order".[33] Emergent elements relate to new phases of the dominant culture, elements which were perhaps originally oppositional, such as the popular press, but soon became incorporated as established or accepted parts of the dominant culture.

In Williams's terms, popular satire can readily be seen as an emergent element, evolving to be an oppositional yet incorporated feature of the dominant mainstream political media. It has elements that are genuinely oppositional (often anti-capitalistic and sometimes even anti-democratic, although most popular mainstream satire is strongly pro-democracy); others that appear alternative or oppositional at first but which in fact reflect dominant narratives about politics (for example, that politicians are corrupt, and journalists biased); and others that are fairly mainstream and thus dominant (for example, satire's status as a valuable commercial product and its continuation of pro-democracy narratives).

Residual and emergent forms can of course exist alongside and within the dominant, even when they appear oppositional. Seemingly anti-consumerist rhetoric is often deployed to encourage consumption. Criticisms of the damage inflicted by mass production on Third World workers, animals and the environment are absorbed by the media and then marketed back to consumers in forms such as organic, small-scale, artisanal, free range or fair trade products. While this is not to say that ethical consumption practices are of no value, they can thus be seen as alternative forms of consumption that have been incorporated into the hegemony of capitalism.

Clearly, many of the celebrated satires being subjected here and elsewhere to academic study are commercial products. US programmes such

as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* are created and distributed by vast multinational media companies such as Viacom and Time Warner. To see them, viewers must pay for a subscription or cable service, or pay for each episode via licensed download outlets like iTunes. Even when some companies upload their episodes to official websites for viewers to stream for free, access is usually restricted according to a viewer's geographical location, and advertisements are often embedded in the streaming broadcast. Satires and political comedies that are free to air on commercial stations feature advertisements. Those that are free to air on public broadcasters with few advertisements are either subsidised or entirely funded through taxpayers' money. *The Thick of It*, *HIGNFY* and *The Chaser*'s various series are all examples of publically funded satires. These satires are usually available on their broadcasters' official websites: for instance, the BBC offers its programmes through BBC iPlayer and the ABC through ABC iView. These programmes are usually available for a limited period of time and only if a viewer's IP address is within the website's designated geographical area. Such restrictions by both public and private media companies are designed to sell licensing rights to foreign broadcasting and subscription companies, augmenting the revenue their programmes can generate.

Most satires also come with merchandise, from t-shirts and mugs to books and DVDs. Even smaller-scale satires run by small companies or independent producers, such as UK magazine *Modern Toss* or podcast *The Bugle*, sell mugs, shirts and bags. Viewers are encouraged to express their political awareness and love of satire through consumption, making satire a part of the identity they project through what they drink out of, wear or read. This chapter focuses, however, not on the consumption of satire as a commercial product. Despite the close nexus between ideology and capital, I intend to focus on the ideological function of satire and what happens when it is incorporated in the sense of being co-opted by the political establishment.

Considering Political Co-option

Incorporation is not of course inherently negative. Ethical consumption, for example, can be seen as a positive emergent practice within the dominant. However, Heath and Potter point out that uncritical participation in countercultural movements can induce the belief that one is "jamming" the system and that, therefore, there is no need to take any other

action to reform what some regard as the exploitative conditions of capitalism or modern politics. They conclude that, at best, "countercultural rebellion is a pseudo-rebellion: a set of dramatic gestures that are devoid of any progressive political or economic consequences and that detract from the urgent task of building a more just society".[34] It is not so much rebellion as the *appearance* of rebellion.

Extending this logic to political satire, satire consumers may well feel that mocking politicians is a sufficiently radical act and accordingly do not feel the need to participate in politics. Furthermore, satire can be seen as losing some of its radical potential as this process develops. Basu argues that when *The Thick of It* becomes incorporated by the very thing it critiques, "one of its possible functions as satire is short-circuited".[35] I would argue still further that not only is the critique short-circuited, it is actually co-opted in a way that benefits the politician. This goes well beyond the idea of neutralising subversion through incorporation: in co-option, the subversion actually becomes part of the politician's own image. The subversive elements of satire that appeal to so many people—good-humour, rebellion, honesty, ironic self-awareness, truth and so on—are taken and used to construct a more affable public image for the politician concerned. This co-option moves past standard attempts at public relations to make oneself more appealing to voters: if done successfully, the politician can co-opt the satire's cultural capital *without even appearing to do so.*

An illustrative case is that of British Conservative MP (2015–) and former Mayor of London Boris Johnson. Even before his elevation to Foreign Secretary in 2016, his remarkable public image attracted a good deal of research, often focusing on this relationship between humour, the politician and authenticity. Famous for his scruffy appearance and charismatic, bumbling-clown routine, Johnson regularly uses humour in his public appearances and has appeared seven times on *HIGNFY*, on four occasions as host. Sonia Purnell's biography of Johnson reports that *HIGNFY* audiences "thought him unusually game and somehow authentic; and that his monumental ineptitude when he became a guest presenter—fluffing his lines on the autocue and awarding points to the wrong team—was endearing".[36] Such joking, she argues, saves Johnson from "sounding too right-wing, too ambiguous or too tough", and his bumbling persona and use of personal anecdotes often result in voters overlooking his statements' "lack of political content".[37] One review observed that "Johnson has become his own satirist: safe, above all, in

the knowledge that the best way to make sure the satire aimed at you is gentle and unchallenging is to create it yourself".[38]

This is an example of humour as deliberate strategy. Another telling Johnson anecdote is recounted by journalist Andy McSmith[39]:

> When he was culture spokesman he made some minor gaffe and one journalist phoned him up and got the whole buffoon spiel. He printed it word for word in his newspaper. What so amused us was that another lobby [political] journalist had also phoned him up and got exactly the same bumbling routine, word for word, and recorded it. The two routines were identical. Boris put in a very well rehearsed performance, both times – it shows it's all a construct.

Johnson himself has acknowledged the power of humour, calling it a "utensil that you can use to sugar the pill and to get important points across" and admitting, "I make what I think is a very cunning calculation. If you clown around, you may be able to creep up on people with your ideas, and spring them on them unexpectedly".[40]

Though Johnson cultivates his public persona by using humour outside comedy shows, Purnell points out that *HIGNFY* really established and cemented his enduring comic image, rendering him as a "man of the people, someone who appeared to belong to the masses".[41] In the relationship between satire and politicians, therefore, the notion of co-option needs to acknowledge the neutralisation of satirical critique through incorporation—rarely done in scholarship. It must also take account of the fact that the politician's self-interested motivation is often overlooked by the viewer if they successfully present themselves as having the traits that are so celebrated by satirists and comedy fans alike.

Scholars like Frank have pointed out that scholarship on co-option is often mistakenly based on the notion that the authentic counterculture possesses revolutionary potential and that the dominant, especially business, subverts that threat by mimicking and mass-producing fake counterculture. Heath and Potter argue further that the counterculture cannot be co-opted by consumerism because it was produced by and indeed *is* itself consumerism. They continually state, "no one is 'selling out' here, because there is nothing to sell out in the first place".[42]

If we apply these arguments to the co-option of satire, we simplify and ignore some of the important ways in which satire is now being used by both politicians and citizens. First, while satire may not offer politicians a

chance to co-opt a form of authentic satirical rebellion that would, without political or capital interference, have some truly revolutionary potential, it is able to construct an *image* of the authentic. Indeed, it is often seen as authentic truth-telling by its viewers, as is evidenced by the fact that Jon Stewart was often considered more trustworthy than many journalists. When politicians co-opt this halo-effect, they are not co-opting something authentic or "real", but they *do* co-opt an image or idea that has cultural capital *as* authentic. Even if much of this popular and influential satire becomes implicated in the dominant, it has nonetheless significant cultural capital as counter-dominant—and that gives it power.

Second, and most important, to apply the "nothing to sell out" argument to satire, saying it cannot be co-opted because there is nothing to co-opt (it is already part of the system) implies that satire is functioning as it should and therefore does not need to change, or develop an awareness of the way it is being used by politicians, journalists and viewers. In fact, people do see satire as more than "just entertainment". While this is not to say that satire has some inherent oppositional function that must be adhered to, audiences do *expect* subversive critique from it. It is widely seen to serve a critical function. Heath and Potter's main critique of the counterculture is that those who participate in it uncritically view it as a *productive* rebellion, one that makes other forms of political action and reform unnecessary. If audiences of satire are to avoid this same fate, they increasingly need to be aware of how satirical critique can be incorporated or co-opted in ways that may be counterproductive to the function they expect of satire.

Case Studies

The following two examples of politicians participating in satire programmes serve to illustrate how co-option operates in particular circumstances. The first concerns UK Liberal Democrat Leader (2007–2015) and Deputy Prime Minister (2010–2015) Nick Clegg and his appearance on the British political comedy show *The Last Leg*. This example demonstrates that satire is often seen as a very honest, "anti-bullshit" medium and examines how public and media narratives around Clegg's appearance show that a politician is enabled to embody these characteristics through participating in satire. The second example is US President (2009–2017) Barack Obama—a statesman who mastered the art of satirising himself—and an appearance on *The Colbert Report* in which he

took over Colbert's own regular segment, "The Word". This appearance is especially notable because it is an instance of the satirist completely handing over the vehicle of satire to the politician. The textual and discursive analysis of the skits and of the media/public response to them aims to illuminate the complex interplay between politicians and satirists, especially the possibility of co-option.

Not Talking Bullshit: Nick Clegg on The Last Leg

On 30 January 2015, Nick Clegg appeared on Channel 4 comedy show *The Last Leg*.[43] This is hosted by Australian comedian Adam Hills and co-hosted by British comedians Alex Brooker and Josh Widdicombe. The show began life with a focus on disability and was described as "three guys with four legs talking about the week",[44] alluding to the fact that Hills and Brooker only have one leg each. Its initial premise was to be a variety show about the 2012 Paralympics, complementing Channel 4's more serious coverage, but it continued as a weekly show on topical news events and issues. Hills regularly delivers monologues ("rants") on the show, often with a very political focus. His catchphrase, "Don't be a dick", is frequently levelled at politicians. Comedians, journalists and politicians regularly appear as guests.

Clegg's ten-minute interview with Brooker resulted in significant coverage in mainstream news media and online social networking site Twitter. During the interview, Brooker made use of a "bullshit buzzer" that proclaimed the word "bullshit" whenever it was hit and he promised to hit it every time he felt that the Deputy Prime Minister was "talking bullshit" (see Fig. 3.1). Following this warning, Brooker informed his guest, "I know this is a comedy show. This isn't meant to be fun, I don't wanna see you laughing, the audience can laugh, but I'm not here to entertain you. I'm not your clown". Despite this, whenever Clegg felt the *questions* were bullshit, he playfully hit the buzzer too. Much dismayed, Brooker repeatedly objected that he was the one asking the questions and therefore only he could challenge responses. On balance, the buzzer was in fact mostly used by Brooker when Clegg stalled or failed to answer questions directly, or answered them in ways that Brooker felt were insincere.

In the interview, Clegg made several remarkably frank admissions, such as having wanted multiple times to slap his Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, during their years together in coalition. He also responded to the question, "Boris Johnson: statesman or twat?"

Fig. 3.1 Nick Clegg (right) faces Alex Brooker and the bullshit buzzer. Still from *Alex Brooker & Nick Clegg Showdown!*, a YouTube rebroadcast of *The Last Leg*, 30 January 2015, posted 5 February 2015 (accessed 10 February 2015).

with "Bit more the latter". At another point, Brooker referred to Clegg having reneged on his election promise never to raise university tuition fees by asking the Deputy Prime Minister, "On a scale of one to ten, with one being couldn't give a toss, ten, literally you cannot sleep at night, how shitty do you feel about what you did with tuition fees?" Clegg stressed that he was not prime minister and had only 9% of MPs in the Coalition Government, but failed to evade the bullshit buzzer. Eventually, he admitted to a rating of 9.5 out of 10.

Clegg tried many times to interrupt Brooker in order to address the comedian's assertion that he would not vote in the upcoming general election. He was finally allowed 30s to convince Brooker to vote, and tried asking what he cared about, only to have the comedian reply, "That's a question to me" and that he wanted answers, not questions. Clegg then said, "If you care about how people are educated, if you care about the environment, if you care about taxes, if you care about the NHS [National Health Service], if you care about anything that affects our daily life, that is determined by politics, you should get stuck in and vote". When Brooker responded by hitting the bullshit buzzer, Clegg

tried to appeal to the comedian's well-known love of Nando's, the fast-food chain, saying: "It's like going to Nando's and asking someone else to put in your order and then you get something you don't want. If you don't vote, you'll get a kind of government you don't want, so get stuck in there and vote. I'm not asking you to vote for me". Stopping Clegg again with the buzzer, Brooker nevertheless conceded, "Actually, tell you what, you almost had me at Nando's". At the end of the interview, Clegg asked Brooker if he would be voting and, to applause from the audience, the comedian admitted that he would. Clegg also applauded, declaring, "He said he's going to vote, did you hear that!".

The mainstream media covered this interview quite widely, focusing on Clegg's comments about Cameron, Johnson and his remorse over tuition fees. Comment came from the *Daily Mail* (Pleasance 2015), the *Guardian* ("Nick Clegg: I Wanted to Slap David Cameron" 2015), *The Huffington Post* (Elgot 2015), *Metro* (Westbrook 2015), *The Independent* (Saul 2015), *The Spectator* (Rifkind 2015) and the *Telegraph* ("I want to slap David Cameron" 2015). However, the response on Twitter to Clegg's appearance was much more remarkable. The hashtag #cleggleg was so popular that it trended third highest worldwide (*Worldwide Trends Sidebar* 2015). Although a few tweets decried the interview as a cynical publicity stunt, most were positive towards Clegg. Twitter users saw him as honest, genuine, an underdog and funny. The following comments illustrate the tone and narrative produced around Clegg's interview:

> "Loved Clegg, found him hilarious! Nice when leaders are humanised, and you can see they're genuine people too!" (@RuleaTom 2015)

> "I kind of love Nick Clegg now, love an underdog" (@ChristinaJaneH 2015)

> "#isitokay to completely change my opinion on Nick Clegg after catching up on #thelastleg…Finally a Politician with a personality!" (@mummy_of_4_ 2015).

> "Watching #cleggleg again and loving #nickclegg even more. Showed himself to be real, funny and took his beating in good humour". (@TabithaWarley 2015).

> "Just caught up on #thelastleg and I've gotta say #cleggleg made me think he's more like us than the politions [sic] who think there [sic] better than us". (@ChelleSuga 2015)

"@nick_clegg you are too funny and intelligent to be in politics, very brave to go on the last leg". (@pearl365 2015)

"As a Union shop steward I've got to say Nick Clegg has gone up massively in my estimation after watching a recording of Last Leg". (@colinjyorkie777 2015).

What was it that caused people to respond so positively to Clegg's appearance on *The Last Leg*? In an article for the *New Statesman*, host Adam Hills argued that Clegg "didn't talk bullshit. More to the point, he wasn't allowed to talk bullshit", adding[45]:

In a world where the overwhelming feeling among voters, young and old, is that 'they're all as bad as each other' and more often 'they all talk such rubbish' perhaps 'not talking bullshit' could be a revolutionary tactic for politicians. Because we want them to be real. We want them to talk to us. Actually to us. Maybe more politicians should use the bullshit buzzer when they prepare for interviews. Because people aren't stupid. We know there are economic trials, we know there are harsh realities of Government, and we know sometimes tough times call for tough measures. We also know when someone is talking bullshit. And we appreciate it when they don't.

Here, Hills repeats the Twitter narrative of Clegg being honest and real. In saying that Clegg wasn't *allowed* to talk bullshit, he also reinforces the idea of the satirist as one who relentlessly calls the politician to account. It is impossible to say whether or not Clegg really did "stop talking bullshit". Hills himself reflects on the possibility that certain comedic responses were prepared for the interview, saying, "I don't know if Nick Clegg had planned to end with that [Nando's] analogy, if he had it up his sleeve in case of an emergency, or whether through exasperation the Deputy Prime Minister blurted out the first thing that came into his head". But, as he acknowledges, this is irrelevant because whatever it was, "it worked" and was accepted as "not bullshit". Hills further observes that this resulted in a very sudden shift in people's perceptions: for example with Clegg's admission of regret about tuition fees, "the even more unthinkable happened—the audience applauded. And in its own way, so did Twitter. The guy who 30s earlier was being jeered for going back on his promise was now being lauded for feeling bad about it".[46]

Of the negative tweets, many resorted to name-calling or insulting Clegg. The more thoughtful ones made statements about policy, about

the nature of coalition government and about political public relations. Examples are: "Good Television and good policy are NOT the same thing #cleggleg" (@thomasmbell23 2015); "Order for yourself at Nandos, then the staff decide to change the order because they went into a coalition with KFC #cleggleg" (@joble_jabel 2015); and "Am shocked at #C4's blatant attempt at manipulation of our young people by way of the #cleggleg stunt on last night's episode of #Lastleg" (@Wirralo 2015). These tweets show a more critical approach to Clegg's appearance on the show, demonstrating what could be considered as cynicism about politicians and the media, or healthy scepticism or simply awareness of how politicians attempt to craft their public image. Such tweets, however, were dwarfed in number by ones that cast Clegg as an ordinary, honest human being. Rather than simply "not talking bullshit", Clegg's success exemplifies how "performing a convincing political persona in these contexts [of televised political media] requires continuous and effortless shifts from anecdote to analysis, emotion to reason, polemic to moderation, personal to political, serious to humorous and back again".[47] In fact, the simultaneously humorous and serious nature of satire offers politicians a valuable platform in which to make these shifts. The following example illustrates how the politician can successfully shift between humour and seriousness, this time with the satirist removed from the frame.

Politicians at the Reins of Satire: Obama Delivers The Decree on The Colbert Report

Although the phrase, "his own satirist", was applied by Jonathan Coe to Boris Johnson, it could just as accurately be used to describe former President Obama. Obama embraced popular media and comedy more than any other politician, appearing on late-night television (*The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *The Late Show with David Letterman*), comedy and satire programmes (*The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *Saturday Night Live*), online comedy videos (*Between Two Ferns with Zach Galifianakis*) and podcasts (*WTF with Marc Maron*). He was regularly interviewed by comedians and satirists, but also participated in scripted skits, often satirising himself. His 8 December 2014 appearance on *The Colbert Report* partly illustrates this range. While Colbert as host does interview Obama, the President also performs a skit called "The Decree", a presidential version of Colbert's own segment, "The Word".[48] "The Word" normally

features Colbert delivering an impassioned monologue while an on-screen text contradicts or ironically adds to the absurdity of his claims.

On this occasion, Obama "interrupts" (presumably by pre-arrangement) as Colbert is about to start "The Word", saying he is sure he can do the comedian's job and promising just to read what Colbert was going to read from the teleprompter. In a fascinating example of the satirist handing the reins of satire over to the politician, Colbert then exits the frame entirely, leaving Obama to perform alone in what both the President and on-screen text label "The Decree". He delivers the sketch as if speaking the satirist's words and uses the opportunity to poke fun at himself while advocating for more young people to sign up for healthcare insurance—an issue with which he was then concerned. He opens by saying, "As you know, I, Stephen Colbert, have never cared for our President. The guy is so arrogant, I bet he talks about himself in the third person". The on-screen textual commentary adds, "In between those long pauses". Once again, Obama demonstrates Coe's insistence that the best way to ensure that satire is gentle is to deliver it yourself. The irony of calling himself arrogant for talking in the third person while actually talking in the third person allows him to address criticism of being aloof or arrogant by demonstrating a self-aware sense of humour. His reference to long pauses (an often-parodied trait of Obama's speaking style), and other jibes about the rate at which he has aged since being elected in 2008 are personal attacks, not ones about politics or policy. The only negative reference to policy initiatives is when he describes the launch of the government healthcare website as "a little bumpy", accompanied by the on-screen text, "Commander-In-Understatement" (a pun on Commander-in-Chief). These acknowledgements and personal jibes present Obama as able to take criticism and having a good sense of humour, avoiding any specific address or acknowledgement of criticisms about policy.

Predominantly, the skit seriously advocates for health care. Speaking as Colbert, Obama acknowledges that "Obamacare" (the controversial scheme favoured by him as Democrat President) is now law with some aspects that even Republicans like, such as enabling people under 26 to remain on their parents' health insurance policy. Since young people can now get cover for less than a hundred dollars, he satirically points out that the only way to kill the scheme would be to make signing up unappealing to them. He jibes at the Republican Party, with the on-screen text explicitly casting them as heartless or dismissive when it comes to

Fig. 3.2 Barack Obama hosts "The Decree" on *The Colbert Report*, 8 December 2014. Still from *President Obama Delivers The Decree*, a YouTube rebroadcast, posted 9 December 2014 (accessed 16 November 2015).

healthcare. Obama states that if (as was threatened) the Republicans were to repeal Obamacare, they would have to come up with their own healthcare policy: the text commentary suggests catchphrases such as "fracking the elderly" and "WalkItOff.gov" (see Fig. 3.2). These comments reflect narratives casting the Republicans as poor on environmental issues (the controversial mining technique of fracking), heartless (willing to "frack" the elderly) and old-fashioned ("walk it off" is a phrase often associated in pop culture with older generations who ignore or dismiss medical complaints).

As with Clegg's appearance, "The Decree" was covered in many online publications and in newspapers, magazines and television broadcasts, such as *Bloomberg* (Talev 2014), *CNN* (Mercea 2014), *The Huffington Post* ("President Obama Takes Over on 'Colbert Report'" 2014), *The Independent* (Moodley 2014), *New York Daily News* (Warren 2014), *Time Magazine* (Miller 2014), *Vanity Fair* (Robinson 2014) and *Variety* ("Watch: President Obama Takes Over *'The Colbert Report'* for 'The Decree'" 2014). The response on Twitter, however, was nowhere near as pronounced as for #cleggleg, although similar narratives did circulate regarding Obama being "funny" (@GavinWakeUpCall 2014; @pradeep_aradhya 2014), "likeable" (@ClaudiaGiroux 2014), "a good sport" (@ClaudiaGiroux 2014) and "human" (@VoiceOfMorris 2014).

The sketch's most interesting aspect is the way Colbert hands over the vehicle of satire to his guest. The founding premise is that Obama thinks he can do Colbert's job and proceeds to do it. Although this is obviously a gimmick and the sketch has clearly been prepared for him, Obama is positioned as standing in for Colbert, a mouthpiece for Colbert's words. This, since his words are supposedly those of the satirist, can be seen as a kind of endorsement of Obama by Colbert. In addition, while the monologue may criticise him personally, Obama, by delivering this criticism himself (as Boris Johnson does), ensures that "the satire aimed at [him] is gentle and unchallenging".[49] Colbert's subsequent interview with Obama is somewhat more pointed—it includes ridiculing him as a Roman emperor who ignores the Constitution, with Colbert calling him "Baracus Maximus I"—but criticism is neutralised by Obama's laughing responses as he takes the quips in his stride and plays along.

Conclusion: The Possibility of Both Critique and Co-option

Satire can certainly offer political commentary; but can it provide a critique that is not automatically incorporated into the dominant, commodified as a product, co-opted by politicians or used to create a feeling of rebellion that disarms one's willingness to participate in politics? This question deserves more careful exploration by scholars, public intellectuals and viewers alike. One recent study claims that satire is "saving our nation", critiquing academic arguments that focus on the potentially negative effects of satire. It calls such narratives "the satire scare"[50] that accuses satire of creating cynicism, disengaging voters and over-simplifying politics. Such narratives do indeed fail to acknowledge the positive contribution of satire to political discourse, but it is equally necessary to avoid simplistic and overly celebratory claims that satire is "saving our nation" in the way it calls politicians to account.

Importantly, issues of co-option have not yet been raised in anti-satire studies. In raising and analysing them here, it is not my intention to increase negativity about satire in politics. Rather, I propose that championing of satire should be tempered by a willingness to consider how it is implicit in the political systems it criticises, how its critique may be (partially) neutralised by incorporation, and how its power and cultural capital may be co-opted by its targets. Satire is certainly not to be dismissed

as "merely part of the system": the complex relationship between the two demands a more nuanced and critical approach that regards satire as an incorporated yet oppositional element of the dominant political discourse.

In summary, comedy is often presented as an honest medium: while "just a joke", comedy also "tells it how it is". Comedic licence grants both comedians and satirists more leeway to approach taboo topics than in serious discourse, and the result is often presented and accepted as bravely honest. While many popular narratives about politics are indeed perpetuated by satire, journalism and voters do the same independently of comedy, casting politicians as self-interested, elitist and corrupt figures. Unsurprisingly, politicians often complain about unfair and cynical comedy, calling—as British MP David Blunkett did—for broadcast satire and political comedy to be reclassified as current affairs in order to face more regulatory scrutiny (Sherwin 2013). However, politicians also benefit from playing along with the satirical approach. For scholars, therefore, the issue should not be whether a politician is truly being honest or sincere in such a frame—this is impossible to determine—but rather a focus on whether playing along and *appearing* to be "not talking bullshit" creates an image that disarms the viewer's critical faculty, or whether the appropriation actually conveys some positive information. Paraphrasing Boris Johnson, does the viewer realise what medicine is being taken by this "sugaring of the pill"? And what does that signify for the genre of political satire? Terminology is important here. Given that co-option is sometimes associated with a complete "taking over" or "infiltrating" of a movement or practice,[51] the more nuanced term "incorporation" may promise more for future analysis. The stronger term that I have used here and elsewhere has value nevertheless in disrupting the predominant discourse in political satire scholarship. It needs to acknowledge that satire is not a pure form of truly radical subversion—or one that would be truly radical if it were not for the intrusions of politicians, journalists and commercialism generally. As an art form, satire has been commodified, a part of mainstream political media that often furthers mainstream values about freedom and democracy when it criticises politicians for being corrupt. Equally, however, satire is not so implicit in the system that it *is* the system, leaving nothing to be co-opted. Like other residual or emergent elements of a hegemony, satire possesses both oppositional and incorporated elements. To account

adequately for these diverse elements, more critical approaches, both satire's possibility for critique and its possibility of political co-option, must be acknowledged. Public and academic debates about satire should both take account of the way in which satire has already been incorporated into political media, and consider the implications of this for how we view politics and politicians who play along with satirists.

Notes

1. Since this chapter reviews a large body of literature, where a study is referred to as a whole, citations are made in-text, while specific citations appear in Notes. In both cases, for complete details, see the list of References.
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31. Jim McGuigan, *Cool Capitalism*, 2009, p. 38.
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36. Sonia Purnell, *Just Boris: The Irresistible Rise of a Political Celebrity*, 2011, p. 177.
37. Purnell, pp. 3, 212.
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CHAPTER 4

The Politics of Deadpan in Australasian Satire

Nicholas Holm

Amongst a raft of other mooted qualities, both Australian and New Zealand humour have traditionally been characterised as dry and understated,[1] descriptors that apply as much to their satire as to other manifestations of humour. In practice, this dryness tends to reveal itself in an affinity for modes of humour characterised by an absence of emotion or affect; that is, comic forms that are both passive and impassive, or "deadpan". By contrast, satire, as a form of (cultural) political practice, is usually figured in active or even aggressive terms: a manifestation of humour that identifies defects in its subject in order to enact change in the world. As Robert Phiddian has argued, "to construe a text as satirical is to construe it as making a point".[2] Consequently, to speak of deadpan satire is to invite accusations of categorical contradiction through the simultaneous evocation of active satirical and passive deadpan modes of humour.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent unlikeliness—not to mention the seeming unworkability—of such a combination, the designation of deadpan satire captures a prominent and important form of comic practice that, as this chapter sets out to show, is particularly prevalent in the

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Australasian context. While Australasia may not be able to claim sole ownership of deadpan satire, the mode is certainly widespread in the culture of both countries. This prevalence of deadpan satire in Australasian humour may perhaps be taken as indicating some Antipodean affinity for and perhaps even expertise in deadpan satire. At the very least, an analysis of deadpan satire in the Australasian context can provide a useful starting point on which an analysis of the wider transnational manifestation of this comic form might build. The goal here is to articulate how we might understand deadpan's relationship to satirical humour specifically in terms of three comic works that are broadly representative of Australasian deadpan satire: John Clarke and Bryan Dawe's parody interview series *Clarke and Dawe* (ABC 2011), Jon Safran's comedy documentary series *Race Relations* (ABC 2009) and Jemaine Clement and Bret McKenzie's musical comedy series *Flight of the Conchords* (HBO 2007–2009).[3] This examination will explore how the concept of deadpan satire not only helps in mapping the political work carried out by humour as an aesthetic category, but how it also speaks to the distinctive features of a Australasian politics of humour, where the deadpan and the satirical frequently collide and intersect in ways that complicate the conception of satire as a political aesthetic mode, particularly with relation to the attribution of political intention and aggression.

Humour in the Deadpan Mode

Defined in its narrowest and most literal sense, deadpan refers to an emotionless and expressionless presentation of self. Such a definition follows in straightforward manner from the term's etymology where "pan" is a now outdated US slang term for face, and "dead", in this context, refers figuratively to the static and unchanging nature of that face. Deadpan in its most basic sense is therefore primarily concerned with a performance style characterised by "a lack of expression (facial, vocal, bodily) or immobility".[4] Accordingly, in its specific application to humour, deadpan has predominantly referred to a particular style of comic acting in which humorous content is performed with a blank face and an unenthusiastic demeanour. This style of performance is famously associated with the silent films of Buster Keaton (1895–1966), while a list of more contemporary practitioners of deadpan might include John Cleese of *Fawlty Towers* (1975–1979) and *Monty Python* (1969–1974) fame, Larry David of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000–2011) and Aubrey

Plaza, who is most well known for her role in *Parks and Recreation* (2009–2015). To perform comedy in a deadpan manner is to present it in such a way that the presenter seems unaware of or uninterested in the underlying humour and its potential for amusing the audience. This introduces a fissure between the material and the means of presenting it, so that the performance seems to work against—or at least not with—the comic grain of the underlying content.

For the purposes of the current discussion, however, it is not sufficient that deadpan be narrowly understood solely in terms of performance. Rather, a wider and more conceptual account of deadpan is needed that takes into account both its relation to humour and the wider cultural politics involved and its potential to be spoken of in contexts beyond performance and rhetoric. In contrast to satire (the other central concept here under consideration, which has been the subject of sustained scholarly investigation and multiple attempts at definition[5]), the deadpan mode of humour has unfortunately received relatively little critical attention.[6] In those few instances when deadpan has been examined in some depth, it has been treated primarily in terms of two quite distinct and limited points of reference: contemporary art photography and Mark Twain.

In the case of photography, deadpan is defined as a "nonjudgemental approach" characterised by a "cool, detached and keenly sharp" style.[7] Deadpan photography is a style which emphasises technical perfection over human perspective, resulting in a distancing effect that denies the relevance of the photographer's subjective agency. In the second case, Twainian scholars identify the deadpan mode with Twain's account of a "humorous story" where "the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects there is anything funny about it".[8] Here, the deadpan mode speaks to a contrast between staid form and comic content, such that confirmation of the text's comic status remains difficult to pin down and therefore, as Bercovitch has it, the process of interpretation becomes unsettled and unsettling.[9] Drawing on both photographic and Twainian accounts, we can thus characterise deadpan more broadly as an aesthetic mode defined by a lack of the aesthetic and affective markers that conventionally help guide audience interpretation—not just facial cues and body movement and comportment, but a wide range of visual, linguistic and even audial markers. Deadpan thus emerges as more than just a matter of facial expression: it is better understood more broadly as a comic mode characterised by the muting and flattening of those formal, aesthetic elements that make it recognisably comic.

Such an understanding allows us to develop a more expansive model of deadpan that focuses not just on the mannerisms of actors, but embraces the other elements of a comic work that contribute to this flattening and recession of explicitly comic elements. In a televisual or filmic context, examples of these might be the use—or more correctly the absence—of a laugh track or a soundtrack; or the use of cinematographic and/or editing techniques that, instead of emphasising punchlines or absurdities, adopt a steady, but radically conventional perspective, such as that Brett Mills has identified in the contemporary British TV series *The Office*.[10] In terms of this model, even the shift from the conventional (and theatrically derived) three-camera sit-com set-up to the now increasingly dominant single-camera comedy format can be interpreted as removal of an expected institutional marker of the comic.

As noted above, this model of deadpan is not necessarily limited to visual media: for other media, it is also possible to consider how the presence or absence of or changes in formal aspects relative to particular forms might be interpreted as deadpan. Although space prohibits considering all the different ways in which deadpan might arise in all possible media forms, genres and institutional contexts, it would certainly be possible to undertake this work and to proffer a list of formal attributes relevant to the study of media such as literature, popular music, video games or comic books. Addressed in these broader terms, then, deadpan still bears a strong resemblance to its traditional focus on the human face, but now the interpretative priority that was previously focused on the minutiae of facial expression has expanded to take in the entire aesthetic capacity of the text. In effect, the formal aspects of the comic work now function as an extension of the face in providing or withholding comic cues.

The Politics of Flatness

As a consequence of its tendency towards obfuscation, deadpan tends to provide its audience with a lower level of information than is usually required for the straightforward confirmation of interpretation. In this regard, the deadpan can be seen to share a strong affinity with what Lauren Berlant refers to as "flat affect".[11] This returns us to a concern with facial cues and bodily comportment, but also points to the potential for a political aesthetics of the deadpan mode. As Berlant develops the concept, "flat affect" refers first and foremost to a recessive style or an apparent underperformance of emotion: a withdrawal from affective

intensity whereby the highs and lows of emotional engagement and expression are replaced by a steady, muted and seemingly blank engagement with the world.[12] Joy, grief, fear, elation, excitement and despair all give way to an unflappable and unchanging—that is, a flat and expressionless—presentation that does not provide sufficient information for an outside party to discern the subject's internal emotional state.[13] This refusal to confirm meaning, denying its possible aesthetic intervention in or contribution to ongoing conversations, indicates the familial resemblance of flat affect to deadpan as a form of performance characterised by the withdrawal or absence of interpretive information.[14]

Historically, flat affect has often been associated with psychopathology. This connection is implicit in discursive formations ranging from the original clinical use of the term "flat affect" as a symptom of depression or schizophrenia,[15] to more nebulous and everyday concerns about sullen, uncommunicating teenagers, not to mention the great bugaboo of late twentieth-century politics: apathy. Keen to rethink the politics of flat affect, Berlant argues that it should not be read simply as a passive retreat from the political terrain of affective life. Rather, she suggests that the recessive style of flat affect does not necessarily "point to something stuck, neutral, or withheld in relationality, a hesitation or a defence against presence",[16] but instead can also point towards an active participatory affective life that resists "melodramatic norms" and challenges the equation of intensity with importance.[17] Rearticulated in this manner, flat affect is not so much a refusal of emotion *tout court* as something more complex: a possible rejection of certain forms of melodrama and the affective intensities demanded by the dominant structure of feeling.[18] The idea of melodrama is of particular importance here, because (as Berlant's earlier work explores),[19] the melodramatic refers to a form of affective politics in which emotion is immediately transparent and melodrama therefore acts to console its audience by steering their emotional experiences into familiar categories. Flat affect's refusal of melodrama can thus be understood as a political act that protects the disruptively complex nature of emotions from being translated into the dominant conventions of contemporary feeling and thereby being explained, constrained and exhausted.[20] By withholding emotional display, flat affect leaves room for affective manoeuvrability by maintaining a state of suspension and holding resolution at bay.

The affective withdrawal found in flat affect finds a parallel in the aesthetic withdrawal of the deadpan. Just as flat affect may prevent emotions

from being translated into dominant genres of feeling, so deadpan as "flat humour" can impede any easy and immediate recognition of the text in terms of existing comic genres. This parallel provides the conceptual resources needed for re-thinking the political aesthetics of the deadpan mode. A key consequence of withdrawal is that deadpan can be understood not just as a muted form of humour but also as an intentionally elusive one, one that always threatens to withdraw its status as humour and thereby leave the laughing audience member high and dry, laughing at a joke that is not really there. This interpretive ambiguity ties back to the disconnection noted above between content and form, whereby the deadpan mode introduces uncertainty as to the comic nature of its base material by withholding expected performative or rhetorical cues. Furthermore, in its extreme forms, deadpan may be so ambiguous as to be almost imperceptible—or at least very difficult to confirm—as humour. As a result, the comic nature of deadpan humour is often missed, especially by those operating in an unfamiliar interpretive context. Flat affect and deadpan thus share a common resistance to generic resolution and to any easy and final understanding that would facilitate interpretative closure. Approached by way of the operations of flat affect, the deadpan mode can thus be re-conceptualised as an active intervention that refuses to fall straightforwardly into the conventional aesthetic categories by which humour is communicated and understood. More therefore than simply the passive counterpart of active satire, deadpan can be understood as an equally active comic mode that is orientated towards the prevention of closure and the retention of polysemy.

Deadpan Satire in the Australasian Context

Given this theoretical re-assessment of the political aesthetic possibilities of the deadpan mode, the question follows as to how these active politics might manifest in concrete instances, particularly in the combinatorial mode of deadpan with satire. As noted above, this question is particularly pertinent to Australasian examples, given the proposed cultural affinity with the deadpan satirical mode. Accounting for this widespread acceptance of deadpan, linguist Cliff Goddard argues that, at least in the Australian context, the adoption of such forms of humour stems from a national cultural inclination towards understated emotion and a challenge to "see through bullshit".[21] He points out that deadpan aligns

with this wider social attitude by way of an "ethnopragmatic" cultural script that takes the following form[22]:

a. sometimes someone says something to someone else,

    as if they think something about something when they don't think anything like this

   they don't do it because they want the other person to think that they think like this

b. when someone says something in this [deadpan] way, they can want to say something like this

    at the same time, not with words:
    "if you think about it, you can know that I can't think anything like this
    I know that I can say things like this to you because you are someone like me
    when I say this, I feel something good towards you now"

Based on this formulation, Goddard asserts that in the Australian context the deadpan mode expresses a gap between presentation and actual meaning (seen in Part a above) but also contributes to the formation of social solidarity through an expectation that the audience will be able to see through the interpretive ambiguity created by this gap (as in Part b). The aesthetic flattening found in deadpan thus becomes not simply a formal convention, but in the Australian context also a means for indirectly fostering social ties and cultural solidarity. Moreover, given the long and widely acknowledged colonial culture shared by Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand, Godard's model for interpreting Australian cultural norms can also be understood as broadly applicable to the Aotearoa-New Zealand context.

What, then, are the consequences for Australasian satire, which seems to have such affinity for the deadpan mode? Three key contemporary examples serve to illustrate the political aesthetic possibilities of deadpan satire in both countries: Episode 3 of John Safran's documentary TV series *Race Relations*; the "Drive By" episode of *The Flight of the Conchords* situation comedy, directed and written by Taika Waititi; and John Clarke's *Clarke and Dawe* TV interview series. Taken together, these examples span the Tasman Sea with Safran representing Australia,

the Conchords Aotearoa-New Zealand, and Clarke bridging to both by virtue of his current status as an Australia-based satirist whose upbringing and early career were in New Zealand. The three examples have the additional benefit of illustrating a range of manifestations of deadpan satire. They demonstrate both the flexibility of the form and the commonality of the fundamental political aesthetic concerns at play. The satirical nature of these three texts will be premised on the assumption that all three are always likely to be judged as satire, simply on the basis of their subjects—anti-Jewish propaganda, racism and political governance. As we shall see, "Drive By," *Race Relations* and *Clark and Dawe* all certainly appear to be saying *something*, even if the exact nature of that thing remains up for debate.

Deadpan Satire in Clarke and Dawe

The first example for analysis is *Clarke and Dawe*, which provides an example of deadpan satire in one of its simplest and most straightforward forms. The comedy of John Clarke (1948–2017) perfectly embodies the tradition of Australasian deadpan satire. Feted on both sides of the Tasman Ocean for his creative comic work in literature, theatre, film and television, Clarke built a career on the successful execution of variations on this theme, ranging from the rural stylings of his New Zealand farmer character Fred Dagg, who made brief appearances on the farming television show *Country Calendar*, and several comedy audio recordings in the 1970s, to the late 1990s acclaimed Australian mockumentary *The Games* (ABC TV Australia, 1998–2000). Indeed, throughout, Clarke demonstrated such mastery of deadpan satire that it could be argued he should take some personal credit for the form's Australasian prominence and success. His current final project, *Clarke and Dawe*, was a weekly mock-interview show where Clarke takes on the role of either an eminent or fictional figure in conversation with actor Bryan Dawe (b. 1948), who serves as his often stoic interlocutor or straight man. The interviews are short—usually less than 3 min long—and aired on the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) following the regular Thursday night news bulletin, as well as being posted online. The satirical nature of *Clarke and Dawe* is largely taken for granted: media coverage categorises the show as satire without explanation,[23] as if it were self-evidently satire by virtue of the show's frequent engagement with political figures and current affairs.

Indicating the centrality of the deadpan aesthetic to Clarke's work, the economical construction of *Clarke and Dawe* serves to highlight the formally deadpan aspects of the text. The set is starkly minimalist, consisting only of a black backdrop, and the show's editing consists of a simple repeated shot-reverse shot between the two sole actors who are shown seated, from the chest up. Even the length of an individual episode contributes to the deadpan nature of the text, with a short running-time of roughly two-and-a-half minutes prohibiting the development of any extended characterisation or development of discussion that might call for the provision of greater information or more expressiveness on the part of the actors. Such formal features not only replicate a toned-down version of the familiar TV current affairs interview format, but also construct a pervading sense of staid seriousness that is reinforced by the deadpan nature of the actors' performances. Regardless of the interview topic, the style of exchange between the two actors remains largely restricted to disarmingly casual chatter, which introduces a new level of flatness into the proceedings by refusing to moderate the conversational form in light of different subjects of discussion. Taking on a wide variety of roles in the series, Clarke never affects any change to his delivery or posture, and his costume changes consist of variations on a shirt, jacket and tie. Here, while deadpan is certainly evidenced in its wider terms and not just in acting style, the pared-back setting and editing works to focus attention on the flat performances of both Clarke and his respondent Dawe, making that aspect central to the deadpan aesthetic.

Overall in this series, there is an marked absence of comic cues: nothing in the formal aesthetic details of the scene presents the men's discussion as comic, nor is the content of the discussion itself blatantly comic, restricted as it is to evasive vagaries, non-sequiturs, extended metaphor and other subtle incongruities that flow seamlessly in and out of the conversation. Given such a dearth of normal aesthetic markers of the comic, it is difficult for an audience to interpret such a text as comic. As is evident from Fig. 4.1, the audience must either be primed with prior knowledge and context, or be particularly attuned to the subtle signs if they are to commit to a tenuous but possible comic reading.

Fig. 4.1 A typical example of John Clarke and Brian Dawe's deadpan aesthetic conveyed by Clarke's face. Still from the episode "Quantitative Easing" of *Clarke and Dawe*, aired 20 October 2011, ABC (Australia); YouTube video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2AvU2cfXRk (accessed 21 February 2016).

Deadpan Satire in Race Relations

A more complex form of deadpan is found in the second example, which is taken from *Jon Safran's Race Relations*, a 2009 TV series in which the Australian comic documentarian John Safran (b. 1972) addresses stigma around inter-racial romance and relationships. Safran has a long history as a comic provocateur who uses humour to address sensitive issues of political importance, and thus, like Clarke, he has frequently been referred to as a satirist. In the segment examined here, broadcast as part of the Episode 3 of the series, Safran, an Australian of Jewish descent, travels to Palestine in order to sing "If I Were a Rich Man" (from the well-known 1964 musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, depicting Yiddish-speaking Jews in Imperial Russia) to leading figures in the political organisations Fatah and Hamas, as well as to perform the song on air for the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC).[24] While the fundamental premise of this segment is deeply incongruous and almost inherently ridiculous, the formal presentation of Safran's attempts at fostering "inter-racial" harmony is presented in the flattened manner characteristic of the deadpan mode.

The sequence opens with Safran speaking directly to camera from the backseat of a car that is navigating the Israeli state security apparatus,

before providing location shots showing Safran entering Fatah headquarters dressed in cap and vest modelled on the costumes of the 1971 film adaptation of the musical, escorted by armed Palestinian military personnel. The associations of this outfit provide an opening sense of the flattened deadpan comedy of the sequence: the clothing is out of place, but not jarringly so, and the camera captures it in the same shaky handheld style as it did the Israeli security checkpoint and the militarised Palestinian compound. If there is any mood formally conveyed as Safran enters the building, it is a vague atmosphere of anxiety and tension as he is cautioned to be quiet by vaguely menacing figures, and the low-angle camera creates a sense of an imposing and claustrophobic environment. In contrast, the interview with the unnamed Palestinian functionary, "an advisor to [Palestinian President] Mahmood Abbas," is toneless, but in a genial if slightly awkward fashion. As a neutral re-creation of conventional interviewing conventions, the visual context here is reminiscent of *Clarke and Dawe*. When Safran sings his song, however, the deadpan nature of the sequence becomes truly evident. The action on screen is absurd—Safran, accompanied by a portable CD player, serenades a Palestinian politico while performing an awkward jerky dance with the flags of an embattled quasi-nation fluttering in the background (see Fig. 4.2). Both Safran and Abbas's advisor are captured in a bobbing

Fig. 4.2 Jon Safran performing his musical routine for a bemused high-ranking Hamas functionary. Still from Episode 3 of *Race Relations,* aired 4 November 2009, ABC (Australia); from a video owned by the author.

mid-shot—a movement which indicates that a handheld camera is being used, reinforced by an amateurish zoom-in on the advisor's face.

In formal terms, this approach to film making shares an affinity with the cinéma vérité school of documentary, a method that permits the documentarian a role as an active agent on-screen, but which retains a commitment to present the material recorded without further aesthetic modification or comment.[25] As a consequence of this commitment to aesthetic non-intervention, cinema verité shares the deadpan mode's rejection of formal manipulation as a means of framing on-screen action. The two thus have a common aesthetic purpose: to strip back all formal markers so that there is as little as possible to guide (or manipulate) the reaction of the audience. In this context, using the verité mode means there is almost no formal reinforcement of the comic nature of the scene.[26] This effect is compounded as Safran ups the stakes by moving from visiting Fatah to the more radical Hamas, and there repeats his song for a man who identifies himself as a former minister in the Hamas-led tenth Government of Palestine. This time Safran begins his song in a seated position, an arrangement that requires the camera to cut back and forth between the two men as if the song were simply an extension of a regular interview format. The reaction shots of the former Hamas minister reveal a face frozen between emotions, as if unsure whether the scene before him should be interpreted as a form of mockery, as the actions of a sincere fool, or as a case of inter-cultural miscommunication. The reaction is testament to the deadpan nature of Safran's performance. His oddly earnest commitment to his ludicrous plan is characteristic of much of his work and means that even those involved in the scene, let alone the viewer, are unable to lock down on any particular interpretation of the events that are occurring.

The sequence concludes when Safran decides "to spread [his] word to all the people of Palestine" by singing his song on a live PBC broadcast. Once again, he and his crew are shown negotiating passage with armed men in camouflage uniforms, before there is a cut-away to what appears to be a feed from a chat show. Here, Safran appears as a guest interviewee rather than an interloping interviewer. In a low-budget studio set, a polite, besuited host introduces Safran as a man who will sing a song about how to become rich; then Safran launches into the now familiar opening bars of "If I Were a Rich Man." This time, though, the

camera does not stay with the performance, but cuts away to a montage of people watching Safran's performance on televisions in different Palestinian homes and businesses. As with the previous audiences, these people appear in equal parts vaguely bemused and quietly suspicious about Safran's shaky rendition. Their faces are shaped by hints of smiles or frowns as they impassively witness his apparently sincere musical routine. Their undecided emotional responses make them seem to be waiting for an additional piece of information that would allow them finally to interpret the meaning of the performance as either insult, idiocy or entertainment; but this never comes. This indecision echoes that of the wider audience of Safran's deadpan performance: even though the flattened verité presentation withholds interpretive confirmation, it nonetheless does not appear to challenge the idea that this presentation must mean *something*. Thus, despite the flat aesthetic, the text retains the promise of a purpose—the promise of satire. In part, this is because of the context and subject of this sequence. Indeed, it may not be possible for any comic statement to be made about Palestine-Israel at the current moment without a message of some sort being attributed to it. Even so, in this case, it remains unclear quite what such a purpose might be, indicating the peculiar ambiguity of the deadpan satirical mode.

Deadpan Satire in Flight of the Conchords

The final example increases in complexity by moving from the "real" context of documentary to the entirely constructed world of fiction and thereby introducing another level of potential aesthetic intervention. Although the *Flight of the Conchords* series was produced in the USA with funding from the US cable company HBO, which certainly raises some questions about its "authentic New Zealand-ness", the show has previously been interpreted by previous scholars as an un-problematically New Zealand work.[27] On those grounds, it is nonetheless included here as an example of Aotearoa-New Zealand and thus Australasian deadpan satire. The rationale for its inclusion is not only that the show is thematically concerned with the cultural clash of two pākehā—New Zealanders who are not Maori—folk musicians (Bret and Jemaine) trying to find success in New York City, but also that the episode in question, "Drive By," is written and directed by Taika Waititi (b. 1975). Waititi is a noted comedian in Aotearoa-New Zealand who is also responsible for the deadpan films *Eagle vs. Shark* (2007), *Boy* (2010) and *What We Do in*

the Shadows (2013). In addition, "Drive By" is one of the more markedly satirical episodes of the series, which, although generally deadpan in a fairly self-evident manner, could not always be described as satirical without stretching that term to its limits. In this episode, the *Conchords*' two young protagonists become embroiled in a conflict with a racist fruit vendor in New York City who refuses to sell to them because they are New Zealanders. The ensuing quarrel provides a forum for exploring questions of racial identity and racism in a comic manner and thus, in a manner similar to *Race Relations*, "Drive By" enters into the territory of satire when it addresses through humour issues that attract social tension and debate.

The scene of particular interest for this analysis occurs roughly two-thirds of the way through the episode, when the fruit-vendor, Sanjay, confronts Bret and Jermaine at their apartment. Prior to his arrival, Bret and Jemaine have been discussing with their American friend Dave, ways to gain revenge on Sanjay. This conversation maps the ebbs and flows of deadpan possible in the text through contrasting the American and New Zealand characters: Dave is not only more animated in his delivery and presence, but more outlandish in his suggestions for revenge, including framing Sanjay for murder. In contrast, Bret suggests sending Sanjay a letter and Jemaine is keen on "thinking mean thoughts" about him. These differences are indicative of the way in which the deadpan mode can manifest unevenly across a text where a flattened comic aesthetic is interrupted occasionally by more explicit comedy. These serve to emphasise the deadpan aspects as "Drive By" (and *Conchords* generally) moves back and forth between the two modes of comedy. Their conversation is interrupted, however, when Sanjay is heard yelling insults at them in the street below the window. Although considered in the abstract, the subsequent exchange through the window as Jemaine and Bret trade insults with Sanjay (shown in Fig. 4.3) may seem dramatic, the actual execution of the sequence exemplifies the flattening effect of the deadpan mode, as we shall see.

In the fictional context of *Conchords*, these deadpan aesthetics manifest primarily as a form of dull realism. Thus, as Brett and Jemaine trade ineffectual barbs with Sanjay, the scene's potential drama is undercut by the sequence's flattened formal aspects in terms of acting, dialogue, sound editing and mise-en-scène. As with the previous examples, the main characters' inexpressive performance certainly plays a part: the

Fig. 4.3 Bret (played by Bret McKenzie, at window) and Jemaine (Jemaine Clement, facing) respond to abuse from a racist heckler on the sidewalk. Still from Drive By, Episode 7 of *Flight of the Conchords*, aired 29 July 2007, HBO (USA); from a video owned by the author.

"straight-faced matter-of-factness" that characterises the principal actors' performances as well as their characters' demeanours diminishes the inherent drama of the scene.[28] If comedy is often a matter of hyperbole, here the retreat from exaggeration towards understatement withdraws clear markers of humour.

The flatness of the sequence is not limited to the actor's style—focusing on acting alone would miss the way in which aspects of the scene itself contribute to the deadpan mode. For example, the flatness of the characters' expressions is matched by that of the light and by the generally drab mise-en-scène, dominated by the light browns and faded oranges of Bret and Jermain's apartment and the greys of the pavement below. In addition, the sequence's soundscape is marked by the unobtrusive but distinct rumble of street noise that forms an aural complement to the drab colour scheme. Both visually and sonically, the sequence is almost aggressively unremarkable: there are no elements that are glamorous or unusual. The cinematography also contributes to this impression

by taking up point-of-view shots of the two sides of the argument. While in other contexts this balanced treatment might promote identification with one or other of the parties concerned, here it leads to the opposite by emphasising the audience's impression of distance from the action. Finally, the content of the abuse itself is also understated: Sanjay's insults are far from incisive barbs, but rather broad truisms ("New Zealanders all have tartar on their teeth"), or out-of-place clichés ("Are you guys bungee-jumping up there?") and oddly clinical statements ("New Zealanders are all unhygienic"). Unlike the zingers that constitute the abuse humour of many contemporary sitcoms, these exchanges fall absolutely flat. Using Berlant's terminology, the accumulation of these different aspects to the scene serves to withhold the customary confirmation that what is presented on screen is meant to be interpreted as comedy. Instead, the sequence flirts with the mundane in a way that impedes the actions from immediately translating into a clearly recognisable comedic genre.

The Political Aesthetics of Deadpan Satire

This extended analysis of the three examples bears out how the deadpan mode withholds confirmation of their comic nature and thereby unsettles any easy attempt to interpret them in terms of humour. It is this aesthetic of resistance that most immediately complicates deadpan's relation to the satirical aspects of these texts. By withholding confirmation—or more precisely the formal markers by which the text announces itself as humour—deadpan impedes satire's essential ability to express purpose (usually critical purpose) through humour. If even comic confirmation of the text is difficult, this is all the more so for the delivery of any larger point to be made, because the lack of semiotic traction in the aesthetic flatness prevents a reader from inferring a clear and stable satirical message. At the same time, though, these texts remain satirical in some sense; that is to say, they evidently have a purpose and are making a point about their topics, even if the point is not always clear. Thus, in the context of satire, the act of withholding comic confirmation becomes particularly fraught, since not only is the comic status of the text in some doubt, but so also is the audience's ability to infer any purpose, point or politics behind the humour. The aesthetic withdrawal that characterises deadpan thus acts at cross-purposes to satire's purposefulness,

threatening to make it difficult if not impossible to conceive of the politics of deadpan comedy. In its flatness, the deadpan mode unsettles and possibly even prevents clear attribution of satirical qualities to a comic text: the aesthetic withdrawal that characterises deadpan acts at cross-purposes to satire's purposefulness, threatening to make it impossible to conceive of any possible politics of deadpan comedy.

Thus, the first conclusion about the politics of this deadpan mode of satire is that, although the perception of satire arises from the charged nature of the subjects being addressed, deadpan's flattening aesthetic renders unclear what exactly is being said about those subjects. Consequently, contrary to commonplace models of satire as an inherently pointed form of humour, when allayed with deadpan, satire constitutes neither a passionate denunciation nor a ferocious mocking. Instead, robbed of its clarity, this satire leaves us with the impression of a purpose but not of a direction. Understood this way, deadpan satire updates Fredric Jameson's oft-repeated assertion that in postmodernity, parody passes into pastiche.[29] Contrary to Jameson, however, it is not pastiche that dominates post-modern humour, but an increasingly prevalent deadpan mode. This does the equivalent work of refusing to guarantee a singular interpretation of a comic point, and, even before that, to indicate the precise comic nature of the point.

This retreat from clarity robs such satire of the political possibilities often ascribed to pointed humour. Lauded as a form of critique or dissent, an eruption of the discombobulating carnival spirit, satire often appears to exemplify a critical cultural politics. This is far from the case when satire works in conjunction with deadpan. Robbed of its certainty, satire is forced to abandon its claim to anarchic liberation, denying the frequently heard but too easy assertion that humour always challenges something somehow. Deadpan satire not only refuses to present its points with clarity, it also (perhaps this amounts to a definition) refuses to present them with passion. Its restraint thus undermines the equation of humour with a politics of challenge and, through its pronounced disengagement, shies away from any broad claim to political efficacy. This is not to say that deadpan satire does not engage with politics, but that if and when it does, it does so in a relatively quiet, apologetically indirect manner.

Perhaps this invocation of indirectness is a political tradition by which we could potentially define the cultural politics of much Australasian

humour. Certainly, in the cultural context of Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand, it is a far from undesirable and unflattering designation and potentially speaks of a productive form of local politics. However, such a self-congratulatory conclusion is not my intention here. After all, Berlant's notion of flat affect from which I have taken inspiration is directly opposed to a melodramatic cultural politics, reflecting the US context of its genesis. Although Australasia certainly has much in common with the USA, there are strong differences in attitudes to emotional display and sentimentality. Thus, while the concept of flatness is useful for conceptualisation, when comparisons are drawn between the USA and Australasia, such national-cultural differences need to be born in mind. Australasia is a cultural and social space specifically framed against sentimentality and one in which deadpan cannot therefore automatically be evidence of resistance, but instead can be seen as reflecting a certain hegemonic commitment to the withholding of emotion.

In such a context, aesthetic and affective restraint may be less a political statement than a fact of life. While deadpan satire may lack the heroic flourish so often ascribed to satirical politics, nonetheless it will often find a wide, sympathetic and aware audience, indicating that the lack of explicit cues does not necessarily impede its successful interpretation. This observation harks back to Goddard's characterisation of Australasian deadpan in which its widespread adoption indicates a high level of interpretive facility among community members, allowing recognition even in ambiguous circumstances. It follows that the withdrawal of clear aesthetic markers does not necessarily reflect a political refusal to be pinned down into conventional, dominant genres, but can also indicate that the conventional structures of humour combined with deadpan are so tightly bound up with Australasian culture that there is little need to flag them for cultural insiders. The political aesthetics of deadpan satire are thus poised between a heroic refusal of interpretive demands and an accomplished dominance that erases the need for clear formal demarcation for those who are already in on the joke. The confluence of satire and deadpan in Australasia, then, is certainly not an evacuation of politics, nor a zone of automatically progressive political work: it needs to be understood and approached as a complex political site, where meaning and interpretation always remain "up for grabs", albeit in a particularly, perhaps peculiarly, passionless way.

Notes

1. John Clarke, "Wit and Humour", 2009, pp. 18–93; Caroline Harker, "Humour", 2013; John McCallum, "Cringe and Strut: Comedy and National Identity in Post-War Australia", 1998, p. 206; Cliff Goddard, "'Lift your Game Martina!' Deadpan Jocular Irony and the Ethnopragmatics of Australian English", 2006, p. 86.
2. Robert Phiddian, "Satire and the Limits of Literary Theory", 2013, p. 49.
3. For TV series and films, name of broadcaster (where relevant) and original year/s of screening are given. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is an Australian public broadcaster; Home Box Office (HBO) is a commercial US cable and satellite broadcaster.
4. Donna Perbedy, "'I'm just a character in your film': Acting and Performance from Autism to Zissou", 2012, p. 56.
5. Cf. Conal Condren, "Satire and Definition", 2012; Conal Condren et al., "Defining Parody and Satire", 2008; Leonard Feinberg, *Introduction to Satire*, 1967; Dustin Griffin, *Satire*, 2015; Gilbert Highet, *Anatomy of Satire*, 2015 [1962] and George A. Test, *Satire*, 1991.
6. No doubt this disparity is partly motivated by satire's affiliation with a rich tradition of classical verse and eighteenth-century prose, while deadpan's early associations with late vaudeville and silent film afford it no such high-culture cachet. Consequently, while satire has a long history of academic—particularly literary—study, there have been markedly fewer attempts to define and unpack deadpan humour as a category.
7. Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, 2009, p. 81; Aron Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography", 2009, p. 854.
8. The quotation is from Mark Twain, "How to Tell a Story", 2008 [1897], p. 5; representative Twainian studies of deadpan are: Sacvan Bercovitch, "Deadpan Huck", 2002, pp. 91–4; Jennifer A. Greenhill, "Winslow Homer and the Mechanics of Visual Deadpan", 2009, p. 380 and Randall Knoper, *Acting Naturally: Mark Twain in the Culture of Performance*, 1995, p. 55.
9. Bercovitch, "Deadpan Huck", pp. 99–106.
10. Brett Mills, "Comedy Verite: Contemporary Sitcom Form", 2004, p. 72.
11. Lauren Berlant, "Structures of Unfeeling: *Mysterious Skin*", 2015, p. 193.
12. Berlant, "Structures of Unfeeling", p. 195.
13. Robbie Duschinsky and Emma Wilson, "Flat Affect, Joyful Politics and Enthralled Attachments: Engaging with the Work of Lauren Berlant", 2015, p. 185.
14. Berlant, "Structures of Unfeeling", p. 197.

15. Duschinsky and Wilson, "Flat Affect, Joyful Politics and Enthralled Attachments", (2015), p. 185.
16. Berlant, "Structures of Unfeeling", p. 195.
17. Berlant, p. 193.
18. Ibid.
19. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2011, pp. 34, 157–8.
20. Berlant, "Structures of Unfeeling", p. 195.
21. Goddard, "'Lift your Game Martina!'", 2006, p. 89.
22. Goddard, p. 88.
23. E.g. Andrew McMillen, "Clarke & Dawe: In the Line of Political Satire", 2015; and Matthew Knott, "Will Clarke and Dawe be Shown the Door? ABC Duo Face Uncertain Future", 2012.
24. The rationale for Safran's singing crusade arises from a real interview with self-declared ex-terrorist Walid Shoebat, a Palestinian American. In the interview, where Safran and Shoebat discuss the origin of anti-Jewish sentiment amongst Palestinian youth, Shoebat recounts both anti-Jewish propaganda in his early education in Palestinian, and his later realisation—after watching *Fiddler on the Roof*—that Jews were people too. From this story, Safran concludes that the *Fiddler* music possesses the power to foster amicable relations between the Jewish and Palestinian people: hence his decision to perform the song for Palestinian political leaders and the PBC.
25. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 1991, p. 44.
26. There are, however a few exceptions in this clip to this verité mode. Halfway through Safran's song, an intertitle appears that reads "two minutes later", and the action cuts to the end of the song. The necessity of this intervention is evident from the time constraints posed by a three-minute song sung three times in a thirty minute show, but it is also produces a comic compression of time. In addition, Safran offers commentary during transition sequences—a break with the tradition of verité. These sequences are not included in the current analysis.
27. Andy Gibson, "*Flight of the Conchords*: Recontextualizing the Voices of Popular Culture", 2011, pp. 606–7; and Mike Lloyd, "When Jemaine Met Keitha: *Flight of the Conchords* Tackle Australia", 2011, p. 415.
28. Gibson, p. 607.
29. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, p. 17.

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CHAPTER 5

Towards a Discipline of Political Cartoon Studies: Mapping the Field

Khin Wee Chen, Robert Phiddian and Ronald Stewart

While there is a steadily growing body of research on editorial cartooning, the study of political cartoons is fragmented theoretically, exists largely on the fringes of research in political communication, and is well recognised as lacking a framework belonging to any specific discipline.[1] As one study puts it, "[c]artoons can be seen as artistic work, historical documents, forms of humor or satire (analogous to literature), and as artefacts of journalism history, as well as rhetorical texts. Perhaps it is the multi-dimensional aspect of political cartoons that has constrained their study. This aspect also compels study".[2]

Since Edwards wrote this, the study of cartoons has grown, but too often within separate silos where researchers have re-invented wheels for

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want of sufficient cross-disciplinary knowledge of other developments. Consequently, the field in general has not gained the depth and coherence it would need to provide effective commentary on, for example, the disparate cross-cultural significances of the cartoons involved in the *Charlie Hebdo* murders of 2015. This survey attempts to map the field of political cartooning and serve as a guide to what researchers in various subfields are doing, and to enable better integration of findings. The authors do not claim these categories as rigid demarcations, since many of the studies considered overlap. As pointed out elsewhere,[3] taxonomies of this kind can only be justified on heuristic grounds since they always require interpretive judgement; but they can provide a useful frame for discussion among future researchers.

Scope and Definitions

It is worth emphasising that this is not a survey of work on cartoon art, nor of political satire in the general sense. Nor does it seek to map or predict current developments in visual political satire on rapidly changing digital platforms. "Political" is interpreted in a fairly narrow sense as involving electoral politics (e.g. cartoons of election campaigns), controversies with direct political impact (e.g. the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed), or issues with direct public policy implications (e.g. "women's liberation" cartoons). While we do not dispute the validity of studying (to invent an example) "the cultural politics of bourgeois sensibility in *Peanuts* cartoons", such a study would lie outside the practical scope of our analysis. Also, by "cartoon" we mean—classically—the editorial cartoon in newspapers, as developed from the later nineteenth through the twentieth century, and its derivatives, which include political caricature and some examples of pocket and strip cartoons. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it would be ridiculous to confine our attention strictly to material on cartoons in printed newspapers and journals, but our focus is work broadly derived from that tradition. Moving images, mash-ups and the multiple possibilities encouraged by rapid developments in digital technologies lie at the edge of our attention. Clearly, neat distinctions between hand-drawn, still-photo and film images are currently becoming untenable, but the field described here is anchored in (if not absolutely limited by) the newspaper-based tradition of the editorial cartoon.

One discipline area laying claim to the study of such political cartoons is the emergent interdisciplinary field of comics studies, now rapidly swelling and boasting at least seven peer-reviewed journals, its own

discussion forums, conferences, and introductory texts and collected essay readers aimed at both students and researchers. There are a number of reasons to consider this a legitimate claim of possession: political cartoons and comics have some interlinked history, sharing newspapers as a location of early development, and they share many formal features in their use of text and image, methods of representation and drawing techniques. Indeed, a number of practitioners have worked in both political cartoons and serialised comic strips (e.g. Winsor McCay, Walt Kelly, Jim Russell, and more recently Jeff MacNelly and Lalo Alcaraz). A few editorial cartoonists have even created graphic novels (e.g. Matt Borrs, Jules Feiffer and Stephanie McMillan). Moreover, an increasing number of editorial cartoonists—often those working for weekly or "alternative" news publications—regularly create multi-panel political cartoons, for instance Steve Bell, Ted Rall, Jen Sorensen, Ward Sutton, Tom Tomorrow, Kevin Kallaugher (KAL), and the late Jean Cabut (Cabu).[4] A small number of comic strips that satirise and comment on current politics within longer serialised story arcs, such as *Pogo*, *Li'l Abner*, *Bloom County*, *Boondocks* and *Doonesbury*, also blur any firm distinction between the traditionally single-panel political cartoon located on editorial or opinion pages, and the narrative comics of the newspaper funnies pages or comic books. The fact that, since the 1970s, US cartoonist Gary Trudeau's *Doonesbury* strip has been shuttled numerous times by newspaper editors between these positions is testament to this.[5] This kind of strip certainly fits within the scope of political cartoon studies.

With such a degree of overlap in history, form and practice, it is not surprising that research on political cartoons has been done by a number of comics scholars, to name just a few: El Refaie, Forceville, Lent, Soper and Worcester. Recent edited volumes in comics studies have also included research on political cartoons (e.g. Heer and Worcester 2009; Lent 2009, 2014; Bramlett 2012; Smith and Duncan 2012; Howard and Jackson 2013; Chute and Jagoda 2014), and its study has been welcomed at The International Comics Art Forum's annual conferences in the US, as well as at the Comics Forum 2015 conference in the UK. Some of the peer-reviewed comics studies journals (*ImageTexT*, *European Comic Art*, and *The Comics Grid*, along with the non-peer-reviewed forum, *International Journal of Comic Art*), have published academic papers, interviews and essays relating to political caricature and cartoon.

Nevertheless, the number of research papers on political cartoons within comics studies as a whole is actually quite small and their position within the field is not surely situated. This is due in part to varying

notions of the proper subject of comics studies: the mostly single-panel political cartoon seems excluded by the stated aims and scope of many comics studies conferences and publications since they focus on sequential art, as Hatfield has noted.[6] One clear example of this type of omission is the statement of aims and scope for the journal *Studies in Comics*, and another appears in Duncan and Smith's introductory text for comic art studies courses.[7] Moreover, even when political cartoons are included, the overwhelming focus of interest is still multi-panel narratives, identity and comics-specific genres (e.g. superheroes and manga), leaving engagement with the world of predominantly single-panel editorial cartoons and their concern with electoral politics as a small and peripheral presence. As a result, no genuine dialogue on political cartoon research, its methodology and problems, has developed within comics studies. In fact, most academic papers produced today on political cartoons are still to be found scattered across other fields, from political science and media studies, to history, art and beyond. The complexity and wide distribution of the field is visible in the selection of studies shown in Fig. 5.1.

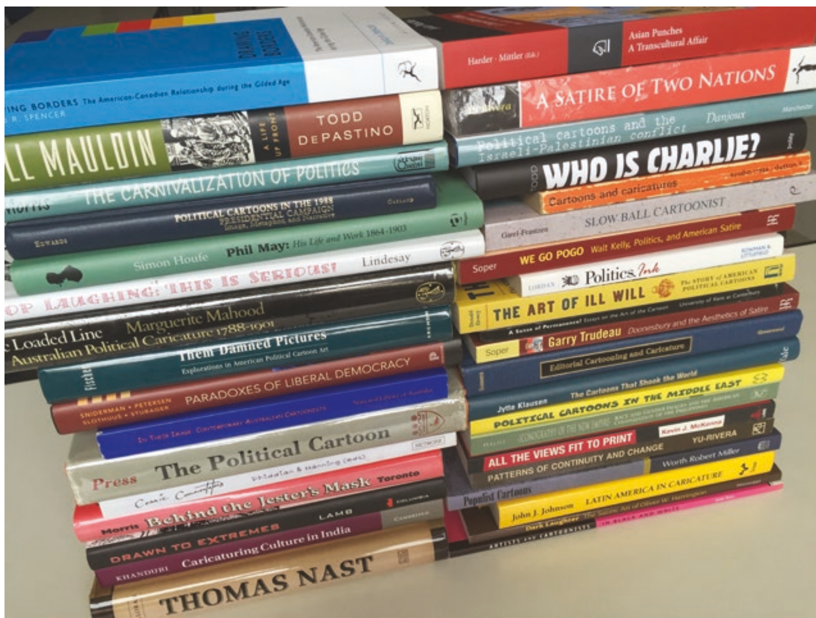

Fig. 5.1 A wide-ranging collection of studies on political cartoons. Photograph by Ronald Stewart, from his personal collection, August 2016.

In order to deepen their research, scholars of political cartoons need more dedicated publications and forums to debate ideas and terms, refine methodologies and exchange information. Should this be a push for a firmer footing within comics studies, or within another particular discipline? Or should the aim be to become an independent field? Perhaps a first step would be finding a widely accepted name—just as comics studies now has—to create a rallying flag around which a field might gather. But what should the study of political cartoons be called? Also essential for developing the field are some broadly accepted definitions of basic terms, to ensure that when scholars do have cross-discipline dialogue they are not talking at cross purposes. These are things to ponder during a review of the range of past studies.

Literature Review

This review covers 144 studies, 92 of which form the backbone of our meta-study. They can be allocated, with some duplication, to six major sections: meta-studies of political cartoons, the properties of political cartoons, political cartoons' function as a cultural mirror, political cartoons' impact, audience reception, and the political cartoon ecosystem. This survey is not exhaustive and only considers studies in English, so it may not fully reflect all international trends. It is, however, sufficiently extensive to give an overview of the Anglophone scholarship with a high degree of probable validity, both for the categorisation proposed and for the comparative orders of magnitude of the numbers (if not the precise percentages) which are proposed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Studies of political cartooning by sub-field

Sub-field	*Number of studies*	*Percentages(%)*
Meta-studies of political cartoons	15	16
The properties of political cartoons	49	53
Political cartoon as a cultural mirror	40	43.5
The impact of political cartoons	19	21
Audience reception	15	16
Political cartoon ecosystem	22	24
Totals	160	*173.5

*Note: Figure exceeds 100% because many studies are counted in more than one sub-field. The numbers provide an heuristic device to give an overview of the field rather than to claim statistical precision. The categorisation process being necessarily subjective and interpretative, other researchers might arrive at somewhat different percentages. Quantification is thus indicative rather than definitive.

Meta-Studies of Political Cartoons

A logical starting point is to examine how researchers themselves have conceptualised political cartoon research, resulting in studies we have classed as meta-studies of political cartoons. Some 15 of the 92 papers surveyed (making up approximately 16%) concern the methodology, approaches and theories for political cartoon research. In the 1960s, modern researchers such as Alba (1967) and Coupe (1967) adopted a historiographical and sociological approach to explore relationships between political conflict and political caricature; but this is criticised by Streicher (1967) as lacking a conceptual framework and thus causing problems in the analyses. Streicher called for a general theory of political caricature covering four distinct aspects: the nature of political caricature, the caricaturist, the publisher of caricature and caricature's reading and viewing publics. Coupe (1969) responded that more empirical data are needed before such theorisation is possible, arguing that while the purpose of political cartoons clearly is to create or manipulate public opinion, their actual effects—especially on the original viewers—are not knowable. He also noted the lack of a universally accepted definition of caricature. Carey criticises these early sociological studies of cartoon production and consumption for failing to take into consideration the social contexts, social identity and ideological positions of the viewers of cartoons. Instead, they tended to take a "transportation view of communication",[8] supposing that a stable comic or satiric message is reliably conveyed through the visual form of the cartoons. Barthes' influential 1964 discussion of images extends beyond such naïve hermeneutic assumptions to an understanding of cartoons by applying a theory of text–image relationships in which images are viewed as polysemous (possessing a "floating chain" of things signified) while accompanying linguistic messages act to "anchor" (fix) and, particularly for cartoons, to "relay" (extend) meanings for the reader.[9]

Press (1981) offers four different aspects of political cartoons: focus on the subject matter and characters referred to in cartoons; study of the mechanics of cartoons; examination of the references to historical events and individuals; and the political setting that the cartoonists are located within as well as the pressures exerted upon them. His categorisation hinges on assessment of rhetorical purpose. Consequently, he

distinguishes between cartoons that are merely making *social comments* and those that more deliberately make *political statements*. Manning and Phiddian (2004) expand Press' framework into the four categories of Descriptive Cartoons, which are not overtly political and tend to state the obvious; Laughing Satiricals, which carry corrective tones that can be found in political debates of any "stable liberal democratic countries"; Savagely Indignants, which have a more urgent tone and "seek revision of the world" while falling short of calling for a revolution; and Destructive Satiricals which move towards a demand for revolution and are rarely found in the mainstream media.[10]

Recent studies by Emmison and Smith (2000) and by Emmison et al. (2012) conceptualise cartoons as part of two-dimensional (as opposed to three-dimensional) visual data, as well as lived and living forms of visual data. Giarelli and Tulman (2003) argue that cartoons, being actual social artefacts, have a higher claim to truth, and arguably to a superior representativeness than opinion polls (which, they claim, are invariably constructed and do not report actual public opinion). They also examine problems with sample selection, data collection, sources of measurement error, analysis of constructed images and researcher bias. Walker (2003) proposes two approaches for cartoon research. One is to "use indicators such as the subject portrayed, the source for the cartoon, the political regime and the corporate relations to contextualise the relationship between the media ownership, newspaper circulation and political regime".[11] The second approach is to use the four rhetorical devices isolated by Morris (1993): condensation, juxtaposition, opposition and domestication. The first three of these—condensation, juxtaposition, opposition—are borrowed from Gombrich's "The Cartoonist's Armory", while the fourth—domestication—is adapted from Goffman (1974).[12] In addition, Townsend et al. (2008) propose a four-part conceptual framework for coding content: Business Power, Government Approach, Responses and Future of Society.[13] Conners' (2005) analysis of US presidential campaign cartoons draws from both Medhurst and DeSousa's (1981) "major inventional topoi" taxonomy and Morris' (1993) use of condensation in cartoon analysis. Conners' study reapplies Edwards' (2001) operational definitions quoted earlier.

A full synthesis of these various ways of conceptualising the field is beyond the scope of the present survey. It suffices to note that these

analyses demonstrate the broad problem of fragmentation that we have identified. They do not reliably speak to each other and they conceive the field in incompatible ways, often reflecting the disciplinary bases of the various researchers. Frames vary, depending on whether political cartoons are seen as explicable primarily in terms of form, of perception or of socio-political function. Even more fundamentally, approaches are split on how they address the question, “Are cartoons art or are they message?” The present situation is thus, frankly, messy. It is our hope that collecting the different sorts of approach together in this survey will allow a more robust basis for mutually intelligible taxonomies of cartooning form and purpose to emerge.

The Properties of Political Cartoons: Nature, Function and Mechanism

Studies in this next category address formal and practical aspects of the nature and function of political cartoons. Since an effective combination of form and function is necessary for political cartoons to work, these two are almost invariably interconnected in such studies, which comprise around 53% of our corpus.

In discussing the nature and mechanisms of political cartoons, the term “caricature” is often used to label a cartoonist’s mode of expression rather than the cartoons themselves. As noted above, as far back as 1969, Coupe found it problematic that the conception of caricature varied so much among scholars.[14] This problem, along with the confusion it can cause, still prevails today. While “caricature” is used by many as a generic term for political cartoons, other uses of the word are more specific. Historians use it to locate political cartoons in a past when the term was predominant, such as when writing about nineteenth-century French satirical prints. Art and literature scholars can use it to refer to exaggerated representations. Both for scientists studying facial recognition and for cartoonists talking about their work, caricature often refers specifically to exaggerated facial likenesses. This variety of uses—often with no explicit explanation provided—has sometimes led to a collapsing of multiple meanings into a single muddled conception when scholars have drawn without due caution on past research from differing disciplines. Among the papers surveyed here, such grades of difference and confusion are apparent.

Caricature, according to art theorist and perceptual psychologist Rudolf Arnheim (1983), is an expression by "deviation" which can be investigated through a qualitative analysis of perceptual effects of physiognomic deviation. Murrell sees "truthful misrepresentation"[15] as the nature of cartoons which distil a person's traits or essence. Gombrich (1985 [1963]) traces the origins of "caricature portraits" in the "the so-called science of physiognomics" by which animal character traits could be ascribed to people by the shape of their faces. The modern cartoonist, he believes, finds it useful for its ability to extend an "equation into a virtual fusion" by associating a targeted person with the traits of something else and merging the two forms.[16] Hillier (1970) views cartoons as intrinsically negative uses of lies to distort and exaggerate: like parasites, they prey on cultural figures. Mazid (2008) cites approvingly Cuff's (1945) assertion that political cartoons must have a "[s]parkling wit, basic element of fact and a didactic or editorial purpose" in order to work.[17] Doug Marlette is one of many practitioner cartoonists to dip into the debate on the nature of their art.[18] He sees cartoons as inherently "unruly, tasteless and immature", things that bring out "if not the ayatollah, at least the disapproving parent in even the most permissive of adults".[19] A study by Bal, Pitt, Berthon and DesAutels, although it fails to differentiate between uses of the word "caricature" when discussing past research, does attempt to highlight how political cartoons exploit the obvious grotesque features of leaders in order to attack their image. To do this, they use a theory of caricature "to analyse and explain the nature of—and reactions to—a controversial political cartoon", identifying three conditions deemed necessary for a cartoon to work. These are *sympathy* (the audience must identify with the satirical target), *gap* (a perceivable gap between image and reality that the audience must fill) and *differentiation* (where caricatures must possess unique physical or ideological attributes).[20]

Concepts of rhetoric have also been found useful by scholars examining the workings of cartoons. Medhurst and DeSousa argue that the political cartoon is the visual equivalent of oral rhetoric and therefore employs the same "neo-classical canons of memory and delivery",[21] such as the invention of content, the arrangement of elements for specific effects and the stylisation of presentation adhering to artistic principles and delivery. They propose four key resources available to the

caricaturist: political commonplaces; literary or cultural allusions; personal character traits; and idiosyncratic and transient situations. Cahn (1984) views cartoons as visual communications that rely on universally understood visual properties, while Bostdorff (1987) suggests using Kenneth Burke's (1969) theory of rhetoric to understand their rhetorical functions. Edwards and Winkler (1997) translate the notion of ideograph to this visual medium, whereby a recurring form—usually an abstracted quality of an image—is used as a symbol. Kelley-Romano and Westgate (2007) note that the study of rhetoric generally focuses more on *apologia* (rhetoric in response to accusations) and less on *kategoria* (the rhetoric of accusation).[22] By their very nature, political cartoons predominantly fall into the latter, less-studied category.

Satire theory, with its focus on moral purpose, provides another frame through which to understand political cartoons. Satire's primary conscious purpose, according to Griffin, is to clearly "demarcate vice from virtue".[23] Koelble and Robins thus propose that by using satire, political cartoons act as moral mirrors.[24] This is a major function that warrants its own section later in this discussion, but it is worth noting here that satire does moralise, whether or not its moralising is effectively moral: consider the disparate ethical statuses of satires in 1930s Germany on the Nazis compared to those on Jews. Morris (1992) tests the hypothesis put forward by Charles Press to distinguish between high, medium and low satire, concluding that political cartoons are high satire. In low satire, a cartoonist selectively targets an individual or a political party—usually in line with the ideology of the owners of newspapers; medium satire views all forms of the democratic decision-making process as something to be mocked; and in high satire, all leaders and forms of decision making are targets for indiscriminate mocking.[25]

Townsend et al. (2008) investigate two specific areas of political cartoon satire. Using the terms of Descriptive Analysis, they examine Australian political cartoons for their "tone" and "content" (the categories articulated by Manning and Phiddian). They draw a similar conclusion to Morris', finding that these cartoons are never simply Descriptive but mostly fall into the camps of Laughing Satirical and Savage Indignation.[26] Edwards and Ware (2005) use cartoons to examine how constructive debate is stimulated. The 2009 case study by Bal, Pitt, Berthon and DesAutels of cartoons of Jacob Zuma (President of South Africa, 2007–) illustrates how satire in this form can be used to attack a political brand.

The linguistic turn, ushered into humanities and social sciences by structuralist and post-structuralist theories, was evidently slow to impact political cartoon studies. Despite Barthes' early 1964 theory of text-image relations—in which he explicitly makes a link to cartoons, a theory later criticised as too unidirectional—linguistic approaches did not really take root until the 1990s. An example is Morris' (1987, 1993) use of semiotics in analysis of condensation (the technique of compressing complex phenomena into a single image). Davies also includes this technique in his lengthy inventory of the linguistic and graphic techniques and devices that comprise a "cartoon semiotics" (1995). Semiotics remains a strain within the study of political cartoons, though there appears to be a greater awareness today of its limitations. El Refaie (2003) moves away from a traditional semiotic model to more dynamic and contextualised theories of multi-modality, which are informed by social semiotics and developed later in her work on the reception of cartoon messages (2009b). Tzankova and Schiphorst (2012) likewise emphasise context, putting forward a "shattered plate" model[27] of signifier/signified, by which the Turkish cartoonists they study make use of polysemy to deliver intentionally different messages to different groups. Emmison et al. (2012) suggest semiotic analysis as a qualitative method to complement the quantitative approach of content analysis (a methodology discussed in the following section). In more recent years, the influence of social semiotics in the form of genre, multimodality and discourse analysis can be seen in the work of Mazid (2008) and Sani et al. (2012), for example. Engagement with these concepts can merge with increasing concern with metaphor, as in the work of El Refaie discussed below.

In early studies such as the work of Gombrich, metaphor is addressed using a rhetorical perspective. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) identify six root metaphors and emphasise their use in political cartoons to evoke cultural memories. Since the late 1990s, however, metaphor has increasingly been linked to the cognitive linguistics inspired by the work of Lakoff et al. (1980) on the importance of conceptual metaphors in shaping all communication. Like Morris above, Edwards (2001) examines how political candidates' images are condensed and extended as metaphors and rhetorical fantasia. El Refaie (2009b) sees cartoons operating on two fundamental levels that are tied together by metaphor: telling stories about an imaginary world and referring to the real world. She also asserts that political cartoons should be seen as a specific genre, and argues against

Conners' (1998) assumption that the comprehension of cartoons readily cuts across boundaries in culture, age, and level of intelligence.[28]

Elsewhere, citing Seitz (1998), El Refaie (2003) describes metaphor as a cognitive rather than merely linguistic phenomenon, and asks, "What is a metaphorical thought?", while endeavouring to synthesise a definition of "visual fusion" based on the work of Carroll (1996), Forceville (1994, 1995 and 1996) and Gombrich (1985). She also draws on Van Leeuwen's (1993) concept of *genre* versus *field*, which employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to demonstrate that verbal context can be determined either spatially or temporally. Mazid (2008) also employs CDA concepts such as Jäger's (2001) dispositive triangle, Van Dijk's (1997) ideological square and Chilton's (2004) concept of delegitimation and proximisation, in order to analyse cartoons and the blending and incongruity of visual metaphors. Najjar's (2011) study of Abu Ghraib prison torture cartoons explores Turner and Fauconnier's (2002) Conceptual Blending where cognitive and visual strategies are used to transform icons, blending them "into new emergent structures and applied to other news events". He postulates that such blending is a form of "political culture jamming".[29] Marín-Arrese (2008) broadens the exploration of conceptual metaphor to include metonymy, conceptual integration (blending) and the use of cognitive and cultural models. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) postulate that metaphors help the human mind structure concepts, and that the conceptualisation of abstract ideas is effected through concrete experience. Bounegru and Forceville (2011), building on Lakoff's work, compare "visual and verbal modalities" and propose that "metaphors are manifestations of underlying conceptual modalities" and that metaphors always have a "topic" (target) and a "vehicle" (source).[30] Metaphor, whether approached linguistically or cognitively, appears to have emerged as the currently dominant paradigm in the field.

Political Cartoons as Cultural Mirrors

Koelble and Robins' (2007) view of satire as a moral mirror[31] is rooted in antiquity and shared by many scholars. Nearly 44% of the texts examined in this survey focused on the various ways in which political cartoons reflect individuals, audiences or society at large. Gail Dines (1995) draws on Carey's (1977) criticism of simplistic communication models to argue for a more sociological approach that locates the production and consumption of political cartoons in the relevant social, economic and

political contexts. She points out that sociologists are interested in how cartoons function as mechanisms for social control, reflecting conflict and maintaining dominant social structures. She critiques research from the 1970s and 1980s as focusing too heavily on statistical data without giving sufficient qualitative content analysis of the kind that would provide powerful insight into shared notions of social reality.

Streicher's (1965) study of David Low's cartoons exemplifies how cartoons "convey deeper meanings of social situations".[32] Low is shown to deploy "fool ascription" through his fictitious "Colonel Blimp" character in order to destabilise social relations or political structures. Cartoons have also been seen (e.g. in the work of Thibodeau 1989) simply as reflections of the public's (generally negative) impressions of the subjects depicted. Cahn (1984) views them negatively because the biases of cartoonists are clearly represented. Despite this, Kemnitz (1973) underscores that they can be an important historical source. Scholars such as Brabant and Mooney (1997), Chavez (1985) and Kasen (1980) point out that comics in general can and do reflect public beliefs and attitudes, making it possible to trace persistent or changing cultural patterns. Instances of this are the gender issues studied by Brabant and Mooney (1986), Manning (2008), Mooney and Brabant (1990) and Orbuch and Custer (1995). Charlotte Templin's (1999) study of cartoon depictions of Hillary Clinton adds a twist to this gender angle. By dividing a large corpus into eight femininity and female role themes, she shows how cartoonists across the political spectrum depicted the then First Lady as transgressing conservative gender norms. Templin concludes that this reveals a persistence of traditional perceptions despite women's changing social position.

Cartoons can also reflect on issues of ethnicity, as shown in Soper's (2005) historical content analysis of "complex patterns of identification, sympathy and denigration in cartoon representations"[33] of the Irish in America. Soper is interested in the effect of exaggeration aimed at a whole ethnic group and concludes that the loss of such ethnic comedy results in a masking of political purposes, which in turn sponsors the rise of more subversive forms of satire. Similarly, Conners (2010) uses cartoons from the 2008 US presidential campaign to investigate public opinion about race and gender, as does Gilmartin (2001) for that in 2000.

Press (1981) and Morris (1992) both use cartoons to gain insights into public perceptions of ruling figures. Danjoux (2005), drawing on Press's four levels of understanding cartoons, puts forward the study of political cartoons on international disputes as a way "to provide insight

into interests and norms that provide an ideological foundation of strategic decisions in conflict" and argues that cartoons are effective tools for discourse analysis because of "their capacity to deal with relations of opposition [that] tap into underlying levels of feeling and sensitivity, capture how people feel, rather than think, and provide 'contextual shielding'".[34] In what has become a rare and valuable long data series in the study of political cartoons, Phiddian's (1998) and Manning and Phiddian's (2000, 2002, 2005, 2010, 2012) analyses of cartoons in Australian federal elections between 1996 and 2010 use cartoons as a privileged (because memorable and "undisciplined") mode of representing political history as it happens.

For Mazid (2008), Gilmartin and Brunn's (1995) content analyses of candidate portrayals show how "a political cartoon … allows the cartoonist to express views that would be too 'extreme, mean-spirited', or 'politically incorrect' to express in an essay column".[35] Tunç's (2002) case studies of Turkish cartoonists reflect on their courage in furthering democracy as well as on the tolerance of the ruling regime. Clearly, political cartoons function differently (especially in terms of explicitness of content), depending on the levels of legal and actual toleration of open dissent permitted in their different polities.

Edwards and Ware's (2005) interest lies in voter response. Through cartoons, they identify exemplars of voters' moods, ranging from engagement, disengagement, disenfranchisement and indecision to identification of systemic problems. Seymour-Ure (2007) studies the growing public tolerance for formerly offensive imagery resulting from British cartoon portrayals of the USA post-Watergate. Given the increasing criticism of politics and an upsurge of interest in cartoons by upmarket newspapers, he identifies the demystification of the presidency as a result. Facial prominence analysis has also been used by Calogero and Mullen (2008) to study attitudes towards George W. Bush in wartime. Long et al. (2009) use cartoons to measure statistically perceptions of anti-Americanism; they offer the important caveat that they do not "suggest that editorial cartoons, or newspapers, determine popular geopolitics—rather they are part of the range of inputs that people use to make sense of their world—we use them to interrogate the realist domestic/international dichotomy through our investigation of US attitudes to anti-Americanism".[36]

LaRossa et al. (2000), Sawer (2008) and others also use cartoons to study social trends. Vokey (2000) analyses Canadian popular metaphors and symbols for unintended meanings that might reveal Toronto's social

order during the Great Depression. Chapters in the collection edited by Scully and Quartly (2009) address approaches to historians' use of cartoons as a resource. Interestingly, cartoons about the healthcare sector have received substantial attention by Giarelli (2006), Nelkin and Lindee (1995), Polivka (1988) and Potts et al. (1996).

Political Cartoons' Impact as Politics

This section examines the 21% of the corpus that researches various forms of impact on audiences and societies. Political cartoons seem especially designed for powerful effect on their audience, but tracing these impacts proves complicated. Fiske (1987) saw cartoons as having the ability to reinforce dominant world views as well as fracturing current relations of dominance. While many researchers, such as Sawer (2008), stress cartoons' socially and politically progressive impact, Walker (2003) and others argue that they can also be weapons wielded by the powerful to reinforce established or reactionary social views. For example, Matacin and Burger (1987) investigate how cartoons communicate gender stereotypes—although they concede that "[g]iven the tremendous number of sources of socialization about gender roles and sexual attitudes, it is unlikely that the cartoons by themselves play a very large role. The data presented here should instead be seen as an illustration of the presence of one source of this socialization".[37] Media and communication research spanning more than a century corroborates this caution as it has been shown that effects are notoriously difficult to determine and measure, due in part to the polysemic nature of cartoons, which give rise to multiple interpretations (demonstrated by Carl 1970).

A few papers attempt to gauge empirically the influence of political cartoons. Two studies by Brinkman (1968) and by DeSousa and Medhurst (1982) assess the influence of political cartoons on students. The first finds evidence that political cartoons can change opinions, particularly when supporting editorial writing. In contrast, reader interpretation data collected in the second study reveals inability to decode some cartoon elements and thus does not support generalisations about their persuasive powers. Sena's (1985) paper on cartoon depictions of a US female political candidate found that cartoonists' positive treatment of her (at times even depicting her as a "heroic figure"[38]) did not convert into a positive result at the polling both. So far, the small number of attempts to gauge direct cartoon influence on political opinion—let

alone on voting—appear inconclusive. This has not, however, deterred some researchers from making claims of effects, for example in the study by Sani et al. (2012), attempting to show an agenda-setting effect of Nigerian political cartoons. Their result, at best, only offers some vague correlation, rendering more appropriate a cautious claim of having some impact rather than being an agent of change. Müller, Özcan and Seizov's important research (2009) on the controversial Danish Muhammed cartoons and the ensuing "Holocaust cartoon competition" better frames cartoons as a form of "agenda setter", not as a causative factor. Like Klausen's (2009) study on the same controversy, these authors conceptualise cartoons as a backdrop for global tensions and as visually creating a "friend or foe" climate. Looking at what they call "glocalised" communications, they are able to show how cartoons, taken out of their original context, result in different interpretations by audiences. Bal, Pitt, Berthon and DesAutels's study on cartoons attacking an individual's political brand (2009) and Bigi et al. (2011) in studying satire's impact on the brand of a country also make more reasonable claims about impact. Ginman and Ungern-Sternberg (2003) investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of cartoons as conveyors of information.

Empirical data measuring a reader's ability to decode cartoons according to cartoonist purpose are essential if persuasive power is to be determined. This has been noted by both DeSousa and Medhurst (1982) and Press (1981). The existence of multiple readings is underlined by Dines (1995), who saw Hall's (1999) theoretical framework for reception—the dominant, the negotiated and the oppositional—as providing a valuable base that allows for plurality but progresses a sociology of cartoons. Benoit et al. (2010) use Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), a communications theory, to show how many rhetors, using metaphors and allusions, create rhetorical visions that permit multiple interpretations. The rhetorical vision creates fantasy/fictional images and narratives to convey vital information and to form moral judgements about public figures. An important aspect of SCT is therefore to propose that cohesiveness is created in audiences,[39] a somewhat controversial perspective.

Lowis (2003) used an experimental approach to measure the psychological effects on participants of humour in cartoons. Variables include characteristics of participants, the socio-political climate and the cartoons' humour themes. This study confirms that humour is a multidimensional construct and that humour creation and appreciation are

separate dimensions for cartoons. Surprisingly, there has been relatively little attention given to political cartoons (as opposed to "gag cartoons") in humour studies. This is potentially a fruitful direction for further dialogue and research, although it requires a layer of contextual sensitivity that humour studies can often lack.

Audience Reception Studies

Unlike Lowis' experiment measuring effects on the audience, another body of research has focused on *how* audiences respond to cartoons and on the interpretational process that occurs. Texts representing this field form 16% of the survey. While there is some overlap between the previous section and this one, the distinguishing feature of the studies analysed here is attention to the procedural issues involved in empirically identifying audience reactions.

Cantor (1977) investigates the influence of gender on cartoon preference. Using exposure to images that disparage females, she concludes that "a subject's affective disposition towards protagonists leads him or her to root for the protagonist towards whom the strongest affiliative bonds are felt and/or to take sides against the one towards whom the most resentment is held".[40] Quoting this in a later study, Dines-Levy (1990) conducts a similar investigation into decoding cartoons according to gender. Fine (1983), in a psychological approach, uses the Disposition Theory of Humour and the concept of reference groups, as well as broadening the variables to include age and race as well as gender. Earlier, Linsk and Fine (1981) had investigated the interpretations of cartoons by those holding liberal and conservative political views.

Forceville (2005) deploys Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986) to address the problem posed by assumed knowledge in such a compact communication form. Since "[r]elevance is always relevance to an individual",[41] a communicator will adjust the nature of the stimulus to fit the background knowledge of the audience. The distinction Forceville makes between *strong* communication (clearly possessing a single interpretation) and *weak* communication (only hinting, rather than giving direct commands or requests) is also a helpful concept for researching how numerous individuals understand and share interpretation strategies, and how generalised contextual factors govern perception. Müller et al. (2009), studying the Danish and Holocaust cartoons, also demonstrate the influence of context on audiences that generated

very different interpretations of the same images. Gamson and Stuart (1992) argue that cartoons are a site for competing ideologies and constructions of social reality, with metaphors, catchphrases and symbolic devices serving as weapons. These weapons in turn support an interpretive *package*, which allows measurement of competing interpretations and thus of the success of cartoons.

Greenberg (2002) uses Goffman's (1974) theory of framing to argue that audiences use framing to classify, organise and interpret experiences and observations in a meaningful way. He also applies philosopher George Herbert Mead's theory of temporality to audiences for whom "neither past nor future exists as an objective social fact", while "every conception of the past is construed from the standpoint of the new problems of today".[42] El Refaie investigates multi-modality by taking a humour reception/pragmatics approach to measure the responses of 25 young people to newspaper cartoons. She concludes that humour appreciation depends on the individual schema of readers as well as on a broader "social, historical and cultural context" of what ought to be funny.[43] Such conclusions illustrate the persistent difficulty of reception studies: they must allow for both the determining power of contexts and the subjective nature of individual responses. Context evidently matters in the construction of meaning from cartoons—but which contexts? And for whom?

The Cartoon Ecosystem

Streicher has proposed a broad media-historical approach to the study of cartoons, asserting that "the nature of caricature, the caricaturist, the publishers and audiences of the caricaturist, the historical epoch and social structure are crucial to a theoretical understanding of political caricature".[44] While studies addressing the nature of caricature and its audiences have been covered in earlier sections, the remaining considerations are grouped together in this section. Together, they form the ecosystem surrounding the cartoonists and the industry, as well as epochal milestones both in the past and the future. These studies form 24% of the corpus, although that figure would be higher if three of the texts—The Herb Block Foundation (2011), Davies (2004) and Phiddian and Manning (2008)—were counted not as single entries but as what they are: compilations of essays by cartoonists and articles about cartoonists dealing with various issues faced by the practitioners. Their themes include issues of constraints, job losses due to decline in the industry and

loss of the cartoon's influence. The chapter by Handsley and Phiddian (2008) is a rare and important discussion on the legal considerations that cartoonists must face, where their work often treads a fine line between licit public expression and defamation or sedition. The only comparable study to date is that by lawyer Donna Kramer, spurred by an upturn in US libel cases against cartoonists in the 1980s. She reviews US court cases, attempting to find legal standards for identifying the medium and to define those exceptions where obscenity or libel claims can be prosecuted, in an effort to protect the role of political cartoons in "uninhibited, robust and wide open" public debate.[45] In general, the themes collected in these compilations echo accounts given by Lamb (1996) and Seymour-Ure (2001). The latter's perspective is uniquely optimistic, even when he considers the implications for the future of British political cartoons deriving from changes to newspaper design and size and the threat of television. He notes that cartoonists thrive better in broadsheet than tabloid newspapers. Seymour-Ure's optimism is based on the view that the political cartoon is "supple and adaptable",[46] though the spread of digital media might well alter such rosy predictions of the future. The role of the Internet in popularising political cartoons is picked up by Colgan (2003), who investigates cartoon controversies.

Lamb (2004) revisits the state of the industry with contemporary US society as the backdrop, exploring how cartoons are tied to journalism. Cartoonists must make daily political and ethical decisions in the course of their work, and they do so under various kinds of legal, economic and moral restraint. Tunç (2002), in the course of providing a rich historical account of Turkish cartoons, reflects deeply on the immense pressure and dangers Turkish cartoonists currently face. Strategies they adopt for avoiding danger while still getting their messages across are examined in Tzankova and Schiphorst (2012). Walker (2003) provides a useful historical perspective of Western cartooning and Danjoux (2007) sketches a history of the editorial cartoon, tying it into an account of the present state of cartooning, including an examination of the Internet's impacts on the industry.

Writing in the *New Statesman* rather than in an academic journal, Lewis (2012) floats some interesting propositions, made at the dawn of the digital age for news media. She believes that the satire boom of the 1960s is now clearly over and that three subjects can cause instant and widespread offence: recent death, religion and the Middle East. Lamb (2004), referred to above, also constructs a

framework for assessing cartoonists, based on Hodgart's *Satire* (1969).[47] Unfortunately, most serious scholars of satire would now consider this work outdated and emblematic of the field's shallow engagement with theories of humour. Samson and Huber (2007) probe connections between cartoonists' gender and the formal features of their work, such as the amount of text used, the number of panels, the application of colours and the type of jokes. Their findings suggest that women are more likely to use incongruity-resolution humour, while men make liberal use of nonsense humour. Treanor and Mateas borrow Press's categories for political cartoons (Social Comment versus proper Political Cartoons) to analyse newsgames—games released "in response to current events".[48] They conclude that the processes of "procedural rhetoric" operate to persuade and use the words of Bogost (2006, 2007) to describe how the "videogame embodies ideology in its computational structure".[49] In other words, they find ideology is conveyed through simulation rather than narrative. Evidently, the new frontier for cartooning research has become the possibility for different forms, platforms and audiences provided by twenty-first-century digital technology. While it is rooted in a print-age past, the form is rapidly hybridising.

Conclusion

The first thing to note is variety. Papers surveyed are by scholars from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds: within humanities, language, literature, art, rhetoric and history; within the social sciences, sociology, psychology, political science, area studies, communications and media studies; and from the professions of law, journalism, education, computer science, archival studies and even nursing; with some scholars also working in interdisciplinary fields such as humour studies. The resultant variety of approaches, foci and subjects can be considered a strength of this loosely formed field, as all these disciplinary viewpoints have something to add to its development. However, this is also a major weakness. The study of cartoons is not central to any of these disciplines. One gets the feeling that studies of cartoons are all too often brief flirtations, introduced as a novel way to test or challenge a current theory; or because cartoons have suddenly become a hot topic (as in the case of the Danish cartoon controversy). In either case, cartoons are soon dropped as a topic.

Our list of references demonstrates the lack of sustained attention to the form: an overwhelming majority of authors take up political cartoon studies only for a brief time (usually one paper). Notwithstanding the excellence of some one-off papers, most of the more thoughtful work has come from the small number of scholars to have pondered the subject for years. This paucity of long-term engagement, along with the overly dispersed nature of the field, divided as it is among many disciplines, makes it difficult to find and build on past and even current research. It also makes it challenging to see the field as a whole and to know which areas are well developed and which not—something our survey seeks to highlight and improve. The field needs several more monograph-length studies, however, if it is to gain coherence.

Two areas have developed a substantial theoretical base: research on audience reception and studies using conceptual metaphor theories. Yet even these display the weakness of failing to enter into a discourse with and build upon previous studies. Empirical studies attempting to understand the impact and audience reception of cartoons (e.g. Bedient and Moore 1985; Brinkman 1968; Carl 1970; DeSousa and Medhurst 1982; El Refaie 2011) highlight polysemy and most cast doubt on the ability of intended cartoon messages to reach all readers. But such studies conduct their experiments with youth, mostly students, or with a limited cross-section of adults. None has tried to gauge the reception and/or possible influence on political cartoons' regular readers—the "self-selecting minority of the voting public" identified by Manning and Phiddian[50]—those who have the highest interest and literacy in political cartoons found on newspaper opinion pages, and who are most likely to engage actively in public discourse on politics.

Visual and verbal metaphors have always been a central aspect of political cartoons, so it is unsurprising that even the earliest studies on cartoons have attempted to understand their role. It *is* surprising, however, that recent linguistic and cognitive approaches to metaphor so rarely look back to these earlier studies. Turner and Fauconnier's (2002) use of "conceptual blending", or Negro Alousque's (2013) use of the terms "hybrid" and "visual integration" (fusion) of target and source domains in metaphor (which draws on Forceville 1996 and El Refaie 2009a, b), both seem to be rediscovering what Gombrich saw in the 1960s as an important quality of caricature: "virtual fusion".[51] Bounegru and Forceville (2011), quoting from El Refaie (2003), observe that the central role played by metaphor in cartoons—capturing complex

situations in a simple, understandable way—represents "the unknown, unresolved or problematic in terms of something more familiar and more easily imaginable".[52] Could this not be explained with more critical succinctness simply through Morris' (1993) use of the concept "domestication"?

Other areas in the field here mapped out are noticeably thin. One such is the sparse number of humour-focused studies, or even studies that seriously engage with humour theory. As can be seen in the section on cartoons as cultural mirrors, there are numerous studies that investigate attitudes, trends and representation in particular societies at a given time. However, since cartoons are for the most part a humorous form, frequently employing exaggeration, oxymoron, irony and parody, studies like these should be grounded in the knowledge of humour studies. This seems particularly important when one is looking to determine if a cartoon is perpetuating or undercutting a social stereotype. While scholars have tried to define and theorise the workings of cartoons with regard to formal qualities and social role, there is a lack of humour studies approaches aimed at identifying specific medium/genre/style types of humour produced by cartoonists.

Aesthetics is another approach that seems to be lacking. Why do some styles prevail in certain times and places? Are there specific French, Australian or Japanese styles of cartooning? A number of contemporary Australian artists draw in a deliberate and well-practised "naïve" style (e.g. Bruce Petty, Michael Leunig and Alan Moir). In Japanese comics, this style is honoured with the name *hetauma* (ヘタウマ; 下手巧; badly drawn but somehow cool-looking); but it is rejected by Japanese political cartoonists in favour of inoffensive, stylised facial caricatures of politicians. Historical studies have pointed to formal changes in cartoons as printing technology moved from woodcut and engraving to photo engraving and offset printing. However, technology-led aesthetic changes in recent cartooning are as yet a largely unexplored area (a lack addressed by Lucien Leon in Chapter 6), demanding attention for the increasing use of computers to draw cartoons, and—particularly noticeable in Anglophone countries—the move away from traditional black and white images to colour cartoons in newspapers. How have these changes affected how cartoonists work? Do they open up more potential for cartoon expression? Have all cartoonists been able to make the transition well? Why, or why not?

This chapter has focused upon studies of political cartoons in the traditional sense of those appearing in newspapers, but more research is also needed on the future trajectory of the industry, even in this limited field of cartoon studies. Recent brief meditations on this by Danjoux (2007), Lewis (2012) and Colgan (2003) so far remain too few and too short. Is the political cartoon being re-mediated into other digital forms, for example in memes? As noted above, Müller et al. (2009) found different interpretations of cartoons in different contexts. So, are cartoons also read differently in other media contexts? Are cartoons read and interpreted differently on a newspaper op-ed page as compared to the newspaper website image gallery or the cartoon syndication website, where they are no longer embedded among the newspaper's interpretive hints? How might they be read when reproduced on a blog, on Facebook or tweeted by the cartoonist?

Then again, cartoons are easily scanned or downloaded, reprinted and used (with or without permission). They are increasingly used/appropriated to create memes in social media and placards in protest rallies. To name a few instances since 2011, placards using political cartoons have been seen in protests over corruption in India, Iranian human rights in Los Angeles, anti-Twitter laws in Turkey, government inaction on abducted students in Mexico, nuclear power in Tokyo, and Gaza bomb strikes in Melbourne. Another site for publication afterlife is on gallery walls, not only in cartoon exhibitions but in a growing number of dedicated cartoon museums and archives. How cartoon meanings and impacts may change in these new contexts is an unexplored area.

As noted earlier, there are very few studies yet of the legal environments in which cartoonists operate and of their consequences for cartoon discourse, whether political or not. Journalistic studies exist on contemporary political cartoon censorship, for example Index on Censorship,[53] but research studies are scarce. Critical biographies of political cartoonists, particularly contemporary ones, are also rare. Studies on aspects of institutional collecting, preserving, indexing, digitising and displaying, along with any entailed copyright problems, are almost non-existent, although two exceptions are Hackbart-Dean (1997) and Landbeck (2013). Recent important advances in the understanding of face and bodily signals recognition in neuroscience, cognitive science and psychology (e.g. by Kaufmann and Schweinberger 2012, or the work being carried out on laughing avatars at the ILHAIRE Project[54]), have not yet

been adequately applied to understanding caricature. And lastly, comparative studies are sadly lacking. Indeed, studies of differences between political cartoons in various cultures, countries or language groups could highlight not only similarities and contrasts but also help to underscore aspects of cartooning that normally go unnoticed.

This study is not the first to attempt to chart the breadth of research on political cartoons across various disciplines and to seek to impose some order on the field. For example, John Lent's large multi-volume bibliographies of writing related to all forms of comic art (2003, 2004, 2006) have sections for "political cartoons" and "caricature", grouped by country; and for political cartooning in the US, smaller divisions such as "general studies", "historical aspects", "portrayals", "legal aspects", "professional aspects" and individual artists. Likewise, Rhode and Bullough's (2016) online *Comics Research Bibliography, 1996–2009*, also has a large number of entries in its "editorial cartoons" and "caricature" lists of resources. To a scholar new to the field, these are however of limited use as there is little attempt to separate academic work from journalism, nor to indicate content nor synthesise the research listed. Somers (1998) offers a more focused reference guide for editorial cartooning and caricature. Beyond mere listing, this book gives an annotated guide to locating cartoon materials and attempts to critique and synthesise some past research. However, its focus is not the whole spectrum of the field but primarily US political cartooning and its history. In addition, all these resources for researchers are now (as can be surmised from their dates of publication) somewhat dated.

It follows that more work mapping the field is necessary to raise awareness in the disciplines it spans, to encourage more deliberate interdisciplinary dialogue and to make it more approachable for new researchers. It is presently a maze, littered with instances of overlapping and at times incompatible terminology and methods, and the dispersed nature of the research makes it difficult to be aware of the breadth of research, let alone to find materials. Ultimately, for political cartoon studies to become more integrated and to develop, regular forums, journal(s) and conference(s) where the topic is front and centre rather than peripheral need to be established. Whether this should begin by claiming space within a discipline (perhaps media studies) that is broadly open to the field and then to exchange with other disciplines, or by locating it within an already existing interdisciplinary field, such as humour studies or comics studies, or by joining with a practitioner (cartoonist) related event

(such as the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists 2014 Satire Fest), or by attempting to establish a regular independent but interdisciplinary conference or journal, some deliberate steps are needed. The authors hope to have shown with this survey some at least of the main trends, taxonomies and approaches to date in political cartoon research, and at the same time to have highlighted some of the strengths in the present field as well as aspects that are underdeveloped or yet to be explored. While we can propose no recommendation about a permanent disciplinary home for the field, we hope we have persuaded other scholars who share an interest in political cartoons that it is time to address this issue.

Notes

1. Matthew Diamond, "No Laughing Matter: Post-September 11 Political Cartoons in Arab/Muslim Newspapers", 2002, pp. 251–72. Since the purpose of the present study is to review a very large body of literature spanning a half century of research into political cartoons, where a study is referred to as a whole, citations are made in-text, while specific citations appear in Notes. In both cases, for more complete details, see the list of References.
2. Janis L. Edwards, *Political Cartoons in the 1988 Presidential Campaign: Image, Metaphor and Narrative*, 1997, p. 20.
3. Haydon Manning and Robert Phiddian, "In Defence of the Political Cartoonists" Licence to Mock', 2004, pp. 25–42.
4. Cabu was one of four cartoonists killed in a terrorist attack on the offices of *Charlie* Hebdo on 7 January 2015. The rationale underlying Ted Rall's move away from traditional cartoon forms is set out in his *Attitude: The New Subversive Political Cartoonists* (2004).
5. Kerry Soper, *Garry Trudeau: Doonesbury and the Aesthetics of Satire*, 2008, pp. 32–4; Reed Johnson, "'Doonesbury' Abortion Story Arc Moves to Op-Ed Page", 2012.
6. Charles Hatfield, "Indiscipline, or, The Condition of Comics Studies", 2010, p. 6.
7. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, eds., *The Power of Comics: History, Form & Culture*, 2009; see in particular their definition of the field, pp. 3–4.
8. James W. Carey, "Mass Communication Research and Cultural Studies: An American View", 1977, p. 412.
9. Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image", 1977, pp. 38–41 (essay originally published in French in 1964).
10. Manning and Phiddian, 2004, pp. 27–32.
11. Rhonda Walker, "Political Cartoons: Now You See Them!", 2003, p. 17.

12. Originally published in 1963, re-printed in Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse: And Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, 1985. In a later book, Morris (1995) further developed the ideas of Gombrich and Goffman.
13. Keith Townsend, Paula McDonald and Lin Esders, "How Political, Satirical Cartoons Illustrated Australia's *WorkChoices* Debate", 2008, pp. 8–10.
14. W. A. Coupe, "Observations on a Theory of Political Caricature", 1969, p. 84.
15. William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor*, 1938, p. 8, 187, 206. Murrell also uses the terms, "truthful distortion" (p. 67) and "truthful exageration" (p. 208).
16. Gombrich, pp. 134–5.
17. Roger Penn Cuff, "The American Editorial Cartoon—A Critical Historical Sketch", 1945, p. 87 (cited in Bahaa-Eddin M. Mazid, "Cowboy and Misanthrope: A Critical (Discourse) Analysis of Bush and Bin Laden Cartoons", 2008, p. 450).
18. For others, see Ann Turner, *In Their Image: Contemporary Australian Cartoonists*, 2000.
19. Doug Marlette, "The Muslim Cartoon Controversy Exposed an Absence of Courage", 2006, p. 84.
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CHAPTER 6

The Evolution of Political Cartooning in the New Media Age: Cases from Australia, the USA and the UK

Lucien Leon

The twentieth century saw newspapers replace journals, magazines and pamphlets as the most common vehicle through which political cartoons were disseminated and consumed by the public. In its turn, the Internet of the twenty-first century has promoted a gradual but inexorable decline in newspaper circulation and readership as readers eschew metropolitan dailies in favour of online news content providers. In Australia alone, a number of media and social commentators have remarked on this decline, particularly with respect to readership and circulation of daily newspapers.[1] The fact that readership—and hence advertising revenue—is collapsing in this medium has obvious implications for the status of the political cartoonist whose work has long formed a vital part of the daily press. As readers explore alternative avenues for consumption of news and opinion, political cartoonists also need to survey the contemporary

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mediascape and identify fresh opportunities for publication and dissemination of their work. These impacts—and adaptations to them—made by cartoonists in Australia and elsewhere are the subject of this chapter.

From Print to Online: Political Cartooning and Change

In the USA, many cartoonists already see the attrition of newspapers and diminishing employment opportunities as inextricably linked to a decline in the influence of the political cartoon.[2] At the turn of the twentieth century there were around 2000 editorial cartoonists employed by daily papers in the USA:[3] by the turn of the twenty-first century that number had shrunk to 85.[4] The downward trend has accelerated over the past decade, with a mere 30 full-time editorial cartoonists now working for the nation's approximately 1300 daily newspapers.[5] The downgrading of the role of the political cartoonist in the US newsprint media is the combined result of economics and editorial regard for the role of editorial cartoons. When readership falls, advertising revenue falls and the pool of money available for salaries is diminished. Newspaper editors with a low regard for political cartoons invariably dissolve the position of full-time cartoonist and look to syndicated cartoonists as a way of minimising expenses.[6]

The problem is not so pronounced in Australia, where five newspapers owned by one of two media groups (Fairfax and News Limited) account for approximately 40% of total newspaper sales.[7] This narrow distribution of media ownership offers a more stable employment environment for Australia's political cartoonists. The attitude of Australian media proprietors who are generally supportive of the cartoonist's role[8] and value their independent contributions to the newspaper is also a significant factor in the stability enjoyed by cartoonists. This support can be seen today, for example, even in the op-ed pages of the Rupert Murdoch-owned *The Australian*, where cartoons by Jon Kudelka (b. 1956) or Peter Nicholson (b. 1946) regularly appear alongside an often antithetical viewpoint expressed in the editorials.[9]

From discussions with some of his US counterparts, Jon Kudelka reported that, whereas political cartooning is viewed in the USA as a commoditised craft, Australian cartoonists are viewed more as individuals practising an art. The heavily syndicated environment in which US cartoonists operate demands of them a relatively interchangeable or generic

graphic style. Australian cartoonists on the other hand have the freedom to make their work unique and distinct from that of their peers. Kudelka remarked, “I think the one way I'm looking to survive whatever's going to happen to newspapers is that I will be a fairly unique artist and people will want my stuff for what it is. And they couldn't get someone else into replace me, that's the whole point”.[10]

Despite such positive attitudes, the print newspaper does not occupy the same esteemed position that it once did as the principal arbiter of news and opinion. The advent of radio and television provided the newspaper's first real competition for audience, and the entrenched position that the Internet now occupies in the mediascape has further eroded its hegemony. Casually turning the pages of a print newspaper facilitates access to a confrontational and contextualised political cartoon; but such images are published online often without context and co-exist with an overwhelmingly diverse array of competing images that divert a viewer's attention.[11] Additionally, accessing political cartoons online often requires deliberate navigation on newspaper sites or subscriptions to social media feeds, and both lines of approach enable readers effectively to filter out images that might have otherwise stimulated or challenged their worldview. Certainly, the proliferation of media technologies has adversely impacted on the traditional role of political cartoons in promoting civic discourse and shaping the way people make sense of their world.[12]

The declining influence of political cartoons might then be attributed to the decline of the print newspaper and the fact that, in today's society, there are so many competing demands for the reader's attention. The Internet is a dynamic, content-rich environment and newspapers around the world (especially in Australia) were initially slow to recognise and take advantage of this new information paradigm with respect to screen format, multi-media potential and dissemination of content to the audience. It is not enough to shift content without adaptation. For example, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH, Fairfax) online newspaper site is Australia's most frequented newspaper website.[13] Some innovations that take advantage of the non-linear manner in which readers engage with online content have made their way into the paper's online format, but the political cartoon remains an element that has merely been transplanted from print to screen, in the *SMH* as elsewhere. It may be that such a format appeals to those readers raised on a diet of print media, but it is certainly not as appealing to the generation raised on online

content. Matt Ozga argues that "transplanting a static political cartoon from its equally static print environment to the dynamic information superhighway effectively enervates the original cartoon of any power it might once have had".[14]

Despite having been somewhat slow to recognise the threats and opportunities presented by the Internet, newspapers have in recent years begun to reorganise content to suit online viewing behaviour and to develop strategies for garnering revenue from their Internet presence. Once largely open access, many online newspapers now demand a subscription fee from readers. In her examination of newspaper paywall trends in the USA, UK and Australia, Andrea Carson reveals the increasing number of publishers monetising digital content in this way.[15] The current climate is one of ongoing experimentation with paywall models, as companies attempt to maximise both traffic and subscription revenue. Their approach to advertising has also become more sophisticated, with less reliance on classifieds and a greater focus on demographically targeted advertisements.[16] As newspapers seek a commercially viable model in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to imagine one that will accommodate a daily print output. Inevitably, what we have come to regard as the traditional political cartoon will be almost exclusively mediated by screen technology.

Strategies for New Media

Political cartoonists have a longstanding tradition of embracing technological advances to enhance their practice and to improve on the capacity of their drawings to communicate particular messages. From hand engraving to photo-engraving, colour printing to digital image manipulation, cartoonists have consistently been enthusiastic to embrace new techniques. The challenge for the contemporary political cartoonist is to adapt their present art to a changing and increasingly sophisticated mediascape.

Two areas can be identified as providing immediate opportunities for the political cartoonist in the digital media environment. One lies in the new production methods made possible by advances in hardware and software technology, while the other relates to the nature of dissemination of digital content. As Jon Agar has noted, "Cartoons have always depended on technology for circulation, but changing communication technologies have transformed the art, either by opening or closing

opportunities to reach an audience, offering new means of reproduction, or by suggesting new topics, or even ways of thinking about the world."[17]

Along with advances in digital image technology come distinctive forms of spectatorship within visual culture.[18] The nature of dissemination of digital content and production methods made possible by advances in hardware and software technology offer opportunities to enhance the traditional function of political cartooning in the news media while also creating opportunities to reach new audiences. A further consideration is the manner in which the audience might engage with the material through Web 2.0 applications such as interactive blogs, social networking sites and video sharing sites. The interactive and participatory nature of these new media genres may broaden the impact of the cartoonist's work through their capacity to find new and unintended audiences and also elicit direct responses and feedback from readers. We are thus witnessing the arrival of a new paradigm for political cartoon production and dissemination, one facilitated by society's engagement with new media.

Production

The spectrum of image production techniques and processes available to the digital artist includes: image manipulation and appropriation; video; and animation. Andrew Darley notes that the increased affordability and efficiency of digital technology has allowed digital artists to draw on established forms and techniques while at the same time developing "distinctive modes of image combination and recombination". He observes that "although digital imaging techniques are new, the aesthetic uses they are put to and the forms they take are not; they contain and display distinctive characteristics whilst at the same moment relying on prior cultural practices and forms for their shape and character".[19] The proliferation of computer technology in the production and manipulation of images has expanded creative opportunities for artists and invites a reassessment of categorisation of art disciplines.

In terms of production techniques available to the contemporary political cartoonist, digital image manipulation programmes such as Photoshop present the most accessible and intuitive tool with respect to cost and ease of use. Combined with a graphics tablet or a computer with draw-on-screen technology, this method of image production echoes traditional mark-making techniques and is therefore easily

learnt. The benefit of this graphics technology lies in its flexibility; these programmes offer the cartoonist an infinite colour palette, a variety of simulated paper stocks, pen and brush types, and the capacity to easily manipulate and edit graphic elements; the artist can also introduce collage elements such as photographs and appropriated imagery. All of these capabilities serve to broaden the vocabulary of the visual communicator.

Hand-drawn cartoons are a very spontaneous and immediate response to political events, and the time required to produce moving image cartoons militates against such spontaneity. Animations and video mash-ups represent the most radical shift in form and process available to the cartoonist. Where previous advances in printing and publishing technology have facilitated more spontaneous approaches to creating political cartoons, advances in digital animation have not presented the contemporary cartoonist with the same creative potential. For example in Australia, *The Age*'s regular cartoonist Bruce Petty produces rather intricate animations using traditional film techniques that are relatively time-consuming and incompatible with generating spontaneous or immediate responses to current political events. Adopting a digital approach does not necessarily resolve these issues: in fact it can present further obstacles in the creative process, such as the need to develop technical proficiency across multiple production processes. For many artists, this necessitates a collaborative approach to production or at the very least demands a simplification of elements, or a pared-down approach to creating graphic elements.

Animators and video artists creating political work are also required to think differently about the issues they satirise in terms of their currency and longevity in the news cycle. An issue that appears and disappears from public interest within 24 hours does not afford adequate production time for the moving image cartoonist. The comparatively labour-intensive nature of animation and video production also makes them a less cost-effective option for newspaper editors.[20] Economics is a significant drawback for moving-image satirical content on the web, with editors and content providers being unable to justify the cost of artist fees and salaries. The increasing proliferation of online advertising does however promise a potential revenue stream for political animators and video artists publishing their content online.[21]

While some cartoonists in the USA, UK and Australia have negotiated these challenges to achieve professional success and various accolades for their animated work, a dispiriting few to date have sustained the practice

Fig. 6.1 Still showing an image sequence (To be read top–left to bottom–right) from Walt Handelsman's digital video *Trump*, 1 October 2015, at: http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/opinion/walt_handelsman/article_c8110373-713d5c9c-8359-03d635c50c67.html (accessed 2 May 2016).

over an extended period of time. The year 2007 appeared to herald a new era for political cartooning when, for the first time in its history, the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning was awarded to a cartoonist whose submission consisted of both print cartoons and animations.[22] *The New Orleans Advocate*'s Walt Handelsman was awarded the prize ahead of two other finalists, Nick Anderson and Mike Thompson, whose submissions also included animated work. In 2010, freelance animator Mark Fiore was awarded the prize for a portfolio that consisted exclusively of political animations.

Handelsman taught himself how to use Flash animation software in 2006 and combines both analogue and digital processes in the production of his animations. Exploiting his spontaneous but well-honed drafting skills, he infuses his distinct graphic style into the frames by first drawing the image assets by hand. The subsequent colouring and manipulation of the images using the Flash software programme, followed by the requisite voice and audio treatment, demands an ultimate time commitment of around one hour per second of animation. The result however is impressive, as illustrated in Figure 6.1, which shows a selection of

four frames taken from one of his recent digital videos. In this animated, musical commentary on Donald Trump's race for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination, Handelsman depicts the Republican candidates field as a homogenous, diminutive group of elephants (the Republican animal symbol) singing in unison of their despair at Trump's continuing success. Drawn with the same signature short-stroke line work and flat, bold colour palette of Handelsman's static cartoons, the clip neatly captures the Republican field's exasperation at Trump's brash political style and their inability to counter his appeal with the electorate. Handelsman's animations draw a substantial audience to the newspaper's website, with the most popular attracting 15 million views.[23]

Nearly a decade on from Handelsman's watershed first success, he and Fiore are almost alone in maintaining a regular and frequent political animation practice in the USA although Ann Telnaes creates regular gif-style animations for *The Washington Post*. Handelsman's monthly animations augment a daily static image practice while Fiore produces no static cartoons but self-syndicates his weekly animations to various media outlets. Lacking the security of a newspaper staff position, he describes having "an entrepreneurial attitude and a willingness to adapt to new technology and new markets" as the key elements to maintaining his livelihood.[24]

In the UK, political animation enjoyed a fleeting period of popularity in the first decade of the millennium as newspaper outlets strategised how best to exploit the new media environment. The animated cartoons of Kevin Kallaugher, Matthew Buck, Andy Davey and Ben Keeling were prominently featured in mainstream online newspapers and magazines. The initial flurry of production and publication activity was relatively short-lived, and in the second decade of the millennium political cartoonists making animations have all but disappeared from the democratic conversation in the UK. Similarly, in Australia, the *SMH's* Rocco Fazzari has recently been made redundant from his position as political cartoonist with Fairfax Media Limited, despite having maintained a successful cartooning practice for 30 years and a successful animation practice since 2009.[25] Before this, Fazzari was the only political cartoonist sustaining an animation practice in the Australian news media. In 2011, both *The Australian*'s Peter Nicholson and *The Age*'s Simon Rankin proved unable to secure long-term support from their respective employers and ceased their animation practices. Given the dubious health of the newspaper industry, it seems unlikely that new political animation talent will emerge from those stables in the future. The self-syndication model

adopted by Fiore and Telnaes presents a more reliable strategy for aspiring animators.

In contrast to the creative and technical demands of animation, however, video editing presents a relatively easily learnt and applied toolset. Video mash-ups typically feature contemporary and current video-visual content that is arranged and edited to create satirical juxtapositions. In recent years, two Australians, Hugh Atkin and Huw Parkinson, have emerged as expert producers of political mash-ups. Atkin has achieved substantial audience reach and media exposure as an independent producer since 2007, while Parkinson works under the auspices of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), where he holds the position of video-editor of the weekly political talk show program *Insiders*. His skill was recognised in 2015 when he won the new "Multimedia Storytelling" category in that year's Australian Walkley Awards for Excellence in Journalism for his folio of cleverly composited and arranged videos.

Despite all the technological developments that have punctuated the historical timeline of political cartooning, the onset of the digital media revolution has ushered in an era where cartoonists find themselves, for the first time, operating in a news-publishing context that supports both static and audiovisual moving images. Whereas the technological shift away from woodcuts to incrementally more advanced printing processes preserved the drafting-illustration paradigm that had always been the cartoonist's traditional domain, digital media has expanded the cartooning toolset in much more radical ways. The convergence and hybridisation of media has created a production and dissemination framework in which the political cartoon (a traditional component of print media) and the political video mash-up (a derivative of film process and culture), can now be mediated by a common platform. If video mash-ups could properly be considered a part of the political cartooning tradition (arguably they can), the discipline would expand to embrace the way production and dissemination of an image can correlate via the same media.

Dissemination

The Internet has certainly changed the way editorial cartoonists distribute their work and how they compete with others.[26] Undoubtedly, the greatest benefit so far offered to the political cartoonist is the capacity to distribute work instantly and widely: as Pulitzer prize-winning cartoonist

Clay Bennett says, “Its most profound impact on editorial cartoonists has probably been in the delivery of our work”.[27] Resident cartoonists no longer need live in the same city as the newspaper that publishes their work. *The Age*'s Michael Leunig, for example, lives in rural Victoria and submits his cartoons to the paper’s editorial office in Melbourne via email.[28] The capacity to send high quality, full colour images instantly and cheaply also facilitates the syndication of cartoons.

Online and wireless image distribution assumes a non-linear quality that was not inherent in the distribution and consumption of traditional print media cartoons. The cartoonist-editor-print-reader model has effectively been subverted, allowing cartoonists to bypass the editorial process altogether via self-publication on their website, Twitter feed or blog. Alternatively, they may find their cartoons spread virally via email and social media reaching audiences outside the newspaper readership. For mainstream media cartoonists, the microblogging platform Twitter and other blogs authored outside the auspices of their newspaper also provide a vehicle for engaging an audience beyond the print newspaper readership. Tweeting and blogging have emerged not only as means for artists to publish work independently and to garner revenue through sales, but also as integral components of online reporting, opinion and analysis. For example, news agencies such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Reuters and Al Jazeera all disseminate news reports via Twitter, and many online newspapers use Twitter and embedded blogs as vehicles for commentary and analysis. The interactive and participatory nature of social media technologies also allows once passive consumers of content to engage actively with and even assist content producers. Consumers can comment on or “like” a selected post and instantly disseminate favoured content throughout their social networks via reblogging and retweeting.

Jon Kudelka is one of the more active participants in online publication in the Australian political cartooning landscape. He started his Twitter and blog accounts as early as 2009, initially as a means to maintain a visible presence in the mediascape, but states, “I’ve always had a suspicion that the whole newspaper staff cartoonist job was going to vanish eventually so I used the blog to keep my foot in the door”.[29] Blogging allows Kudelka to publish his satirical responses to news and current affairs in a very instant and immediate fashion and also to publish the journalistic articles and commentary that place his work in their relevant context. Like many cartoonists who publish their work online,

his site also includes a mailing list protocol that facilitates the dissemination of his cartoons to readers whilst allowing instant feedback from his audience.[30] Self-publishing in this manner allows the political cartoonist a mechanism to circumvent the editorial process by publishing cartoons that might otherwise be deemed too offensive for publication and denied endorsement by the newspaper editors (though this is not an strategy that Kudelka himself has employed to date). Primarily, Kudelka's main impetus for maintaining a blog is commercial. He has invested in a top of the range printer and sells three or four archival prints each week,[31] which provides him with a significant revenue stream.

Since 2011, Kudelka has increasingly used Twitter as a means of communicating with his audience. A prolific poster, he has authored over 64,000 tweets to date. Kudelka describes Twitter as a mode of engagement that gives him "some idea about what some of the [engaged] people are thinking".[32] A strictly text-based dissemination platform until late 2010, Twitter now offers direct posting of static and moving images in a user's feed. The "follow" subscription model of Twitter—and its mediation via web interface, Short Message Service (SMS) and mobile device "app"—deliver a vehicle of publication and dissemination that is even more instantly accessible than a blog. Kudelka exploits this point of contact with his nearly 12,000 followers to disseminate not just his cartoons, but also an eclectic array of personally authored and curated content. In particular, his Twitter feed spontaneously and satirically riffs on topical content via his pithy posting of text, thereby affording him an alternative mode of satire and providing followers with a broader insight into his humour and personality.

As a Fairfax cartoonist, Rocco Fazzari's Twitter feed was linked to his blog and embedded in the *SMH* newspaper website,[33] where he published his political cartoons and animations. Fazzari started his blog in 2005 as a way of feeling less isolated and to share his creative process with the wider community. An earlier foray into blogging, between 2006 and 2009, was especially interesting from an artistic and scholarly point of view because he documented the news stories upon which his cartoons were based, and included preliminary sketches and drafts of the final cartoon, revealing something of his artistic process. It was this blogging practice that led Fazzari to investigate animation as a satirical tool.[34] Initially, Fazzari imbued his static drawings with movement by compiling them into animated gif-files, but over time his approach has become increasingly sophisticated and polished through the application of stop-frame

Fig. 6.2 Still showing an image sequence from Rocco Fazzari's digital video, "Turnbull Ditches Abbott's Policies", 3 November 2015, at: http://www.smh.com.au/video/video-news/video-federal-politics/turnbull-ditches-abbotts-policies-20151103-45lv2.html (accessed 2 May 2016).

film-making techniques. Figure 6.2 shows a recent work in which Fazzari responded to the sudden replacement of the sitting Australian prime minister. The Liberal Party of Australia switched from the more conservative Tony Abbott to the comparatively progressive Malcolm Turnbull. The video speculates about which of his predecessor's policies the new, more progressive leader might decide to dismantle. It showcases Fazzari's skill at hand-drawn and painted caricatures as well as his proficiency in arranging these within a stop-motion photomontage with a diversity of digital imagery. Subtitles assist the viewer to grasp the points being referred to, which of course reflect local concerns of that moment.

Fazzari's blog motivated him personally to explore new creative practices. It also exemplifies the shift in media strategies employed by the *SMH's* Fairfax media executives in recent years. Where impact and outreach used to be measured in terms of the number of unique hits that an article or cartoon attracted, Fairfax management now emphasises the use of blogs as instruments for building an online audience of loyal, community-based readers.[35] These are groups of readers who follow a blog specifically because they are attracted to its content. Applied to

an animation, success is no longer measured purely on the number of views it receives in any given week, but on how effectively the blog in which it is published builds a community over time. Fazzari describes his readership as readers who visited the blog expressly to watch his videos: "they're not people who walk in and out of the room".[36] His following was relatively small, thousands rather than tens of thousands, but in the Fairfax model, ten or twenty bloggers each with a similar following equates to a substantial online readership.

By any measure, Fazzari's blog can be considered successful, attracting a readership that regularly placed it in the top Australian five in any given week.[37] The feedback facility typically featured dozens of posts from readers keen to offer their perspective on the political issues presented in the cartoon. That some of his written-word blogging colleagues found this irritating is revealed when Fazzari says, "That's pretty fantastic when you consider that I'm not a journalist".[38] Success breeds success, and Fazzari's blog enjoyed a prized patch of online real-estate: it was located on the front page of both the online and the iPad editions, which in turn increased his viewership. The differentiation of his product from others meant that it was often coupled with op-ed text from a well-reputed political commentator (Such as Peter Hartcher, Political and International Editor).

Cartoonists in the USA and UK have similarly adopted Twitter, both as a dissemination platform for their work and as a communication vehicle with their audience. *The Chicago Tribune*'s Scott Stantis and the self-syndicated Daryl Cagle are the most followed, with over 22,000 and 78,000 followers respectively. In the UK, the *Tribune*'s Martin Rowson, the *Observer*'s Chris Riddell and Peter Brookes of *The Times* can all boast over 10,000 followers each. The *Daily Telegraph*'s Matthew Pritchett creates captioned pocket cartoons that, at four centimetres wide by six centimetres high in print-format, are ideally proportioned for the mobile phone screens through which Twitter is largely mediated, as is evident from Figure 6.3, commenting on the extreme policies of Jeremy Corbyn, Labour Party leader, at the time. Pritchett's gentle socio-political satire is granted a prominent and accessible presence in the online edition of the newspaper. The newspaper also supports him by hosting a viewable archive of his previous works, actively linked to his saleable merchandise, and by disseminating his cartoons on Twitter via the #telecartoons hashtag. Pritchett has thus established a personal, digital brand that is seamlessly tied into that of the newspaper.

Fig. 6.3 Untitled cartoon by Matt Pritchett, originally published in *The Telegraph*, 1 May 2016. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist and Telegraph Media Group Limited.

Those who follow a cartoonist's Twitter feed or blog entries have access to a far more expansive and intimate voice than those who only engage with cartoons in the newspaper. How that voice might resolve itself in the public perception of the cartoonist and the reception of their work is a question for future research; although it is safe to presume that maintaining a persistent and recognisable presence with an audience is a positive strategy for new media artists to pursue, both for exposure and for keeping abreast of trends and attitudes.

Video-sharing website YouTube is another social media phenomenon of the digital media age. Launched on 15 February 2005 by three former PayPal (an online payment service) employees, the site allows registered users to upload a wide variety of video content for viewing by visitors. Content ranges from movie clips, TV clips and music videos to amateur videos such as video blogs, short films and animations. Web analytic companies such as Alexa Internet Inc. report that the volume of traffic as a proportion of total Internet traffic made it the third most visited site in the USA in 2016, and second in Australia and the UK.[39]

Despite the fact that more than half YouTube's US audience is aged 35 or over,[40] politicians in that country were quick to recognise the site's potential for accessing the reputedly politically disengaged youth demographic and have regularly released policy announcements and positions through it. At the beginning of the 2008 presidential election, Hillary

Clinton, John Edwards and Barack Obama all announced their candidacies on YouTube:[41] what began as an amateur video-sharing site had become a legitimate platform for conveying political information to the electorate. This authoritative political function makes YouTube an ideal context in which to locate moving image political satire, situating the lampooners and the lampooned in the same environment.

In Australia, the 2007 federal election saw a major shift away from network television and major newspapers to online media sites such as YouTube.[42] But politicians quickly learned that this medium could not easily be managed or controlled on their own terms. Its capacity for users to capture and publish content that attracts huge audiences within hours means that every gaffe made by a politician, every casual aside or contradictory statement can be amplified well beyond the scope of traditional print and broadcast media. The interactive nature of YouTube, where viewers can post text and video responses to existing videos, further exposes those politicians who participate to parody, ridicule and abuse. Macnamara observes that such forms of intermediation are increasingly common and often outnumber official political communication.[43] For example, within hours of the then Australian prime minister John Howard releasing his climate change policy on YouTube, "thousands of derisory, hostile and frequently rude comments appeared in the comments section of the YouTube link, with seemingly no capacity on the part of the prime minister's representatives to moderate them, respond to them, or even have them deleted".[44] Howard's efforts to engage young voters were undermined by the popularity of the satires and mash-ups that proliferated in response to his video releases.[45] Triggered by his government's climate action ads using the theme *I can do that*, the non-partisan Australian political lobby group Getup created a much appreciated satirical send-up with lines such as, "Creating an ad campaign to make the government look cleaner? I can do that!"[46]

The lack of traction achieved by party political YouTube videos—and the success of many of the satirical responses—can be attributed at least in part to the former's adherence to television broadcast conventions and lack of awareness of online video sensibilities.[47] It is the satirical spoofs, mash-ups and parodies that are republished across the blogosphere and which spread virally via email, Facebook and Twitter. One such example was Hugh Atkin's *Kevin Rudd—Chinese Propaganda Video* (2007), which deftly connected a number of political themes in a biographical parody of the then Australian opposition leader. This is one of several

Fig. 6.4 Still showing an image sequence from Hugh Atkin's mash-up video. *Will the Real Mitt Romney Please Stand Up? (feat. Eminem)*, 19 March 2012, at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxch-yi14BE (accessed 2 May 2016).

satirical videos that has made Atkin something of a cyber celebrity, not just in Australia but also in the USA. His videos regularly attract tens or hundreds of thousands—and occasionally millions—of unique views. His 2012 mash-up, *Will the Real Mitt Romney Please Stand Up?* (illustrated in Fig. 6.4), comprises dozens of separate audio-visual broadcast clips, seamlessly edited together to deliver a satirical and original lyrical arrangement of American singer Eminem's popular number "The Real Slim Shady". At time of writing, the resulting clip had been viewed over 9 million times, "liked" over 135,000 times and had attracted more than 24,000 comments.

YouTube viewers typically express admiration for what they see as high production values and insightful satire, while others use the comments section as a forum for political discourse. Atkin's videos have been disseminated both on popular blogs and throughout the US and Australian mainstream media in reputable and esteemed news sites and magazines such as *The Australian*, *The Guardian*, *New York Magazine*, *Wired* and *Forbes*. Something of their impact is revealed by Michael Serazio's assessment (in *The Atlantic* magazine's digital edition) that Atkin's videos satirising the 2012 US presidential election campaign were "a

pitch-perfect meta-commentary on the state of politics and the media in America today". *Will the Real Mitt Romney Please Stand Up?* he judged to be "devastating as a lampoon of the candidate and the media shorthand shaping up around him", adding that even "the Obama campaign could have scarcely assembled a tidier compendium of oppo research".[48] Atkin's success can be attributed to a number of skill factors: a sustained critical engagement with both Australian and US politics; his ability to source and capture the archived video clips from which his works are constructed (or "mashed-up"); his mastery of digital video editing processes; keen insight into contemporary popular culture; and a sharp and witty intellect that draws together disparate concepts and ideas into a metaphor-laden, satirical pastiche that captivates viewers, whether they share his political standpoint or not.

These satirical videos also perhaps owe much of their success to the very politicians and political parties they satirise, since, in seeking to benefit from the exposure that YouTube can provide, they have created an open forum that leaves them vulnerable to subversive and comic protest. Questioning the Internet's capacity to increase democratic participation by citizens, Mark Rolfe has cautioned that Web 2.0 applications such as YouTube do not so much promote positive discourse as present an "additional avenue for satirically savaging those who would prove their credibility with us".[49] Conversely, Macnamara suggests that spoofs and parodies in the new media sphere allow those citizens not well-versed in formal and elitist language to participate in political debate.[50] The language of the common citizen is well represented in these forums and video satire can rightly be viewed as a substantive component of current democratic discourse. Such new media communication forms and networks provide a power-monitoring mechanism through which "the powerful … come to feel the constant pinch of the powerless".[51] In the same way as the emerging Indian film industry in the 1920s "helped citizens to feel publicly represented in the language, religion or region of their choice",[52] YouTube videos provide a means by which citizens can assess and respond to the partisan, on-message communications of their elected representatives and other power institutions.

For animation and video satirists, YouTube has established itself as the dominant publication platform. While Facebook and Twitter have recently developed the capacity to host video content, the current trend is for websites to embed YouTube videos; that is, rather than consume their own data storage space by hosting the original content themselves,

websites embed videos via a URL code that points browsers to the YouTube clip. The video is played in the site being visited, but is hosted, or sourced, from the YouTube site. Thus, Hugh Atkin, for example, does not bother uploading his work anywhere else: once the video is uploaded to his YouTube site, he can email the URL to friends and media outlets who can immediately view it. His legion of nearly 20,000 subscribers ensures that his videos are shared either via direct links to the site, or as embedded videos in news and opinion sites, social networking sites and blogs.

Portable Communication Platforms

The evolution of the mobile phone into a portable multimedia communication device allows phone users to access online content and send visual material to their peers and others. While the Apple iPad is a relatively recent phenomenon, it has established the portable tablet device as a ubiquitous digital tool, both around the home and in business and education. Phones, tablets and personal computers are becoming more or less identical through hybridisation; each of them performs some specific tasks better than the others, but their overall functionality is more or less the same. Certainly, the capacity to access and play back video content is serviced equally by these devices.

Content may consist of videos or images which the users have uploaded to the phone themselves, had delivered by peers via a text message, or downloaded from the Internet. Uptake of this technology has accelerated in just the last couple of years,[53] as manufacturers and communications providers devise ways of delivering the products more reliably and inexpensively. Until recently, the cost of accessing and downloading video content was prohibitive for many: video file sizes are relatively large and habitual use can easily consume a user's available data download allowance. In the short-to-medium term, though, the universal trend in affluent societies is towards universal broadband Internet access and more affordable subscriptions,[54] which is likely to present the best opportunity for satirists to disseminate their work to portable media platforms.[55] Users may then readily access content whether through video sharing sites, social networking sites or emails.

Recent trends in the USA, UK and Australia alike are that portable device technology is fast becoming the primary vehicle for the dissemination and consumption of political news and comment, including satirical

videos and mash-ups. For example, The PEW Research Center in the USA reports that the use of mobile phones to track political news rose from 13% of registered voters in 2010 to 28% in 2014.[56] The British independent regulatory agency, Ofcom, revealed in 2015 that British adults for the first time preferred mobile phones to personal computers for online use.[57] In 2014 in Australia, 21% of adults reportedly accessed the Internet exclusively via their mobile phones.[58] While there is no scope here to explore the psychological impact of these devices on browsing habits, it is nevertheless interesting to reflect on the fundamental shift in how we consume static and audiovisual images online. Until relatively recently, content was viewed passively on a screen in a fixed location: either in a cinema, on a television set or on a desktop computer. Portable digital devices have changed our viewing space, and in doing so, by extension, will inevitably change the way we receive and manage content.

New Media and Democratic Participation

Not surprisingly, the dynamic nature of the Internet—and Web 2.0 applications in particular—has profound implications for the role of the political cartoon in modern democracies. An increasing number of citizens now look to the Internet for information about politics. As discussed above, a growing number of politicians and activists use it to promote themselves and disseminate their messages. In 2010, 54% of US adults used the Internet to get news and information about that year's mid-term election campaign, up from 44% in 2008 and 29% in 2004.[59] The political cartoonist seeking an audience has to bear in mind that the Internet user may engage with politically related content either deliberately through focused browsing, or incidentally as the result of targeted political communication and advertising, or by sheer accident.

The use of the Internet for political communication as well as for sourcing news and entertainment means that a satirical political image has multiple contexts. Depending on the context in which they are presented, political cartoons can be delivered as invective, as affirmation, clarification or persuasion for the viewer. Viewed in isolation on the Internet, the image, even though clearly satirical, may lack the potency to persuade or move to action those who view it; but placed within a broader context of opinion and analysis designed to persuade, the political cartoon becomes a component of this conversation.

There is no consensus that the proliferation of Internet media equates to increased community engagement and participation in democratic discourse. Some scholars, such as Mark Rolfe, point to the countervailing impact of public power,[60] while Margolis and Resnick's oft-cited "normalisation thesis" contends that the Internet has not revolutionised social and political life so much as replicated in virtual form the established patterns and characteristics of the offline sphere.[61] Certainly in Australia, as noted above, politicians have been slow either to recognise or to apply in their web marketing and communication strategies the interactivity and "conversation" features that distinguish Web 2.0 media. Despite their social media use more than doubling after the 2007 election, Australian politicians performed even more poorly during the 2013 Federal election, in terms of interactively engaging with the electorate via social media.[62]

Conversely, with regard to broader citizen access and engagement with the Internet, and especially including the production of subversive forms of political satire, the picture is brighter. Macnamara has observed "a changed sense of community, a greater sense of participation, less dependence on official channels and expertise, and a repositioning of politics within popular culture".[63] Chen notes that social media has facilitated a "massive expansion in highly visible public talk about politicians", promoting democratic and policy discourse in the community.[64] The rapid and organic nature of information dissemination amongst users diminishes the capacity of politicians and corporate media to control the discursive agenda. In a 2015 instance concerning a foolish Australian parliamentarian, a number of commentators have attributed the downfall of then Speaker of the House of Representatives Bronwyn Bishop to the proliferation of "chopper" memes ridiculing her unwise decision to travel by helicopter to a relatively nearby engagement.[65] In the USA, presidential candidate Mitt Romney certainly suffered from his awkward response to a question about gender pay inequality during the second debate of the 2012 presidential campaign. It left him embarrassed by sustained mockery on social media across multiple platforms.[66] Such ridicule cannot be proven causative, of course, but it undoubtedly adds to a politician's woes.

Ongoing refinements made to the functionality and interoperability of Web 2.0 applications, combined with increased accessibility to the Internet, continue to lower the barriers for user participation and to permit the establishment of new modes of political expression and

community interaction.[67] Henry Jenkins's study of the collision between old and new media identified the characteristics that distinguish new media from broadcast media in political communication as access, participation, reciprocity and peer-to-peer rather than one-to-many communication, leading him to predict that digital democracy will develop through "a changed sense of community, a greater sense of participation, less dependence on official expertise and a greater trust in collaborative problem-solving". As a consequence, however, it will likely be "decentralised, unevenly dispersed, profoundly contradictory, and slow to emerge".[68] It remains to be seen how this will affect the role and impact of political cartoonists.

To engage with an audience, the political cartoonist must also consider the increasingly fluid relationship between media institutions. Drawing lessons from the 2007 Australian federal election, Terry Flew concluded that effective socio-political communication in the Westminster tradition would increasingly need to be multi-channel: "new voices in the media will not just be bloggers or citizen journalists, but will also have strategies to work across multiple media channels, and across the domains of mass media, online self-publishing, and the various forms of 'editing-lite' online media".[69] Successful political cartoonists in the new media age accordingly might be distinguished by their capacity to publish and disseminate their work in the ways indicated by artists like Jon Kudelka and Rocco Fazzari: still image cartoons appearing on Facebook and Twitter, on blogs and in the op-ed pages of broadsheet media; and moving image works on YouTube, as well as through broadcast and narrowcast media channels. Or, discarding these organised vehicles, cartoonists of the future may simply be citizens with access to some basic software programmes, an Internet connection and with something to say that resonates with others.

Conclusions

The production and dissemination opportunities provided by the Internet and new media technologies certainly present significant challenges to the political cartoonist. There is a potentially huge audience on the Internet, but one that is not always easy to access and engage. The advances in technology that open up new modes of production can be time consuming to learn and employ. The skill sets required to engage in digital production and dissemination also challenge the traditionally

spontaneous nature of political cartooning. There are also practical implications for cartoonists seeking to publish and disseminate their work online within the framework of a regular daily or weekly media cycle. An online profile needs to be promoted to a selected audience and then nurtured: this can be challenging for any cartoonist, but especially for those who do not have an existing public profile built up from prior practice in traditional print media. Finally, cartoonists seeking to publish online must be prepared for constant engagement with evolving digital technology, in terms both of production and dissemination methods.

The increasing hybridisation of media platforms and intermediation between media types points to a future that is as yet uncertain. Nevertheless, this study hopefully provides some comfort for those who lament what they perceive as the decline of the political cartooning tradition. Both cartoonists and commentators who feel that contemporary forces are conspiring to diminish the role of the cartoon image in public discourse can surely draw solace from remembering that the art form has endured for hundreds of years, precisely because of the capacity of its practitioners to adapt to and exploit the socio-political and technological conditions of their day. Seen in this light, the decline of the print newspaper as the dominant publication and dissemination platform for the images of political cartooning merely echoes previous transitions in the tradition. The crucial difference in the present phase is that the superseding medium provides a multi-media environment that offers political (along with other) cartoonists unprecedented creative opportunities.

It is still too early to determine how effectively newspapers as a whole are negotiating the transition from print to online publishing. Clearly, the environment into which they are transitioning is a highly competitive one with respect to news and opinion dissemination. The traditional separation between radio, television and newsprint media does not exist on the hybrid media platform of the Internet, and the 24 hour, multichannel nature of user accessibility and interaction with its content fractures the news and opinion audience further than in the past. And the fact that much of the content is saturated with the audiovisual image is a further challenge to the old newspaper-publishing paradigm.

The fundamental imperative for newspapers is to establish a revenue model that enables them to maintain their core craft online. Although the static, political, satirical image may remain so far an integral component of the publication models of newspapers, this cannot guarantee the future of the political cartooning tradition The resilience of the tradition

and its capacity to adapt to change will surely be best served by relinquishing its dependence on the newsprint media and embracing the full suite of opportunities afforded by new production and dissemination platforms.

Notes

1. E.g. Eric Beecher, "The Death of Fairfax and the End of Newspapers", July 2013; Glenn Dyer and Myriam Robin, "Print Circulation Circling the Drain: Is it Time for Drastic Measures?", 2015; and Rod Tiffen, "The Press", 2010.
2. E.g. Chris Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons*, 2004, p. 220.
3. "The Golden Age for Editorial Cartoonists at the Nation's Newspapers is Over", 2011.
4. Bruce Plante, "What Publishers Think About Editorial Cartoons", 2004.
5. Ted Rall, "Editors are Killing US Political Cartooning", 2015.
6. Lamb, p. 225.
7. Keith Townsend, Paula McDonald and Lin Esders, "How Political, Satirical Cartoons Illustrated Australia's *Workchoices* Debate", 2008, p. 7.
8. Ian Mathews, "The Editor and the Cartoonist", 2008, p. 54.
9. Amanda Roe, "Graphic Satire and Public Life in the Age of Terror", 2004, p. 60. Murdoch is Australian by birth, despite his current American citizenship.
10. Jon Kudelka, interview, 12 September 2011.
11. Townsend et al., p. 4.
12. Jon Agar, "Technology and British Cartoonists in the Twentieth Century", 2004, p. 2.
13. "Australia's Appetite for Financial News and Information on the Rise", 2015.
14. Matt Ozga, "Political Cartoonists, the Endangered Species", 2005.
15. Andrea Carson, "Behind the Newspaper Paywall—Lessons in Charging for Online Content: A Comparative Analysis of Why Australian Newspapers are Stuck in the Purgatorial Space Between Digital and Print", 2015, p. 1032.
16. Penny O'Donnell, David McKnight and Jonathan Este, "Journalism at the Speed of Bytes: Australian Newspapers in the 21st Century", 2012, p. 12.
17. Agar, p. 2.
18. Andrew Darley, *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres*, 2000, p. 81.
19. Darley, pp. 133, 191.
20. J. D. Lasica, "Let's Get Animated", 2002.

21. Robert Niles, "Can the Internet Rejuvenate Editorial Cartooning?", 2005.
22. "2007 Pulitzer Prizes, Journalism", 2007.
23. Walt Handelsman, personal website; Walt Handelsman, "My life as …", 17 March 2010.
24. "The Golden Age for Editorial Cartoonists at the Nation's Newspapers is Over", 2011.
25. Rocco Fazzari, "Is This the End of the Political Cartoonist?", 2016.
26. Niles, 2005.
27. Jimmy Margulies, "Interview with Clay Bennett", 2007 p. 232.
28. Leunig (b. 1945) and other cartoonists used fax machines for some decades, but this method of image transmission somewhat compromised the integrity of the line in their work.
29. Kudelka, 2011.
30. At: http://www.kudelka.com.au/ (accessed 31 January 2016).
31. Kudelka, 2011.
32. Ibid.
33. Rocco Fazzari, "The Sugar Hit", 2009.
34. Rocco Fazzari, interview by author, 11 July 2011.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. "How Popular is YouTube.com?", 24 April 2016.
40. David Hallerman, "YouTube's Audience: Not Who You Think", November 2006.
41. Jim Macnamara, "E-Electioneering: Use of New Media in the 2007 Australian Federal Election", July 2008, p. 2.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p. 13.
44. Terry Flew, "Not Yet the Internet Election: Online Media, Political Commentary and the 2007 Australian Federal Election", 2008, p. 3.
45. Mark Rolfe, "From Big to Little Screens: Recurring Images of Democratic Credibility and the Net", 2008, p. 11.
46. Axel Bruns, Jason Wilson and Barry Saunders, "Election Flops on YouTube", 2007.
47. Ibid.
48. Michael Serazio, "The Real Mitt Romney Is Funny, but Is It Art?", 26 September 2012.
49. Rolfe, p. 11.
50. Macnamara, p. 11.
51. John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy*, 2009, p. 745.
52. Keane, p. 634.

53. For Australia and the UK, see "Tablets Take Off: Take Up and Use of Tablet Computer in Australia", 2015; "Device Ownership Over Time", 2016; and Deloitte Mobile Consumer 2015: The UK Cut, Game of Phones, 2015.
54. For Australia, see "Australian Social Trends", 2011.
55. In 2016, the Australian National Broadband Network infrastructure project aims to provide 93% of individual premises across the vast continent with access to broadband Internet services.
56. Aaron Smith, "Cell Phones, Social Media and Campaign Smith 2014", 2014.
57. "The Communications Market 2015 (August)".
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59. Aaron Smith, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008", 2009; "Politics Fact Sheet", 2015.
60. Rolfe, p. 10.
61. Michael Margolis and David Resnick, *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace Revolution*, 2000, p. 74.
62. Jim Macnamara and Gail Kenning, "E-electioneering 2007–2013: Trends in Online Political Campaigns Over Three Elections", 2014.
63. Macnamara, 2008, p. 18.
64. Peter Chen, *Australian Politics in a Digital Age*, 2013, p. 217.
65. E.g. Shaun Turton, "How Social Media Destroyed an Australian Politician", 2015; and Charles Purcell, "How the Power of the Meme Brought Down Bronwyn Bishop", 2015.
66. "Romney's 'Binder Full of Women' Comment Spills onto Campaign Trail", 2012.
67. Chen, p. 121.
68. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 2006, p. 208.
69. Flew, p. 14.

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CHAPTER 7

The Effects of Satire: Exploring Its Impact on Political Candidate Evaluation

Alison O'Connor

The relationships between satire, truth, today's mainstream news provision and opinion shaping are often fluid. Since satire can tell the truth to power, the significance of the role assumed by satirists when doing so increases in the absence of other individuals and institutions making such critiques. Even when other critical voices are present, an important question is what effect (if any) this kind of truth-telling satire has. The most accessible examples for studying this are provided by occasions when satirists either make an overt call-to-action to their audience (often to engage in the traditional political process or to protest); or become involved in what is recognisably traditional political action or other involvement in the political process; or when politicians and leaders themselves voluntarily appear in the context of satirical content.[1]

Considering the first two types of example, the apparent effects of contemporary satire on its audiences have been widely noted in the USA in relation to specific satirical television programmes. *TIME Magazine* described the "John Oliver Effect": the process whereby political action seemed to result from or be inspired by investigative segments aired on the

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TV comedy show *Last Week Tonight* with John Oliver, leading to actual policy changes.[2] A defining feature of that show was to include segments with an explicit "call to action" in which the audience could participate. The range of invited responses could be as mild as participation in social media hashtags or as serious as the formal submission of opinion in government processes. Host John Oliver is only one part of a group of comedians in America who call upon their audiences to perform particular actions. Steven Colbert, for example, when hosting his own satirical entertainment programme *The Colbert Report*, addressed his audience as "the Colbert Nation". Along with *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, these two popular contemporary satirical programmes were identified as primary sources of news during the 2008 American Presidential election, particularly for viewers aged under 30. A study of coverage of the 2004 US Nominating Conventions showed that *The Daily Show* provided comparable information to that in the nightly news on three channels: ABC, NBC and CBS.[3] The outreach of these two entertainers is further shown by the fact that, in 2010, Stewart and Colbert co-hosted a "Rally to Restore Sanity And/Or Fear" in Washington DC. The rally included appearances from a range of entertainers, musicians and commentators who performed to a crowd estimated at 215,000 people.[4] While it had no single, overt policy objective, the event was both a chance to be entertained and a way for political moderates to make a public statement of their belief that contemporary political expression was both polarised and polarising. That the rally was organised by comedians demonstrates the blurriness of distinguishing in some cases between political statements and entertainment.

At times, satirists may even be called upon to move explicitly beyond the sphere of entertainment, for example by appearing at a legal or political proceeding. Ian Hislop, editor of UK satirical magazine *Private Eye*, gave formal evidence before the Leveson Inquiry in 2012.[5] In September 2010, Colbert was asked to testify before a US Congressional subcommittee about the plight of migrant farmworkers, a topic he had dealt with on his show. Other satirists in Italy, Spain and Brazil have also crossed this boundary, for example by entering politics as candidates for election, an action quite separate from the popularity and success of satirical political stunts or pranks.[6] The party founded by comedian Beppe Grillo proved effective: it won a quarter of all votes cast in the 2013 Italian national elections; and in 2010, Brazilian clown Tiririca was elected to that country's senate.

While these examples indicate times when some serious consequences of satire can readily be observed, such explicit actions and reactions do not of course attach to all examples of satire. Absent a specific call-to-arms or direct engagement with political action, the question of what, if any, effect beyond amusement satire has upon its audience is more heavily contested.

Researching the Impact of Satire

Given the increasing popularity and notoriety of politically connected satire and stunts, it is not surprising that there has been a corresponding explosion of research. Much is influenced by literary criticism and tends to explore why audiences find something funny, analysing techniques and construction. Other studies place satire in the context of a political theory discussion about the nature of democracy. Some such theorists suggest satire is a barometer for public opinion, a reflection of the times; others (e.g. Stephen Wagg)[7] hold that it is an impetus for traditional political action; or, like Lauren Feldman and Dannagal Young, a gateway to improved political knowledge.[8] Both arguments presume that satire affects an individual's opinions and, for Wagg (as for *TIME Magazine*), their behaviour.

Such discussions, however, whether scholarly or popular, leapfrog the first step of testing empirically whether satire does in fact influence an individual's opinion in a way distinct from other forms of news or entertainment—a research question which entails bringing together the study of humour, satire and politics with communication studies, specifically of persuasive communication and its impact. This is the focus of the present chapter, which reports experimental work on this subject carried out by the author in 2012 with participants in the UK and the USA. Given the broad range of targets and purposes of satire, and the huge variety of ways in which to measure changed opinions and behaviour, the wider question of the impact of satire on its audience was of necessity narrowed to whether viewing satire changed self-reported evaluation of a particular political candidate. The significance of the investigation was not limited to its possible findings, regardless of whether those might prove positive or negative. On the one hand, if viewing satire could be shown to affect candidate evaluation in either direction, the result would provide a basis for future, more detailed research exploring the actual mechanisms by which satire works; it would contribute to theorising the effects of

satire. On the other hand, if no effect were shown, that would in turn have important implications for how scholars might interpret satire and its enormous current popularity in the political sphere. Regardless of its outcomes, any such empirical investigation must first begin by defining terms, most importantly the word satire itself, and by linking research trends in persuasive communications to humour studies theory, before summarising previous attempts to measure and quantify the effect of satire.

Defining Satire

In defining the term "satire", a highly practical definition is one designed for but not limited to a legal use of the term. This captures the elusive genre as "the critical impulse manifesting itself in some degree of denigration, almost invariably through attempted humour; [and] the artistic results (usually humorous) of expression of such a critical impulse".[9] This definition combines common usage with an understanding of the classical meaning of the term and also recognises that humour is a common but not always evident feature in satire. This avoids the pitfalls of examples that are widely agreed to be satirical but are not necessarily funny; for example, George Orwell's famously bleak novel *1984*, and instances when an satirist has intended something to be funny, but audiences and/or critics dispute whether that has been achieved. Given the focus of the present study on controversial televisual satire, this is helpful and apposite.

Dictionary definitions of satire (at least in the UK where this study was carried out) are heavily influenced by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). The OED describes satire through the techniques it employs, defining it as "the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise people's stupidity or vices".[10] This approach is reflected in many related definitions used in literary criticism and genre studies, where techniques like pastiche, parody, ridicule, wit etc. are used to pin down satire.[11] However, all these aspects of satire are valuable for noting that a definition that depends on specific techniques or mediums too easily ends up excluding new and emerging forms of satire and especially some of the creative inventions of today's media. For example, definitions from genre studies drawn in the period before widespread access to the Internet naturally exclude the phenomenon of Internet memes, although these, due to their easy creation, have proved one of the most

immediate forms of satire circulating in response to a current event or news item.

Definitions from literary and genre-studies do nevertheless prove helpful in classifying sub-genres of satire, underlining the fact that satire is a continuum, ranging from harsh critiques to milder criticisms. Two defining points on that continuum are Juvenalian and Horatian satire, traditional concepts which are utilised in the present study. They take their names from the Roman satirists Juvenal and Horace. While Juvenal's writings make harsh criticisms that invite indignation and contempt as a response, those of Horace invite a kind of amused recognition of the truth contained in the criticisms made. Thus, Juvenalian satire is understood as harsher than its Horatian counterpart, which in turn tends towards wry amusement.[12] Although some subjectivity is necessarily involved in judging examples and sub-genres, the concept of a spectrum of severity of criticism is a useful guide in selecting specific examples of satire for research purposes. Even though a given piece of humour may relate to politics, its joking may not necessarily be truly critical. If it is merely good-humoured, indulging and tolerating the folly or nonsense it identifies, then, putting together the stating definition quoted above with the Juvenalian–Horatian spectrum, it would be stretching the term to call it even Horatian satire. For this study, a clearly critical element was required to ensure it was an example of satire and not simply of political humour.

Satire in Society

As noted above, there is a flourishing literature including some research that grapples with the effects of specific popular satirical programmes and with the interplay between such examples of satire and how they are interpreted in a cultural context. While not the focus of this chapter, this nexus is an important theoretical perspective for relevant empirical work. Comedy and satire are recognised as contributing to social and national identity formation. Gournelos and Greene (2011) interrogated the role that satire, irony and comedy played in reshaping US identity in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Working with examples of visual culture, they argued that cultural artefacts have the capacity to puncture the rhetoric of fear, and that a comedic response, no matter how bleak, is part of a national response to trauma and tragedy. Thus, political cartoons can be a meaningful signal not only for citizens themselves, but

also for those outside the country to inform them in making an assessment. Other studies have seen such a response as a mechanism by which both a country and its citizens can understand their reputation abroad (Bigi et al. 2011).

Most analysis of the cultural consequences of individual satirists and satirical programmes focuses on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and *The Colbert Report*, largely due to the popularity and longevity of these US programmes. Issues include the programme's place in rhetorical history, its position on recurring issues like race and religion, and its argument schemas and frames (e.g. Goodnow 2011). Baym and Jones (2013) draw together case studies from across the European Union, India, Israel, Palestine and elsewhere to discuss what particular satirical programmes might mean for a cultural landscape. This kind of analysis, often centring on the effects of individual examples, is part of a methodology that uses individual programmes as evidence in broader conversations about their significance and popularity. For example, in an Australian context, Stephen Harrington (2012) argues that the satirical programme *The Chaser's War on Everything* (ABC TV) allows satirists to challenge the status quo with politicians, political parties and political issues differently, and at times with greater authenticity, than traditional news media can. While such studies share a common analytical approach, their conclusions are far from unified and assert a wide variety of reasons for the popularity and significance of such programmes and for the consequences of their popularity.

The debate about cultural significance of satire is not only about individual examples, but concerns the nature of democracy and the quality of engagement in the public sphere. As McClennan and Maisel argue, at a time in the USA when "both politics and mainstream media seem dangerously distant … the defence of democracy increasingly comes from satirists".[13] They see satirists as having become the voices of reason. Thus, their argument is not simply about the value of satire, but is a nuanced one that encompasses professional satirists and what they call non-professional "citizen satirists",[14] asserting their particular significance at a time when politics and traditional media have obscured the voice of the citizen and when the political system gives undue power to a wide range of vested interests and public and private corporations.

Similar arguments are advanced, particularly in a modern US political context, by Priscilla Meddaugh (2010) regarding Stephen Colbert, Jeffrey P. Jones (2010) regarding *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* and

US satirists such as Michael Moore, by Amarnath Amarasingam (2011) and many others. Amarasingam's edited volume starts to delve into the effects of these satirical programmes, not only in terms of political or rhetorical theory, but also their political impact and audience effects. In addressing audience impact, researchers have sought to determine whether these programmes do have an effect, if so on what, and under what circumstances that can be seen, felt and perhaps measured. The effects hypothesised are broadly: the acquisition of political knowledge (education), opinion formation (including a tendency towards cynicism and candidate evaluation), and serving as an impetus for traditional forms of political participation. Of these effects, the one selected for the present study is candidate evaluation, which derives some methodological validation from use in professional polling and research on persuasive communication.

Influencing the Public

The umbrella term "persuasive communication", used in Communication Studies, may describe anything (from speeches to advertisements and public awareness campaigns) where the goal is to influence public opinions and/or behaviour. Research addressing how to make public information campaigns more effective has yielded some conclusions about the operation of persuasion that are relevant to investigating satire. One 2002 study compared 30 different anti-drug public-service announcements under five control conditions, using 3608 students in US school grades 5–12.[15] It found that the effectiveness of the communication depended on the appropriateness of the techniques in relation to both the intended audience and message, confirming the theory originally proposed by Gerald Miller in 1980.[16] This is now supported by research about both political and apolitical campaigns, such as those encouraging people to register to vote, and others concerning public health and HIV/AIDS (Dillard et al. 1996).

Using entertainment as a communication tool has been shown to be especially persuasive when targeting risky behaviour. Evidence from a study of US undergraduates about their intended safe-sex practices suggested that a combination of entertainment-education programming was more effective than either educational or entertainment programming alone for changing behaviours; however, this effect was mediated by previous sexual behaviour and by gender.[17] Similar research on television

entertainment suggests that while the precise mechanism might remain unclear, the effect likely derives from humour overcoming the seemingly inbuilt human mechanism for counter-argument: that people absorb a serious message more readily because it is presented in a humorous or entertainment context (Nabi et al. 2007; Moyer-Gusé 2008; Moyer-Gusé and Nabi 2010).

In some instances, it has been shown that education-entertainment can be effective for persuading even those who are otherwise resistant to the message, for example in engaging US Hispanic women with information services about breast cancer (Wilkins et al. 2007), and also for gay males regarding testing for syphilis. In the latter case, a natural experiment selected a popular TV series featuring a gay male character testing positive for syphilis. Questionnaires regarding sexual practices and intentions for STD testing were then distributed through online chatrooms used by men who have sex with men. Having seen the show emerged as a predictor for intention to be screened for syphilis and also for intention to tell others to do so.[18]

While this research is promising as to the value of opinion shaping and intended behaviour as a result of entertainment-education, there are nevertheless many instances where humour and entertainment-education have failed to produce the intended results. Consequently, research to date has not revealed firm guidelines about what allows humour and/or satire to be effective tools of persuasion. In one public information campaign about safe-sex practices, when individuals were exposed to a storyline about pregnancy within a humorous context, they proved more likely to trivialise a safe-sex message than when it was presented in a serious tone.[19] Some general evidence suggests that humour is more effective than seriousness in reaching particular target audiences, for example adolescents, and young adult males (Moyer-Gusé and Nabi 2010; Slater and Rouner 2002), with corresponding implications for education and public information campaigns.

Influencing the Buyer

Somewhat distinct from entertainment-education, advertising research has also explored whether humour is persuasive and under what circumstances it is effective. As early as 1973, marketing research by Sternthall and Craig[20] suggested that humour was more effective than other advertising techniques because it created a positive feeling towards

the humorist and, by proxy, the brand. More recent research validates the notion that invoking humour produces a positive brand association (e.g. Strick et al. 2009). However, research around the value of humour in advertising generally has also produced a myriad of results: humour is not uniformly successful as a strategy, and both its persuasive capacity and the mechanisms by which it works have been contested. Charles Gulas and Marc Weinberger hypothesised how and why humour might achieve a cut-through effect in a saturated marketplace for products, examining a series of case studies of failed humour, humour that failed in its persuasive objectives and factors that led to its successful deployment.[21] Alden et al. (2000) looked at incongruity and surprise in relation to perceived humour in TV advertising, suggesting that context and positive moderators are vital factors for achieving both humour and the desired outcomes. In experimental settings, Thomas Cline and James Kellaris demonstrated that strength of humour and relevance to the intended message increase advertisement recall, but also showed that this effect is mediated by the attention span and mood of the recipient(s).[22]

More recent research posits a different assessment of the persuasive capacity of humour (Strick et al. 2013). Challenging the notion that persuasive capacity is directly affected by how closely associated the humour is with the intended message, these researchers demonstrated that even humour unrelated to a brand develops a positive association that can influence subsequent brand choice; and, importantly, that it can also block other, more negative brand associations. They hypothesise that this leads to changes in viewers' mental associative structures and thus to a more positive assessment of brand at the point of buyer choice. These implications are quite dramatic, suggesting that humour, message and "likeability" are not necessarily connected through the purpose or intent of the humour used.

Humour and Persuasion

Despite these complex results, the overall trajectory of research so far indicates that humour, like entertainment-education, may indeed reach a different audience than that gained by more serious pieces of persuasive communication, potentially extending to those of a different taste or political persuasion than the humorist/writer. This suggests an effective point of connection with humour studies and satire research: perhaps, in making its critical comments in a comedic and playful fashion,

satire can similarly challenge existing beliefs by operating in a less confrontational fashion than a more serious approach. Dineh Davis argues, for example, that humour creates a space for reflexive evaluation by its recipients,[23] although a study by Polk et al. (2009) did find that the use of irony can also act to reduce the scrutiny of an argument. While the mechanism of persuasion (or lack of persuasion) is beyond the scope of the present study, it does aim to explore the impact of satirical humour on audiences—both voluntary and involuntary ones.

Research relating to elections and candidate evaluation—at least in a non-compulsory voting context—suggests that serious communication with political content best reaches those who are inclined to agree with the message. Negative political advertising, for example, has been found most effective for those audience members who already agree with the positions articulated (e.g. Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Chang et al. 1998). A more recent study has demonstrated that both electronic and hardcopy campaign literature are more persuasive for those already oriented to that political agenda, although it could also be persuasive for those who were unaligned (Abramson et al. 2003).

A growing body of research suggests that the best way to improve results in candidate evaluation is not through policy changes or elaboration, but by having the candidate display more "likeable" traits—traits that fit into a positive human prototype (e.g. compassion, integrity, reliability)[24] to which, importantly, a sense of humour has now been added (Baym 2005). This has practical implications for campaigners and researchers alike in understanding why politicians choose to appear on programmes that have previously made mock of them. This is particularly true of the US political context, where late night comedy shows are a staple of network television and where the prominence and cultural significance of comedy programmes like *The Daily Show* is evident. By appearing on the show, politicians can demonstrate that they are "in" on the jokes, thus potentially increasing their likeability, and undermining the effectiveness of the criticisms being made. Demonstrating a sense of humour is however politically fraught. In an online experiment conducted in the lead-up to the 2008 American Presidential election, and using examples of candidates telling both self-deprecating jokes and jokes about others, Stewart (2013) demonstrated that prior opinions about political issues and about the candidate influence how the jokes are interpreted, and also how the candidate is evaluated afterwards. He found that, rather than challenging, the jokes tended to validate pre-existing

opinions or political inclinations of those hearing them, something also seen with education-entertainment, and advertising.

Quantifying the Effects of Satire

One of the widely assumed aspects of satire is a relationship between audiences of satire and levels of cynicism. Liesbet van Zoonen is a scholar who is fundamentally optimistic about the popularity of politics as a topic in entertainment (whether comedic or not), seeing its inclusion as serving to inspire or reinvigorate political participation and to instil civic pride and values in the broader population.[25] Her argument stands in stark contrast to the scathing critique offered by Hart and Hartelius (2007) on the effect of *The Jon Stewart Show* in encouraging cynicism and apathy in its audiences. Guggenheim et al. (2011) empirically tested the supposed relationship, demonstrating that while systematic cynicism is related to viewing satirical programmes, mistrust in politicians is consistently present across all audiences, whether for satirical programmes, comedy talk-shows or cable TV opinion-programming. This result differs from that of an experiment conducted by Rill and Cardiel (2013), working with user-generated satire on YouTube, where viewing satire about political candidates was not found to affect levels of reported political cynicism—but did negatively alter the evaluation of individual political candidates. Beyond cynicism, Stroud and Muddiman (2013) showed that compared to audiences reading serious news, or reading no news at all, audiences of satirical and comedic news are less tolerant of partisan views distinctly different from their own political opinions, and that viewing satirical news may discourage people from viewing articles or news that differ from their existing opinions. In line with prior research, these results raise serious questions about what kind of audiences satire attracts and creates.

Dannagal Young (2004) showed that watching *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman* during the 2000 presidential campaign led to a more negative evaluation by viewers of both then Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican candidate George W. Bush, when compared to a non-viewing control group. However, the experiment did not isolate the effect of prior political knowledge in the course of viewing, so the more negative assessments may have been because of the satire, but may perhaps have been because the audience simply knew more about the candidates than the non-viewing group.

A study by Brewer and Cao (2006) based on the 2004 primaries determined that appearances by candidates on late night comedy programmes led to increased candidate recognition in a way that morning television appearances (non-comic) did not, suggesting that late night comedy appearances did have a special effect compared to other kinds of television appearances and media coverage.

In that same election year, a laboratory experiment by Baumgartner and Morris (2006) had undergraduates first view material from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and then evaluate presidential candidates, comparing their ratings with those of a group viewing news and with another non-viewing control group. It found that viewing satire led to more negative evaluations of all candidates, as well as to decreased trust in the media. A later online experiment by Jody Baumgartner (2007), using Internet-generated humour, found similar results of increased negative assessments after viewing satire.

There is considerable evidence that exposure to satirical joking about political candidates can lead to "shorthand evaluation" of the candidates. Focusing their research on late night US TV talk-show comedy audiences, Niven, Lichter and Amundsen collected the 13,301 political jokes told on *The Tonight Show, The Late Show, Late Night* and *Politically Incorrect* between 1996 and 2000 and coded them. They noted that joke construction tended to be around simplistic, negative caricatures of a candidate, which recurred on each programme; and that the negative traits being satirised became the traits remembered by the respective audiences,[26] although the researchers drew no direct links to candidate evaluation. These findings illuminate another study into the effects of *The Late Show* which demonstrated that people were more likely to assess candidates negatively if they were regular audience members, and that viewers were more likely than non-viewers to base their evaluations of then presidential candidate George W. Bush on stated character traits after his appearance on *The Late Show*.[27] These results are not incompatible with Geoffrey Baym's findings discussed earlier, specifically that candidate evaluation can improve through elaboration of traits that fit a positive prototype, including a sense of humour.

Other more positive research provides evidence that viewing satire on comedy programmes does serve as a gateway for audiences to become better informed politically, and also to increase their interaction with traditional news media. Two studies (Hollander 2005; Xenos and Becker 2009) that looked at late night comedy programmes and at *The Daily*

Show demonstrated the capacity of these satirical shows for viewer education. An educational effect was supported by Xiaoxia Cao (2010), although the results obtained showed it to be moderated by existing levels of political awareness; that is, the effect was more positive for those least politically aware. Importantly, both the studies by Hollander and Xenos and Becker referred to above revealed lower audience opinion of politics in general after viewing political comedy than those who did not (although the researchers did not specifically look at candidate evaluation). The inverse relationship was reported by Amy Becker (2011), who found a direct and positive relationship between network comedy programmes and political trust, a result found similarly between late night cable TV comedy, cable TV news, and political efficacy.[28] In other words, greater levels of political education, irrespective of whether that derives from comedy or serious content, lead to greater political trust.

Types of Satire and Their Effects

Focusing specifically on the nature of the satire being employed, a multi-author study in 2013 reported two experiments in which participants were allocated to groups exposed to either Juvenalian or Horatian satire, or else to a traditional political opinion-piece, and were then asked to evaluate how persuasive they found their exposure material. While Juvenalian and Horatian satire were both considered persuasive, Juvenalian (harsher criticism) was rated more persuasive than Horatian (wryer criticism).[29] The measurement was thus of perceived persuasiveness, not the material's actual persuasive effect.

Research concerning American sit-coms has shown that the opinions and views being parodied by particular characters appear to generate or at least to co-exist with an affinity for those perspectives in the audience. The prime example is the long-lived show from the 1970s, *All in the Family* (inspired by the 1965 UK series *Till Death Us Do Part*), in which sexism and racism were acted out but laughed at in the person of the lead character, Archie Bunker. Despite this, when tested, both in audience surveys and in experimental conditions, people who had watched the show proved more likely to espouse sexist or racist views than non-viewers (Brigham and Giesbrecht 1976; Surlin and Tate 1976; Vidmar and Rokeach 1974). Here, the satire evidently failed to persuade, perhaps because the show was more of a cheerful sit-com than explicitly critical satire and the audience failed to recognise any implicit parodic

critique. If that were so, the effect measured may have been failed satire rather than the impact of satire on an audience that was "in" on the joke.

Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris (2008) reported on a laboratory experiment concerning *The Colbert Report*, similar to the one they conducted on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (discussed above). Students were exposed to either news items or clips from the programme and their reactions were compared to those of a non-viewing control group. Results showed that viewing *The Colbert Report* in experimental conditions generated sympathy for the perspective of the Republican Party, despite the fact that this is ostensibly the target of the "Colbert character" who presents as a parody of other influential Party-aligned right-wing media commentators and pundits. The researchers concluded that the effect they were measuring was not that of satire, but the effect of satire that is unrecognised as such by an audience, perhaps the effect of satire when the techniques used to create a satirical parody are so close to the original that the two become confounded.

Pursuing this line of research, Hoffman and Young (2011) drew a distinction between different types of comedic media, recognising that satiric and parodic shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are distinct from late night comedy shows such as *The Late Show* and *The Tonight Show*, in audiences, format, guests and comic style.[30] Separating satirical shows from late night comedy showed that satire was likely to have a positive effect on political participation, in the same way as viewing television news, but that late night comedy did not have that same positive relationship. A second significant study by the same team (Young and Hoffman 2012) focused on the effects of satire on individual opinion and knowledge acquisition. They conducted an online experiment looking at longitudinal effects of satire and news exposure on the three areas of civics, current affairs knowledge and candidate knowledge, with reference to a non-viewing control group. Interestingly, both the groups exposed to news and satire demonstrated increased knowledge of current affairs, but not of civics or of candidate knowledge. This finding has interesting implications for voter knowledge and raises questions about what voters might be basing decisions on. It also highlights the distinction between the effects of satire on candidate evaluation specifically and on political opinion formation more generally.

In testing for relationships between variables, experimental design is all-important. While the research described above has developed useful insights, authors have also recognised limitations of particular designs.

Baumgartner's two studies highlight the authors' concern that structure makes it unclear whether what is being measured is the effect of satire or the effect of unrecognised satire (Baumgartner and Morris 2006, 2008). In the 2008 *Colbert Report* experiment, the effect may have simply been that of expounding a Republican perspective rather than that of the implied satirical critique thereof. The researchers themselves note the possibility that the "intended satire is lost because negative stereotypes are primed among viewers".[31] A number of other experiments managed to measure the effect of successfully recognised satire, but only when exposure was mandatory. This misses a crucial aspect of any real-world audience for satire: audiences are made up of self-selecting members who have chosen to be viewers. Quite possibly, the effects of satire differ for those who watch voluntarily and for experimental subjects whose viewing is compulsory. Other studies lacked a control group with exposure to similar but factual information, meaning that the result found might not have been unique to satire but an effect of the information imparted, whether serious or satirical. In other words, the design limitations do not allow us to resolve whether watching satire or gaining greater knowledge leads to a more negative evaluation (of candidates, for example). Such questions were the starting point for designing further research that would be capable of progressing our understanding of satire's impact and effects.

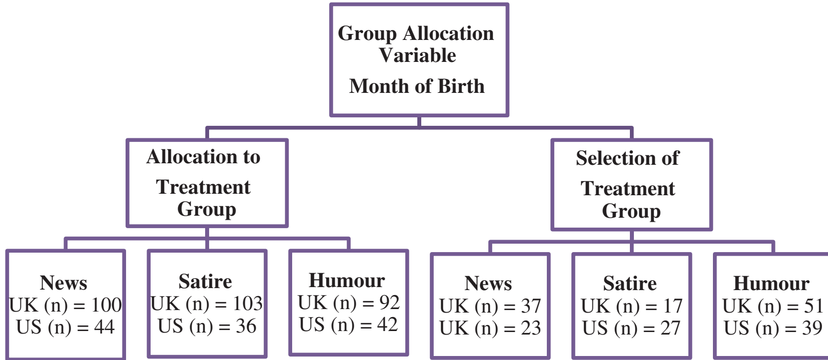
Measuring an Effect?

The study to be reported here in detail was designed to address the two important limitations identified above: first, the absence of a mechanism that would mimic the key "opting in" feature of a real-life audience for satire; and second, the need to recognise that satire provides information as well as entertainment and that participants may be reacting to its education messages in the same way they would to a formal news or informational item, rather than reacting to the intrinsic features of the satire per se. Accordingly, the following two hypotheses were developed and tested:

Hypothesis 1 That choosing to read satire will have a more negative effect on candidate assessment than mandatory viewing of satire.

Hypothesis 2 That reading satire leads to a more negative assessment of the candidate than negative news coverage.

Table 7.1 Experimental design



Notes: UK(*n*) is total number of UK observations in this treatment condition, less exclusions. US(*n*) is total number of American observations in this treatment condition, less exclusions.

Experimental Methodology

To test these hypotheses, an online survey was designed and carried out in 2012 in two countries, the USA and the UK. Widely distributed subjects were recruited via the Internet rather than by using existing classroom groupings, and these volunteers were then randomly assigned to one of four treatments. After opting in and satisfying selection requirements, participants were exposed either to a written news item, to a written satirical item or to a written humorous item unrelated to the candidate or politics; or, were assigned to a fourth group that allowed them to select which of the three pieces they would read (see Table 7.1). UK participants read relevant material about then Prime Minister David Cameron; participants in the USA similarly read material about then Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney. After exposure, all participants were tested on candidate evaluation.

Participants

Participants were recruited through online networks that targeted either the UK or the USA. The invitation was distributed through tertiary but not necessarily university student networks located in geographically diverse sites in both countries, and also via paid advertising on social networking

site, Facebook. Participants older than 30 were targeted. That the experiment was conducted online skewed the sample within that range towards younger and wealthier individuals with higher education levels. Pre-test questions also screened participants so that only those eligible to vote in their respective countries' elections could complete the experiment. A total of 611 respondents were recruited, 400 from the UK and 211 from the USA. Their allocation to treatment groups is shown in Table 7.1 above.

Selection of Treatment Materials

To ensure an effective match between the three pieces of treatment material in terms of impact, specific requirements were developed. The three needed to be of equivalent reading age so as to ensure that any effect measured was not influenced by comprehension level. In addition, the humorous piece had to be wholly unrelated to anything current in the news cycle, or which might emerge in the duration of the experiment, in order to differentiate it sufficiently from the satirical piece. The material selected for "satire" also had to be very obviously satire, ensuring that readers would not fail to recognise it as such. The satirical piece and the news story were matched in content so that they both made the same criticisms and invoked the same references: for example, the UK stimulus piece included a reference to former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher which was replicated in the news piece. While matched stories were achieved for the UK, this proved impossible for the USA, so that a composite news article from existing sources was assembled matching the satirical criticisms.

Information on origins such as authorship and places the material first appeared were all suppressed so as not to prejudice readers. Any publication outlet is likely to contain a series of social cues that may influence a reader before content is considered, and research on topics such as climate change and public opinion has shown that UK newspapers, at least, have strong signalling capacity that informs reader opinion without articles actually being read (Boykoff 2008). In the case of candidate evaluation (here under investigation), and where newspapers have editorial perspectives that participants are likely to be aware of, this is specially important. Both news and satire were selected as being topical in order to ensure their relevance at the time of the experiment, which closed the day before the US presidential election that year (Monday 5 November 2012). Offering satire as well as a negative news item and humour allowed the experiment to mimic the real-world choices whereby

individuals self-select into the categories of news, satire and entertainment audiences.

Post-test Design

Post-testing was designed to elicit participant responses on candidate evaluation after exposure. The questions were modelled on the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), drawing on the questions eliciting opinions about candidates rather than political parties, policy or social issues. The Likert score used was a modified five-point spread so as to mirror the more easily recognisable scale of "strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree". "I don't know" was also included as an option.

While the results obtained from such survey questions are not proof of any causal relationship between an exposure treatment and formation of candidate opinion, marked differences in outcomes between treatment groups are certainly suggestive of some impact. Indeed, survey questions and responses such as are obtained from the NAES and similar surveys, are conventionally taken by pollsters to indicate real-world political views and political parties and their candidates regularly rely upon them. Given the topic under consideration, candidate evaluation, the design was judged robust.

Experimental Results

Reporting Conventions

Participants who failed to complete the survey were excluded ($n = 57$), as were observations with missing data for relevant questions ($n = 66$). The only complete observations that were excluded were participants who selected "I don't know" ($n = 4$) as their response to the post-test candidate evaluation questions thus obviating the purpose of the survey. The dependent variable was the five-point score in response to the statement, "I approve of [*subject*] as a leader", which was coded as a ratio variable, enabling analysis with linear regression.[32] The three contrasting treatments were coded in two binary variables: Exposure to News; and Exposure to Satire (with Humour as the reference category). A binary variable was also coded for the Choice condition, where some respondents chose between humour, satire, and news, rather than being

Table 7.2 Results of candidate evaluation for participants allocated to treatment groups

	Coefficient	*95% Confidence interval*	
News	0.34**	0.09	0.66
Satire	0.54***	0.25	0.83
American	−0.54***	−0.80	−0.29
Constant = −0.62		$R^2 = 0.07$	

Note: *P* value is a two-tailed test $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

randomly allocated. Results will be discussed in the sections that follow, first for respondents who were allocated randomly to treatment group, and then for those able to self-select.

Allocated Treatment Groups

Table 7.2 shows the post-test results for participants randomly allocated to a treatment group, excluding at this stage those who were allowed to choose their treatment. An interaction effect between treatment group and nationality was tested for, but results fell outside the 95% confidence interval ($p = 0.11$) and so were set aside. Overall, US respondents approved of candidate Mitt Romney less than British respondents did of David Cameron.[33] However, contrary to the study's hypothesis, participants approved of their candidate more in both the News treatment and the Satire treatment than in the Humour treatment. Compared with unrelated humour, it appears that satire's critique, rather than diminishing audience evaluation of the candidates, served to enhance it. The same was the case in the critical News coverage treatment. In these two cases of mandatory exposure, while both satire and negative news items served to increase public opinion of the candidate, they yielded no statistically significant difference between results for those viewing news and those viewing satire ($p = 0.26$). This lack of statistically significant difference suggests that in cases of mandatory viewing, there is no distinct effect of viewing satire compared to more conventional criticism. Further, it seems that criticism in either a serious or satirical form does not necessarily lead to a lesser opinion of the target of the criticism, as evidenced by the higher levels of disapproval from those who were exposed to unrelated Humour.

Table 7.3 Results of candidate evaluation for participants choosing their treatment group

	Coefficient	*95% Confidence interval*	
News	−0.51**	−0.86	−0.17
Satire	−0.42*	−0.81	−0.04
American	−0.63***	−0.93	−0.32
Constant = 0.17		$R^2 = 0.13$	

Note: *P* value is a two-tailed test $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$.

Choice of Treatment Group

The results for those who selected their treatment group rather than being randomly assigned are shown in Table 7.3. An interaction effect between treatment group and nationality was tested for, but a comparison between the two models fell outside the 95% confidence interval ($p = 0.14$) and so was set aside. The same overall results for candidate approval were obtained with this group as for the earlier mandatory treatments: even when selecting their treatment, US respondents still approved of Mitt Romney less than British ones did of David Cameron. Significantly, however, when participants selected their treatment group, the post-test results confirmed the prediction of Hypothesis 1 above: those exposed to Satire showed decreased approval of the candidate compared to those reading Humour. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, however, those exposed to News also decreased their approval of the candidate, compared to those reading Humour; but without any statistically significant difference in results for those reading News and those reading Satire ($p = 0.66$). In other words, the lack of statistically significant difference between News and Satire suggests that the criticism is what matters, not whether it is satirical or more conventionally factual. Hence, in this case, there is no effect unique to satire.

Comparing Treatment Group Results

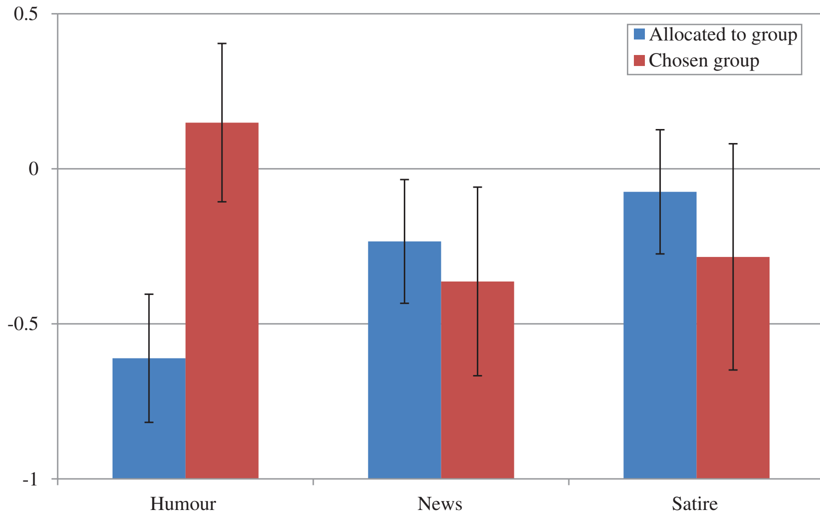
The combined results for those in allocated treatment groups and those in self-selected ones are shown in Table 7.4. An interaction effect between treatment group and nationality was included; but a comparison fell outside the 95% confidence interval ($p = 0.22$). The results demonstrate the effect of participants choosing their treatment by including

Table 7.4 Results of candidate evaluation for participants including the interaction effect of choosing a treatment group

	Coefficient	*95% Confidence interval*	
News	0.38**	0.10	0.65
Satire	0.54***	0.25	0.81
American	−0.57***	−0.77	−0.38
Choice	0.76***	0.44	1.07
Choice X News	−0.89***	−1.36	−0.42
Choice X Satire	−0.97***	−1.48	−0.47
Constant = −0.61		$R^2 = 0.09$	

Note: P value is a two-tailed test $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$.

Table 7.5 Predicted Likert scores—UK only



an interaction effect between treatments and whether they were chosen. There was no statistically significant difference between the two treatments, News and Satire ($p = 0.24$), irrespective of whether participants were allocated to or selected their treatment. Consistent with the previously reported results, respondents allocated to the News or Satire treatments were more favourable in post-test evaluation of their candidate than were those allocated to Humour. However, participants who chose

Humour (0.76) were significantly more favourable towards their candidate than those who were allocated to Humour. This distinction is seen most clearly in the bar chart of UK data shown in Table 7.5, with the greatest disparity between predicted Likert scores being in the Humour category, when audiences were allocated to the treatment compared to selecting their exposure.

Discussion

In an attempt to advance on previous experimental work by recognising that real-world audiences of satire are usually voluntary, this study set out to compare the effects of easily recognisable satire on voluntary and involuntary audiences. It also matched satire with negative news coverage and provided a control group exposed to topically unrelated humour, which allowed post-testing to show whether the effect of satire's critical humour is distinct from that of either news or non-related humour. The findings obtained for compulsory exposure to both satire and news suggest that former US President George W. Bush may have been right when he remarked to David Letterman on *The Late Show* that, regardless of joking content, he was just "glad you're saying my name".[34] The results reported here go beyond Baym's (2005) finding that candidates can increase their popularity by demonstrating a sense of humour and other likeable traits: they suggest that even without a candidate's personal appearance on a comedy programme, being satirised may not have a negative effect on approval ratings. Given the parallel findings for mandatory exposure to negative (but serious) news items, perhaps there is more truth than we realise in the adage "all publicity is good publicity".

When audiences of satire choose to be audience members, however, a more markedly critical effect is clearly produced, as is evidenced by contrasting the results of Table 7.2 with those of Table 7.3. This study is unable to determine whether this is because a self-selected audience is more receptive and attuned to satirical messages than a randomly allocated audience, or whether a self-selected audience is predisposed to political disillusionment and therefore more critical, regardless of the specific message. Alternatively, the composition of the audience selecting Satire may be a factor. Since both candidates for evaluation were right-wing in their politics, the more critical view may have resulted from the fact that audiences who chose to view Satire tended more towards the left in their political views. This interpretation seems unlikely,

considering the lack of statistically significant difference from the News audience: if the left-leaning audience hypothesis were true, it should also be the case for those choosing News, which seems implausible.

Viewed as a whole, the differing results for allocated and voluntary exposure to satire suggest that the circumstances of viewing satire may be more influential on satire's effects than current theory allows for. This has implications for future research into audience studies and for what the results mean in relation to party affiliation and political action. Further, in an era when media consumption is increasingly fragmented and where collating and sharing segments, articles and longer extracts of opinion, comedy and news through social media is increasingly common, it poses a question as to the effectiveness of the trend towards such sharing. Is a curated Twitter feed of a particular political opinion that includes satirical news likely to render that criticism more persuasive? Or will the unexpected and contradictory messages elicit more sympathy for the target of the criticism?

Aspects of Experimental Design

Despite its interesting findings, this experiment has several limitations that must be noted. First, the effects measured are self-reported ones and also immediate, providing no indication of any possibly longer-lasting or "sleeper" effect. Nor can the reports be linked to actual voting, being only expressions of opinion at a certain point of time about a political candidate. In addition, as far as the nature of satire is concerned, the question of any significant difference between the effects of Juvenalian versus Horatian satire was not investigated. This was because the satire used for treatment purposes was closer to Horatian in nature, for the sake of clarity, and was not contrasted to Juvenalian satire. Equally, the experiment could only mimic the richness of true field conditions, since, despite allowing a choice between news, satire and general entertainment, it did not offer one between specific programmes and publications. Its measurements are thus based on broadly generic material rather than on familiar and recognisable individual satirical products, some of which may well have more impact on a particular readership/audience than others. As Dannagal Young has pointed out, even for US late night comedy programmes, there is no single audience.[35] Individual programmes may therefore differ widely in the effects of their satire, not

only because of different content but because of the different audiences they attract.

Furthermore, results obtained—as these were—from written or verbal satire may or may not be generalisable to other kinds of satire, for example the kinds of TV shows that have been the focus of much of the research canvassed in this chapter, or Internet satire, which involves visual mash-ups and parodies of well-known sound-tracks as well as verbal satire. Despite the lack of reliable data on the reception of different formats and styles of satire, trends observed with cartoons or TV programmes are often assumed to have some degree of transferability. However, research in political science rather than in humour studies, such as that carried out by Dillard et al. (2007), suggests differing levels of persuasive capacity for different mediums, because of the inherent features of each and the differing nature of the audience that each attracts. All such factors need to be taken into account in future investigation of the field.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

Perhaps the most significant feature of the present research is its demonstration that the apparent effect of satire on candidate evaluation differs when people are allowed to select the material they view. While the results confirm that when it is obligatory, exposure to critical material, whether satiric or serious, can increase positive evaluation of candidates, the investigation goes one step further to show very different results when people choose to read satire and other material about candidates. In these circumstances, evaluation after Satirical treatment is not only negative, but more negative in comparison to the Humour treatment. As already noted, where participants are only allocated to treatment groups, or where no control is provided for the effects of the knowledge acquired in the process of viewing or reading satire, results may simply reflect a response to learning more about the situation and the candidate.

The likelihood of such an interpretation is strengthened by the results obtained with voluntary selection, and even more so by the absence of any statistically significant difference between negative news coverage and satire in terms of subsequent negative evaluation of the candidate. Participants simply learned more about the situation, whether from a satirical account or a factual one, and were not influenced by satire per se.

It may be that self-selection into either group brings along with it a pre-existing level of political knowledge that may already highlight candidates' shortcomings. Increasing that knowledge would certainly then facilitate the intended negative messages of both news and satire, lowering opinions about the candidates still further and decreasing approval. However, the present study failed to find any statistically significant difference in results between negative news coverage and satire groups when treatment was allocated. This underlines an interesting conundrum deserving further investigation: why do people evaluate candidates more positively after mandatory viewing of negative coverage, whether serious or satiric?

The contrasting results for voluntary and mandatory exposure to both satire and negative news coverage deserve careful consideration. That voluntary compared to mandatory reading of the same text can result in directionally opposite changes to approval measures underlines the importance of context being recognised in future experimental design. The use of dual control groups to control for the education effect of satire would also help to isolate what effects, if any, can be uniquely ascribed to satire. Another feature warranting further research is the composition of satirical audiences. While this lay outside the scope of the present enquiry, investigating who is attracted to satire and of what kind, Horatian or Juvenalian, seems likely to shed light on what guides their responses to it. It would also be helpful to know how the audience that prefers satire differs from that of a news audience, and whether there is overlap between them. Are the audiences reached by satire of various kinds non-traditional in terms of their news-preferences, and are they to be reached in a different way for the purposes of information and persuasion?

Ultimately, the empirical results of this study suggest that the effect of satire is far from uniform across its audiences and that the circumstances of their exposure to it make more of a difference than has previously been thought. It remains unclear whether satire itself has any inherent effect or whether the negative evaluations of candidates and politics in general shown by some audiences after exposure to satire in both this and other studies are largely a product of additional education being gained about the issues being satirised. In the light of current knowledge, it seems justifiable to conclude that, contrary to popular belief about its persuasive power, when satire is made compulsory viewing, it can serve for some to bolster the very targets it seeks to criticise.

Notes

1. This third type of connection between satire and politics is discussed by Rebecca Higgie in Chap. 3.
2. Victor Luckerson, "How the 'John Oliver Effect' is Having a Real-Life Impact", 20 January 2015. Since this chapter reviews a large body of literature, where a study is referred to as a whole, citations are made in-text, while specific citations appear in Notes. In both cases, for complete details, see the list of References.
3. Julia Fox, Glory Koloen and Volkan Sahin, "No Joke: A Comparison of Substance in *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and Broadcast Network Television Coverage of the 2004 Presidential Election Campaign", 2007, p. 231.
4. Brian Montopoli, "John Stewart rally attracts estimated 215,000", 31 October 2010.
5. A 2011 public judicial inquiry into the culture, ethics and practices of the British press, resulting from the hacking of private phones by reporters from News Limited International.
6. As an example of a political prank, on 1 November 2008, a radio comedy pair from Quebec, the "Masked Avengers" (Marc-Antoine Audette and Sébastien Trudel), called then US Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin and made her believe she was talking to then French President Nicholas Sarkozy (Suzanne Goldenberg, "Joke on Palin Again as She Falls for Fake Sarkozy Call", 3 November 2008).
7. Stephen Wagg, "Comedy, Politics and Permissiveness: The 'Satire Boom' and its Inheritance", 2002, p. 319.
8. Lauren Feldman and Dannagal G. Young, "Late-night Comedy as a Gateway to Traditional News: An Analysis of Time Trends in News Attention among Late-Night Comedy Viewers during the 2004 Presidential Primaries", 2008, pp. 402–3.
9. Conal Condren, Jessica Milner Davis, Robert Phiddian and Sally McCausland, "Defining Parody and Satire: Australian Copyright Law and its New Exception, Part II—Advancing Ordinary Definitions", 2008, p. 401.
10. OED Online, July 2017, sv. "Satire".
11. See for example, Katerina E. Triezenberg, "Humor in Literature", 2008, p. 526, and Leonard Feinberg, "Satire: The Inadequacy of Recent Definitions", 1968, p. 36.
12. This dichotomy is adapted from Conal Condren, "Satire and definition", 2012, pp. 379–80.
13. Sophia A. McClennen and Remy M. Maisel, *Is Satire Saving Our Nation?: Mockery and American Politics*, 2014, p. 6.
14. Ibid., p. 193.

15. Martin Fishbein, Kathleen Hall-Jamieson, Eric Zimmer, Ina von Haeften and Robin Nabi, "Avoiding the Boomerang: Testing the Relative Effectiveness of Antidrug Public Service Announcements before a National Campaign", 2002, p. 238.
16. Gerald R. Miller, "On Being Persuaded: Some Basic Distinctions", 2002.
17. Emily Moyer-Gusé and Robin L. Nabi, "Comparing the Effects of Entertainment and Educational Television Programming on Risky Sexual Behavior", 2011, pp. 423–24.
18. David Knapp Whittier, May G. Kennedy, Janet S. St Lawrence, Salvatore Seeley and Vicki Beck, "Embedding Health Messages into Entertainment Television: Effect on Gay Men's Response to a Syphilis Outbreak", 2005, p. 256.
19. Emily Moyer-Gusé, Chad Mahood and Sarah Brookes, "Entertainment-education in the Context of Humor: Effects on Safer Sex Intentions and Risk Perceptions", 2011, pp. 769–72.
20. Brian Sternthall and C. Samuel Craig, "Humor in Advertising", 1973.
21. Charles S. Gulas and Marc G. Weinberger. *Humor in Advertising: A Comprehensive Analysis*, 2006.
22. Thomas W. Cline and James J. Kellaris, "The Influence of Humor Strength and Humor—Message Relatedness on Ad Memorability: A Dual Process Model", 2007.
23. Dineh Davis, "Communication and Humor", 2008, pp. 558–9.
24. Liesbet van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*, 2005. Russell J. Dalton expands these traits in *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 2008.
25. Liesbet van Zoonen, 2005.
26. David Niven, S. Robert Lichter and Daniel Amundson, "The Political Content of Late Night Comedy", 2003, pp. 129–30.
27. Patricia Moy, Michael A. Xenos and Verena K. Hess, "Priming Effects of Late-night Comedy", 2006, pp. 204–5.
28. 'Political efficacy' is a term used in political science for a range of theoretical and practical applications. Becker (2011, p. 238) identified here two forms of efficacy: internal and external. The first indicates a citizen's belief in their capacity both to understand the political process and to participate in it in a meaningful way; the second their belief that institutions, politicians and elected representatives can act in a citizen's best interests.
29. R. Lance Holbert, John Tchernev, Whitney Whitney, Sarah E. Esralew and Kathryn Benski, "Young Voter Perceptions", 2013, p. 180.
30. Since Stephen Colbert moved in 2015 from *The Colbert Report* to *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* on CBS, it will be interesting to observe what effect, if any, there is on the two constituent audiences.

31. Baumgartner and Morris, 2008, p. 627.
32. The Likert score was skewed and an ordinal logistic regression was also completed. Since this rendered the same statistical significance and direction of results, a linear regression model was chosen for simplicity.
33. Cameron was a sitting leader; Romney was defeated by the re-elected Barak Obama. It may be that differing national results can be attributed to political context.
34. David Niven, S. Robert Lichter and Daniel Amundson, "The Political Content of Late Night Comedy", 2003, p. 131.
35. Young, 2004, pp. 3, 18.

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CHAPTER 8

Yes Minister, *Yes, Prime Minister*: The Theoretical Dimension

Conal Condren

Processing the texts of popular culture through the nomenclature of high social theory often runs the risk of risible inappropriateness; and while it is certainly possible to show that a conceptual vocabulary can be applied, whether doing so actually adds to the understanding of the works concerned is another matter. As Pierre Bourdieu discovered in researching French doctoral theses, about the only thing they were sure to demonstrate was a candidate's facility in deploying the academic argot necessary to affirm membership of an intellectual sect.[1] The propensity for theoretical overkill was devastatingly satirised by Frederick Crews in the first of his mock sectarian analyses of A.A. Milne's Winnie-The-Pooh children's stories, read through such theoretical grids as the Marxist, Freudian and Leavisite. A second volume has since parodied inter alia, Derridean, New Historicist, Postcolonial and Feminist perspectives.[2] The purpose of this chapter is to avoid falling into any such heffalumpian trap in surveying the *Yes Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* satiric comedies. Instead, it will attempt to point out some comic echoes of well-digested theories, which, if unrecognised, conspire to perpetuate distorted representations of the

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British political system and which might more broadly sustain misleading preconceptions about the role of satire in politics. Rather than read the texts through theory, my aim is to elicit from them aspects of a theoretical dimension; and thus to illustrate something of the variable relationships between political theory and practice as they are mediated through satire—itself a theoretically informed and usually comically distorting practice. Recognisable theories may be directive of, or derived from, a practice; others may be largely independent of it; some may survive the practice they encode but not be easily recognised for what they are. As J.M. Keynes famously remarked, people who think they just talk common sense are usually the prisoners of some defunct economist.[3]

The Satires and Contemporary Politics

Although being overtly framed as situation comedies, and so in many respects removed from the political process, there are ways in which the *Yes Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* satires directly engaged with and indeed formed a part of British politics. First mooted in 1977, the idea for the *Yes Minister* series was held over until after the election that saw Margaret Thatcher come to power in 1979, for it was thought the comedies would be potentially sensitive. Overall, there were 20 regular *Yes Minister* episodes (1980–1982), with a Christmas Special, “Party Games” (aired 27 December 1984); and 15 episodes of *Yes, Prime Minister* (1986–1988).[4] The initial expectation and reception were shaped and constrained by the role played by popular political satire in Britain during the 1960s; the programmes were thus anticipated to be critical of “The Establishment” (a coinage of the time),[5] and of the Government. The BBC was seen as taking a political risk in airing them.[6] When it had done so, they were praised both as providing a fresh and provocative vision of politics, and as being rebellious and radical.[7] To use the fatuous cliché, the image was of satire Speaking Truth to Power, although Humphrey Carpenter, with apparent disappointment, regarded them as avoiding direct criticism of Thatcher’s cabinet.[8]

The production and scripting values were fastidious in creating and sustaining a sense of verisimilitude and direct engagement with the political system. The dispatch boxes were careful replicas and as far as I can tell, the appropriate school, college, cricket club and university ties are worn. The statistics quoted in episodes were authentic, such as 20% of British

honours going to civil servants; a new hospital with no medical staff and 342 administrators; in 10 years, 60,000 fewer hospital beds in the National Health Service but 40,000 more administrators to tend them,[9] about which Sir Humphrey remarks smugly, if only industry could match such growth.[10] Moreover, the politicians purporting to love the programmes, Margaret Thatcher foremost among them, considered them to be pretty realistic.[11] This assessment warrants a little more examination, for Jim Hacker is hardly the sort of heroic figure with whom a politician would normally want to be associated.

Such appreciation may often have been genuine and for good reason: both *Yes Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* are beautifully crafted, acted and remarkably well sustained, points made publicly on more than one occasion by Margaret Thatcher. *Yes Minister* was her favourite programme: “Its perceptive [hand correction] portrayal of what goes on in the corridors of power have given me hours of pure joy”.[12] In a letter to Jonathan Lynn, she conveyed hand-written admiration of superb dialogue and timing and supreme perceptiveness about politicians and civil servants.[13] Nevertheless, for a politician to express appreciation exhibits a willingness to take oneself not too seriously and also a generosity of political spirit; just as Sir Robert Walpole had been careful to be seen laughing at John Gay’s satirical triumph *The Beggar’s Opera*, with what was taken as thinly disguised accusations about Walpole’s own profound corruption.[14] And significantly, overt political appreciation followed in the wake of *Yes Minister*’s immediate and unexpected popular success: better be on a bandwagon than run over by it.

More importantly, the programmes’ persistent motif is that of laudable political policies being thwarted by bureaucracy. Hence, they provided a recurring explanation for any politician, and most immediately the members of Mrs Thatcher’s cabinet (*pace* the expectations of Carpenter), as to why the best of intentions might go astray and promises remain unfulfilled. Many a politician has an interest in seeing this as a truth.

Finally, as a corollary, the satires are close to being effective propaganda for the reform of a recalcitrant bureaucracy, something high on Margaret Thatcher’s agenda. An obvious motif in the satires was Civil Service waste, and its entrenched opposition to the government getting anything done. For any politician who could see no real distinction between Government and the state, between the Government’s interest and the public interest, this must have seemed tantamount to an institutionalised subversion of democracy.[15] The extreme expression of this

tension between Government and Civil Service is not found in any particular episode although it helps structure most, but in Thatcher's own tiny *Yes, Prime Minister* sketch in which she played the Prime Minister, Nigel Hawthorne was (as usual) Sir Humphrey and Paul Eddington the hapless minister Jim Hacker.

This was performed at The National Viewers and Listeners Awards on 20 January 1984, an occasion on which the programme was receiving an award. Margaret Thatcher introduced her homage as part of her general introduction to the occasion, and presented the sketch as a full rehearsal for a world premiere, with apologies to Jay and Lynn who "were not consulted". The phrase was erased and replaced by a handwritten insertion "who are not to blame".[16] It is a 5-minute descant on episodes like the "The Economy Drive" (10 March 1980), "Writing on the Wall" (24 March 1980) and "A Question of Loyalty" (6 April 1981), all concerning attempts to reduce the number of civil servants. The Prime Minister announces she has a bright idea to save money. She will abolish economists. Hacker sycophantically enthuses, but Sir Humphrey prevaricates uncomfortably about the practicalities. She asks him what he read at university. He admits it was politics and economics.[17] In that case, she concludes, he knows just where to start. "Yes, Prime Minister". The original typescript is signed by both Eddington and Hawthorne, and carries corrections and minor alterations in Thatcher's hand to her own lines, in the manner of her corrections to her serious speeches; thus, for example, she assures Jim Hacker that if the plan goes wrong, she will get the blame, with interlinear addition "I always do".[18]

Margaret Thatcher's co-option of the show's format reveals a succinct merger between politics and art, humour and the system, satire and policy promotion (at one point she alludes to the improving economy). This blending of comedy with political promotion was unforced despite the fact that the original writers, Jay and Lynn, stated that they did not want their creations to become tools of political power, and wished to avoid making any specific political party a target. In referring to the Prime Minister in *Yes Minister,* they were fastidious in avoiding personal pronouns; they dropped the character Frank Weisel, Hacker's political advisor, because he was too easily identified with the Labour Party.[19] This did not stop Margaret Thatcher from imagining herself as the unseen and ungendered Prime Minister of whom Jim Hacker treads in fear.[20] The writers' claimed intention had always been first and foremost to amuse, they were even divided as to whether the programmes were really

satirical.[21] There was also some confusion on the issue: Jay doubted that the programmes were satirical, but conflating satire with parody, thought the printed *Diaries* were.[22] For neither author was Mrs Thatcher a target of criticism, and Lynn enthusiastically congratulated Thatcher on her "magnificent and excellent election victory" in 1983.[23]

Any attempt to draw hard and fast lines between the comedies as mere entertainment and as mechanisms for shaping opinion may be naïve or disingenuous, as Mrs Thatcher clearly knew and joyously exploited. Indeed, confusions between fiction and a supposed political reality were persistent. Paul Eddington recounted that he was often taken as an authentic politician; even more remarkably, both major parties put out feelers to see if he would stand as a candidate.[24] The satires also came to be fed back into the political environment. They were taken up in Denmark to help train the Danish cabinet; and in a twist of satiric fate, they were re-shown, out of order, in 1996, providing oblique commentary on the disasters then engulfing the Government of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative successor John Major.[25]

Traditions of Political Satire

Two related questions arise: how far beyond technical verisimilitude does this comic realism give us a glimpse of the system? And how artificial is it to consider the British system as neatly separate from the traditions of political humour that have been interwoven with it and continue to be so? Put slightly differently, do the satires open a window onto the realities of decision making? When we think they do, are they simply illustrating a theory of it in which we happen to have faith?[26]

To begin with, Sir Humphrey and Jim Hacker are stereotypical creations designed to carry plot and humour, not to embody real political figures. Hacker is naïve, initially innocent, given to idealistically laudable intentions but ultimately a victim of his own self-interest, vanity, dishonesty, cowardice, obsession with image, and job security. These (especially vanity and insecurity)[27] are the weaknesses that Sir Humphrey is able to exploit for his own ends: the aggrandisement of bureaucratic power for its own sake, personal vanity and a desire to sustain politics as nothing more than the perpetual motion of a comfortably closed élite of like-minded administrators.[28]

According to Sir Humphrey, the only ends to administrative activity are the loose ones that forever need tidying up; and indeed he sometimes

expresses a horror of change.[29] His weakness lies in Hacker's occasional ability to turn this fear and the evidence surviving from his previous conduct against him.[30] The characteristics of the two men also allow for ad hoc self-interested alliances between them. On one occasion, Sir Humphrey engineers a publicity triumph for the threatened Hacker, in order to retain the minister he is successfully house-training; on another, they unite to sabotage an integrated transport policy.[31] In "One of Us" (27 February 1986), mutual self-interest is even elegantly blended with blackmail, when a proclivity for spying is exposed within Sir Humphrey's closed educational élite.

Indeed, the educational background of each man, exploited for running gags in the plots, perpetuates popular stereotypes.[32] Sir Humphrey was educated at Bailey College, Oxford (Balliol); Hacker at the London School of Economics: the one is supposedly conservative, the other radical and working-class. In fact, in Christopher Hill (Master 1965–1978), Balliol had for many years a Marxist and ex-Communist Head and a substantial number of African Commonwealth students;[33] while the LSE, with a high middle-class undergraduate intake, had perhaps the most conservative departments of economics and government in the English university system during the 1960s and 1970s. Its highest-profile professor of political science was the doyen of a resurgent intellectual right, Michael Oakeshott, whom Margaret Thatcher reputedly admired and recommended for honours that he declined.[34]

In the course of the series, as Hacker acclimatises to his ministerial position, the contest with Sir Humphrey becomes more even. The balance of outcomes is a dramatic necessity to minimise predictability. Hacker has a partial victory in "The Official Visit" (3 March 1980) and a decisive one in "Big Brother" (17 March 1980). Once Sir Humphrey has pulled the requisite strings, Hacker reveals himself as a plausibly effective operator within his own party-political environment, in "Party Games" (27 December 1984). But while he exercises cunning and resorts to blackmail in order to become Prime Minister, Sir Humphrey secures his own promotion to head the Cabinet Office by *sotto voce* intimations of bribery.[35]

Overall, however, in the cohering contest between politician and bureaucrat, the victories on either side are only partial and piecemeal.[36] Behind these carefully balanced images may well lie some political truth; but more pointedly there are a couple of old and familiar theories of bureaucracy and the Westminster System, which are underpinned by the

Fig. 8.1 Original cartoon by Gerald Scarfe, 1980, showing actors Paul Eddington as Hacker, Nigel Hawthorne as Sir Humphrey and Derek Fowlds as Bernard. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist and the Gerald Scarfe website at: http://www.geraldscarfe.com.

well-established popular belief that all politicians are unprincipled liars. This was splendidly captured in Gerald Scarfe's cartooning images of the principal players (for three of these, see Fig. 8.1). Such images appeared as animated sketches drawn on-screen by an invisible hand, introducing and framing each episode.

Endemic political dishonesty provides a persistent, almost ubiquitous, and rather easy source of jokes for the entire series: thus, for example, Hacker says of Charlie Umtali (President of Buranda and a contemporary at the LSE) that he is totally slippery with commitments only to himself. "Ah, I see", says Sir Humphrey, "A politician, Minister".[37] Again, Hacker off-handedly remarks of a select committee that it "couldn't be less interested in the nature of truth—they're all MPs".[38] Once as Prime Minister he expostulates in frustration: "I don't want the truth, I want something I can tell Parliament".[39] In a variation of the classic *paradox of the liar*, it is even presented as a general maxim that nothing should be believed until it has been officially denied.[40]

The notion, however, of a political system as the institutionalised practice of mendacity is itself a satiric theory that goes back to the early

eighteenth century.[41] It has been routinely reinforced in the public mind, less by sustained evidence than by political recrimination: we know politicians are liars because that's what they call each other. Were they as bad as they say, it is doubtful any political system could really work. But in the routine accusations, largely made to the public, the very word 'lie' has been extended sufficiently to lose much of its conventional meaning. This point is well illustrated in "The Tangled Web" (28 January 1988), the final episode of the initial sequence of *Yes, Prime Minister*. In all good faith, Hacker makes an untrue—thus a misleading—statement to Parliament, which, after much circumlocution, Sir Humphrey finally calls a lie.

The Satires and Political Theory

The image of Sir Humphrey owes much to the theories associated most with Max Weber: that bureaucracies need to be depersonalised and strictly hierarchical in order to operate professionally; that the more they are relied upon, the more they grow; and the more they grow, the more they develop an opacity, a culture and an interest of their own.[42] Consequently, a mature bureaucracy is never simply the instrument the politician requires; nor is Sir Humphrey the mere servant he frequently says he is.[43] A bureaucracy may well see itself as a custodian of a national or public interest beyond the transience of political policy. That something is not in the public interest, Hacker comes to take as a euphemism for being not in the interest of the Civil Service.[44] The energies of such mature bureaucracies may well be devoted disproportionately to their own perpetuation, with diminishing resources expended on any substantive rationale. In "The Compassionate Society", we are given a parodic microcosm of this image in the absurdity of St Edward's Hospital with its army of administrators busily working in their several departments, aided by dedicated ancillary staff, but with no nurses, doctors or patients.[45]

These satires present the Civil Service in similar terms, with its control of information, disinformation, language and access to the Minister, all orchestrated to keep the organisation intact and its policies unchanged. To achieve this end, Hacker must be reduced to little more than its public voice, "not a man but a mouth", as his advisor Frank Weisel puts it.[46] Working with the minister is a matter of house training.[47] Even the mechanisms for achieving such compliance have been turned into a

sort of Weberian routine, subject to formulation: five stages for stalling any policy, three types of silence when questioned by a minister; formal codes of obfuscation and avoidance; the expressions *under consideration* and *under active consideration* mean respectively *lost* and *looking for it*. There are also tried and true strategies for bringing a minster to heel, such as over-burdening with information, hiding it, or Foreign Office stone-walling.[48] Indeed, as Hacker's principal private secretary, Bernard, tells him, the whole departmental structure of the Civil Service provides an interlocking balance of powers and vested interests specifically designed to thwart any government policy.[49]

In the codification and institutionalisation of disingenuous obstruction we have satires that are strikingly at one with the rules for lying and the political system as an instrument for its practice adumbrated by Arbuthnot in his *Pseudologia Politike*. This amorphous monster, the Civil Service, is effectively "the opposition in residence",[50] pitted against the politically legitimate Westminster System, which by contrast is democratic and open and in which leadership is called to account by parliament and the electorate. When Hacker and some minor characters voice such legitimating claims, Sir Humphrey is apt to regard them as irrelevant, frustratingly intrusive, or the attempted disruption of troublemakers.

In fact, much of this image of the legitimate political system, as A.H. Birch has argued, was theorised by Walter Bagehot and A.V. Dicey late in the nineteenth century, with contemporary circumstances in mind.[51] It is what Birch has summarised as the "liberal language of the constitution".[52] The case of ministerial responsibility is instructive. According to Hacker's jaundiced view, this is "a handy little device conceived by the Civil Service for dropping the minister in it, while enabling the mandarins to keep their noses clean. It means that the Civil Service runs everything … but when something goes wrong … the minister takes the blame".[53] I know of nothing, however, to support the notion that the doctrine originated with the Civil Service, although the mid-nineteenth-century professionalising reforms to which that body was subjected certainly provided a condition needed for such a doctrine to develop. It was only after those reforms that a clear and decisive relationship between a given minister and an administrative department became assured. Nevertheless, from 1855 to 1955, there may have been only 16 cases in which ministers have resigned in response, at least partially, to parliamentary criticism of what their departments had done.[54] Birch examines some crucial cases between 1945 and 1960 and concludes

(with S.E. Finer) that any minister's relationships with the prime minister and the majority party were far more significant than a putative responsibility to parliament for any Civil Service blunder. The doctrine, in short, is little more than a useful fiction, a *topos* of oppositional critique.[55]

Something analogous might be said of the notion that the people elect prime ministers, a belief accepted by Hacker as prime minister. He takes leading (a notion presupposing a following) as synonymous with ruling (which does not), despite the manner in which he himself assumed prime ministerial office. His occasional drifts into Churchillian idioms and intonations are usually an expression of his self-image as ruler and national leader.[56] That the prime minister is popularly elected is widely regarded as a feature of the Westminster System. In Australia, where that system is also held to be operational, the then Liberal Party leader, Tony Abbott, made much of the illegitimacy of a sitting prime minister being ousted by his colleagues, in commiserating with Labor's Kevin Rudd, who had been tumbled out of office on 24 June 2010; and Abbott deplored the faceless grey men who were usurping democracy by putting Julia Gillard in Rudd's place. Much was also made of popular election when Abbott as prime minister was in his turn shuffled off by Malcolm Turnbull (14 September 2015). Some Liberals expressed dismay that their party should behave as iniquitously as the Labor Party. With operatic hyperbole, such changes have since been likened to the turmoil of Shakespearean tragedy, with all its intimations of chaos.[57]

Yet the overwhelming focus on prime ministerial candidates at general elections has been erratic, often driven by the contingencies of personality and the convenience of the mass media. It was certainly central to the British Conservative Party election campaign in 1945, in which Churchill appeared as the only asset; in Australia, it was a feature of Robert Menzies's re-election campaign in 1954, and probably expressed his personal dominance for most of the time he was prime minister. Despite this, it was still possible to see the electoral campaign by Gough Whitlam in 1972 as introducing a decidedly US, presidential style to Australian politics by turning a contest between parties into one between potential prime ministers.

To the extent that a general election is predominantly a matter of choosing a prime minister, there is an enormity in MPs deciding to change horses in midstream. But ipso facto, this is to deny MPs the status of representatives in the independent Burkean sense of being elected to exercise judgement as to the common good or public interest. Rather, it takes them as being only elected delegates, whose job (often conveniently) is to vote in the right way when the division bell rings. As Hacker

candidly remarks on his way to vote, "It doesn't matter what the debate *is*, I just don't want to go through the wrong door".[58] Despite its being rarely evidenced, independence of representative status has also been deemed central to the Westminster System.[59] And in that light, the replacement of a prime minister by a body of elected members can be construed as parliamentary democracy actually working properly.[60]

The Westminster System, an amalgam of interlocking and not always mutually consistent conventions, is always shifting. Only in its public image and in party polemic is it fixed as an invariant standard by which to measure deviance. Selective evocation is an idiom of political dispute from within the system itself. As commentaries, the *Yes Minister/Prime Minister* satires exploited aspects of the system that had been explicated and delineated by theoretical reflection and had become variously amenable to both opposition and governmental rhetoric, with all the accompanying tensions and contradictory implications. In the words of the series' Sir Arnold Robinson (Secretary to the Cabinet) on the matter of making the system of government openly democratic, "you can be open—or you can have government".[61]

Such a stable and stark choice between options is a dramatic necessity, providing the precondition for repeated conflicts between the main protagonists and the aspects of government for which they stand. It may even be that the satires (as with ministerial responsibility) helped perpetuate half-truths and convenient myths of the system rather than radically unmasking a reality of which voters and television watchers were insufficiently aware. The situation is not unlike that confronting the historian when dealing with the genre of satire developed during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648). Purporting to expose the secret machinations of major protagonists through the publication of letters, counsels and plans, it also traded in exaggerated half-truth and plausible myth, derived from Machiavellian caricatures and fabrication; the predictable result is that sorting fact from fiction becomes unusually difficult.[62] Reading satire as straightforward evidence of anything can be tricky enough; using evidence in ignorance of a satiric dimension can be disastrous.

The Satires and Political Language

A further aspect of the presentation of politics through digested theory is purely linguistic. One of the great joys of the series is its constant play with language. We may not be encouraged to like or trust Sir Humphrey, but his wit and command of language are a splendid balance to Hacker's

grandiose mixed metaphors and posturing fustian. Bernard, in particular, sometimes stands between the two as a linguistic negotiator and a sort of chorus for the audience on language and its abuse.[63] But although occasionally siding with Jim Hacker, he can also be complicit in the idioms indicative of a classical education used to put the Minister in his place.[64] He particularly abominates mixed metaphors and punctiliously picks them up when (usually) Hacker lets them clang to the floor. As (Sir) Bernard later reflects, "Hacker never really learned to conquer his mixed metaphor problem".[65]

Lying behind the attention to language are familiar attitudes powerfully summarised in George Orwell's 1946 essay, "Politics and the English language". Orwell eloquently popularised the dogmas that mixed metaphors are thoughtless, lazy and obscuring; that a Latinate, let alone a Greco-Latinate, vocabulary was pretentious and inappropriate to authentic English, with its plain short words; and that in its corrupted state, political language itself was obscurantist, full of muddied meanings and euphemism, as he put it, the enemy of thought.[66] It is a theory, or rather an attitude to language use in politics that is still prevalent, and it makes most sense if political reality can be held up as a standard by which to measure linguistic deviance. This requires much to be taken for granted, not least that clarity and precision are always political virtues.

Nevertheless, Orwell remains an occasional touchstone for journalistic commentary and an authority for an author like Australian Don Watson, who has also been a political speech-writer.[67] Before looking more closely at this broadly Orwellian conspectus, it should be stressed that the satires under discussion are not mere applications of a theory. Some of the linguistic humour points in a different direction. There is a sustained awareness throughout the series of the codes of political discourse and their re-descriptive capacity. Precise, correct and simple language can be as misleading as the overblown and pretentious. An enquiry that finds no evidence of an intention to mislead does not exonerate. It has, as Sir Humphrey states, done just that, found no evidence.[68] The gap between literality and contextualised expectation is always present with its potential to mislead by implication. Playing with unstated implication touches on an important feature of political discourse, but it is one that sits ill with the Orwellian dogmas about language that the satires repeatedly rely upon and reinforce.[69]

In such a rich and semantically varied language as English, short simple Anglo-Saxon words are no more authentic than longer Latinate ones.

Some Anglo-Saxon words are themselves derived from Greek; more to the point, short and simple terms may be just as subject to confusion and lack of clarity as long ones. This is a point, as has just been noted, that is deftly capitalised upon by Sir Humphrey.

The matter of mixed metaphors and what their use shows is also more variable and complex than might be assumed. The very identification of a metaphor can be difficult, for, as a translation of a term or expression from one distinct mode of discourse to another, it is dependent upon discursive stability. Many modes, however, are persistently changed in relation to each other. Moreover, an extraordinary number of established political terms (consider *vote, settlement, candidate* and *state*) have metaphorical origins that may be more than just a matter of etymological curiosity: they may have figurative residues that are exploitable in use.[70] The word *government* will shortly be used to illustrate the point. That metaphors are mixed may indicate nothing more than their effective acclimatisation to a realm of discourse; that is, in being so well established that the meanings they carry are clear enough, especially in everyday contexts of use. They are the stuff of cliché, run together to create a general and undemanding picture.[71] To adapt the terms used by John Wilson, the more acclimatised or *dead* metaphors become, the more their potential for generating differing patterns of implication is restricted.[72] Thus, to rely on them may also be a means of clarifying. Indeed, what makes Bernard's pedantic disengaging of metaphors distracting, is that the discourse he disrupts is perfectly intelligible.

Moreover, clichéd discourse with mixed metaphors bordering on the emptiness of the phatic, is nevertheless important in the vital political processes of reassurance. This is easily overlooked in the reductive idealisations of political language as being devoted to the rational unearthing of the truth. Finally, it might also be asked, if it is necessary to adjust political rhetoric to audience (as Francis Bacon and others have insisted),[73] and if audiences are heterogeneous (a common feature of democratic society), why should mixing metaphors be an exception to the imperative of flexibility? Insofar as political discourse does need to be flexible, clarity and precision can actually be counter-productive, and their avoidance is not always reducible to the sort of protective obfuscation on which the satires concentrate. Put in Aristotelian terms, when the audience is large and unknown, it may be necessary to paint with a broad brush. It can be a way (to mix metaphors) of establishing a common currency through which issues can be formulated with some hope of resolution.

The case of euphemism is similarly less than straightforward and the euphemistic is an important theme in the satires. To identify a euphemism requires a standard by which to measure deviation. To claim that something is euphemistic is to assert that there are right words, labels for things and situations and these are being avoided. Euphemism is thus both a putative designation and an accusation.[74] It is a token of an accuser's commitment to how a given state of affairs must be understood. It is this sort of situation that Jay and Lynn persistently put before us: "courageous decisions" = stupid ones; "think carefully about" = do not do it! "hush up" = suppress. "Diplomacy" = appalling cynicism;[75] a "sound man for an enquiry" really means bent.[76] For bribery, Sir Humphrey favours not "slush fund" or references to brown paper bags but "creative negotiation" or "uncontracted prepayments": there is even a scale of euphemism calibrated to the amount of money involved.[77] Once he is prime minister, for Hacker, co-operation means obedience.[78]

We know what is happening in a given episode, so its plot provides the standard by which to decode. The difficult work is done for us, so, like Orwell, we can take for granted the yardstick of a reality by which to condemn. But this can be quite question-begging and at odds with language use in political dispute. Euphemism often evidences not so much an avoidance of a taboo, a common and simplistic view, or even a desire to evade or mislead. Rather, it may signal a clash of perspectives, each requiring a suitably persuasive vocabulary of re-description. In practice, where it is politically important, the euphemistic or dysphemistic signal contentiousness. By stacking the cards for comic purposes, the satires play with inadequate and misleading understandings. The effect may well be to help reinforce them, as when Sir Humphrey praises Hacker: "You're normally so good at blurring the issue".[79] In its dramatic context, the issue is evident, a rock of clarity in a sea of obfuscation; in practice and beyond the television screen, just what *is* the issue can be precisely the issue.

Concluding the Satires

Finally, a word on the lack of a developmental trajectory. Although the sequences of programmes have a chronological integrity, and the thematic issues may rumble on for several episodes (such as the Prime Minister's "Grand Design"), the central theme of the nature of the political system itself remains unchanged. In this way, the narrative

structure is directionless. Every episode ends with the world much as it was at the beginning. This has a satisfying symmetry, even if it leaves us poised between a sense of completeness and frustration. Here, I think, the image or theory of politics displayed by the writers is at one with the scepticism presented by Michael Oakeshott in his notorious or controversial vision of political activity as having no ultimate purpose, or goal. He saw it as an activity in which keeping things going, albeit in the pursuit of short-term enterprises, is all it really amounts to.[80]

As Oakeshott wrote in his inaugural lecture at the LSE in 1951, it is an activity like being in a boat on "a boundless and bottomless sea" in which there is no harbour, ultimate destination or place to anchor. "The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel .... A depressing doctrine, it will be said ...".[81] Oakeshott's self-consciously figurative amplification of the metaphor of helmsmanship lying at the root of the word *government* was drawn ultimately from Plato; but its implications are entirely subverted, as they had been earlier by George Savile, to whom Oakeshott was probably alluding.[82] Regardless of this, the vision is very much of Sir Humphrey's world. It is the one Hacker comes to accept as the reality in an epiphany that is a little like Winston's coming to love Big Brother in Orwell's bleak satire *1984*.[83] At times Hacker feels he is "no different from Humphrey and all that lot in Whitehall". His wife, Annie disagrees: he's really a sort of whisky priest.[84] That is, unlike Sir Humphrey, he still knows what is right but only occasionally acts on it. Although this is arguably a simplistic dichotomy, thoroughly digested from Kantian deontological ethics, Hacker has in fact seemed to concur: "Government is about principle", he reflects, but immediately continues, "that principle is: don't rock the boat".[85] Fittingly, as Handelsmann remarks, the satires just stop.[86] The Oakeshottian keel is still roughly even, providing the necessary precondition that allows the cast of characters to carry on carrying on.[87] This presents a view of the political strikingly different from the more familiar rhetorics of political promotion in which words like *progress* and *vision* loom large, and in which pleas to be allowed to *solve the problem* or *finish the job* are the routine stuff by which politicians, even in Hacker's fashion, hope to gain or maintain office. Gerald Scarfe depicts the satires' more sceptical vision of government in his remarkably Thatcher-like image of Britannia, not ruling, but beset by waves that would rock any political boat (Fig. 8.2).

Appropriately, the satires also end rather differently from that other satiric exploration of survival *Black Adder IV*, with its disturbing frozen

Fig. 8.2 Original cartoon by Gerald Scarfe, 1980, showing actor Paul Eddington enthroned as Hacker/Britannia/Thatcher. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist and the Gerald Scarfe website at: http://www.geraldscarfe.com.

frame of the main characters finally all going "over the top" in the First World War.[88] In Jay and Lynn's satires, even where the episodes do not conclude with the same ritualised affirmative, there is at least an implicit acceptance of a fait accompli. Usually, tacit or express agreement is established with what the public servants want, or are prepared to accept, while allowing the Minister the illusion of authority in directing them—a system of *sotto governo*. Occasionally, the concluding agreement amounts to a small victory for the politician and there is even the odd collusive triumph. Regardless of these permutations on "Yes", appreciating how we arrive at the terminating affirmation is a very large part of what the satires are about. Invariably, it is the implicit endorsement of a status quo in which survival requires complicity, even in the use of euphemistic language; Hacker himself comes to fear making a courageous decision.[89] I suspect that those most tempted to see the satires as a window into the reality of the *arcana imperii* would in fact reject the philosophical vision

that seemingly informs them. Nevertheless, studying them can show not only that a firm distinction between satire and politics is misleading, but also that, as Keynes intimated, the very distinction between theory and practice can be unclear and artificial. As I have noted, Sir Humphrey makes much of the virtues of obscuring the truth: obscuring conceptual differences that we might take for granted may be closer to it than we are accustomed to think.

Notes

1. Michael Billig, *Learn to Write Badly,* 2014, pp. 43–4. A short version of this paper was presented at the Australasian Humour Studies Network Conference, Sydney, 6–8 February 2016. My thanks to the organisers and anonymous reviewers of the original proposal for critical comment; my thanks also to Jessica Milner Davis and to Andrew Riley (Thatcher Papers Archivist) at Churchill College, Cambridge, for his expertise and speedy help beyond the call of duty.
2. Cf. Frederick Crews, *The Pooh Perplex*, 1972; *Postmodern Pooh,* 2001. A noticeable difference between the two is that the latter is replete with quotations from the relevant theoretical groups, whether this was Crews' attempt to be fair, or to indicate that they themselves were often self-parodying, is unclear. The readings of the Milne stories are also less accurate.
3. John Maynard Keynes, *General Theory*, 1936, ch. 24.
4. A revised series, with a new cast was aired January–February 2013 and is not discussed here.
5. Humphrey Carpenter, *A Great, Silly Grin*, 2000, pp. 130–1.
6. Michael Kandiah, "'Yes Minister' and 'Yes, Prime Minister': Interviews with Sir Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn", 1994, pp. 506–20, 506–8; and Andrew Handelsmann, "The Satiric Dimension", 1998, pp. 21–30, for a succinct and valuable survey of the background and original reception of the satires. This study is much indebted to Handelsmann's work.
7. Miriam Gross, "The Secret Life of Jim Hacker", 1986, and Julie Davidson, "Tarzan Out and Hacker in at No. 10", 1986, as cited and discussed in Handelsmann, "Satiric Dimension", pp. 37–8.
8. Carpenter, *A Great, Silly Grin,* pp. 322–3.
9. "Doing the Honours" (2 March 1981) and "The Compassionate Society" (23 February 1981), in Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay, *The Complete Yes Minister*: *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 1989 (hereafter *The Diaries*); see also *The Complete Yes, Prime Minister*, 2 vols., 1986 and 1987.

All quotations from the individual episodes are from these published versions. These deviate from the television performances but allow page references. More general references to programmes are as broadcast, and all carry dates of initial live television performance when first mentioned.
10. "The Compassionate Society", p. 189.
11. Handelsmann, "Satiric Dimension", pp. 52–4, 76; Gerald Scarfe's cartoon of Britannia shown in the closing credits of *Yes, Prime Minister* is a caricature of Margaret Thatcher, as well as Paul Eddington the actor, see Fig. 8.2.
12. Margaret Thatcher, "Speech", 1984, THCR 5/1/5/236.
13. Margaret Thatcher reply to Jonathan Lynn, 1983, THCR 2/4/1/19 f218.
14. David Nokes, *John Gay*, 1995, p. 435; Sir Robert Walpole, 1676–1745, was for many years the dominant political figure during the reign of George I.
15. It is a theme of "Official Secrets" (10 December 1987).
16. Thatcher, "Speech".
17. In fact, Sir Humphrey took Greats (classics), a thematically important difference.
18. Thatcher, "Speech", p. 3.
19. Kandiah, "Interviews with Sir Antony Jay and Jonathan Lyn", 1994, pp. 509–11, 521.
20. Thatcher, "Speech", p. 6. She herself explains the anonymity in the series as a concern for the possibility that she might be replaced by a man, adding "Oh ye of little faith".
21. Handelsmann, "Satiric Dimension", pp. 25–7; Kandiah, "Interviews", pp. 511; 532. Handelsmann also notes that the actors Hawthorne and Eddington had diverging views on the matter, citing comments by Hawthorne (*Radio Times*, 23–9 February 1980) and by Eddington (*The Evening News,* 25 February 1980).
22. Kandiah, "Interviews", pp. 511, 514–5.
23. Lynn to Thatcher, 10 June 1983.
24. J. Wheatley, "The Man Behind the Minister", 1983; Peter Fiddick, "The Making of a Prime Minister", 1986; as discussed by Handelsmann, "Satiric Dimension", pp. 80–1.
25. Michael Dixon, "The Real Lessons of 'Yes Minister'"; as cited from *The Financial Times* by Handelsmann, "Satiric Dimension", p. 81. The rescreening draws on personal experience. I was in England at the time, but heard no discussion of the satiric intervention.
26. As for example in John Considine, "*Yes Minister*: Invaluable material for teaching the public choice of bureaucracy", 2006 pp. 55–61.
27. The insecurity becomes an easily manipulated paranoia as shown in "Man Overboard" (3 December 1987).
28. This is made most explicit in "Power to the People" (7 January 1988).

29. For example, in “The Ministerial Broadcast” (16 January 1986).
30. As happens in “Big Brother” (17 March 1980); “A Skeleton in the Cupboard” (25 November 1982); and partially, in “The Middle-Class Rip-off” (23 December 1982).
31. See “The Devil You Know” (23 March 1980); “The Moral Dimension” (2 December 1982); “The Whisky Priest” (16 December 1982) and “Bed of Nails” (9 December 1982).
32. Set out in “Bed of Nails”, *The Diaries*, pp. 424, 431–2, and “The Grand Design” (9 January 1986).
33. This student profile provides a theme in “Doing the Honours” (2 March 1981), although the cosy and extreme conservatism of the College is depicted as otherwise undisturbed.
34. About half the LSE student body during this period were postgraduates, with a strong Ivy League and Oxbridge presence. Ironically, during the Vietnam War, it was largely the visiting population of US students who helped revivify the radical public image inherited from the post- Second World War days of Harold Laski. Oakeshott purported to be a great believer in the honours system—honours should be given to whoever most wanted them.
35. For demonstration of Hacker’s political cunning, see also “Bed of Nails”.
36. Handelsmann, “Satiric Dimension”, pp. 63–4.
37. “The Official Visit”, *The Diaries*, p. 45.
38. “A Victory for Democracy” (13 February 1986).
39. “A Question of Loyalty” (6 April 1981), *The Diaries*, p. 332.
40. “Party Games” (27 December 1984); the initial formulation of the paradox was the statement ‘“All Cretans are liars’, said Epimenides the Cretan”. Since antiquity there have been many variations designed by philosophers and logicians to prove, or disprove that it is a genuine semantic paradox.
41. E.g. Arbuthnot, *Pseudologia Politike*, 1712; this too involves a particularly ingenious and perhaps unique version of the *paradox of the liar.* I have briefly discussed this as “the entailed liar” in *Hobbes, the Scriblerians and the History of Philosophy*, 2012, pp. 115–6.
42. Weber’s theories were part of a broad vision of society, adumbrated in various forms before his death in 1920 and most fully expressed in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922), translated as *Economy and Society*, 1978. They have been much discussed and elaborated, and the negative aspects of the bureaucracy to which Weber pointed were arguably satirised very early in Franz Kafka’s unfinished novel *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*), begun 1922, published 1926.
43. “Big Brother”, *The Diaries*, p. 85.

44. For example, in "Writing on the Wall". In this light, the use of Sir Humphrey to illustrate public choice theory in administrate organisations, is unduly reductive, as in Considine, "*Yes Minister*", pp. 55–61.
45. "The Compassionate Society". I tell a lie: there had been one patient when "the Deputy Chief Administrator fell over a piece of scaffolding and broke his leg" (*The Diaries*, p. 181).
46. "Big Brother", *The Diaries*, p. 85. The witticism got no overt response from the television audience.
47. For example, "Big Brother", *The Diaries*, p. 88.
48. "A Victory for Democracy" (13 February 1986).
49. "Bed of Nails", *The Diaries*, p. 435.
50. "Big Brother", *The Diaries*, p. 94.
51. Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1867) and Dicey's *The Law of the Constitution* (1885), both with numerous editions, were used as textbooks certainly until the 1960s; see A.H. Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government*, 1964, pp. 48–81.
52. Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government*, 1964, pp. 165–8).
53. "The Compassionate Society" (23 February 1981), *The Diaries*, p. 177; "Bed of Nails", *The Diaries*, p. 442; see also "Bishop's Gambit" (20 February 1986) and "Doing the Honours".
54. Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government*, p. 141.
55. Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government*, pp. 141–8.
56. See the discussion of this point in Chap. 2 by Mark Rolfe.
57. Stephenie Peatling (quoting an Australian Labor Party parliamentarian), "Shakespeare, Reshuffle Talk: Buckle up for Election Year", 2016, p. 5.
58. "Doing the Honours", *The Diaries*, p. 236.
59. See, for example, the impassioned Nigel Nicholson, *People and Parliament*, 1958.
60. *Globe* Editorial, "Australia Shows us What Parliamentary Democracy Looks Like", 16 September 2015.
61. "Open Government" (25 February 1980), *The Diaries*, p. 21.
62. Noel Malcolm, *Reason of State*, 2007, pp. 30–4.
63. Made very evident in "The Skeleton in the Cupboard", *The Diaries*, p. 492, where Hacker states that Bernard's linguistic quibbles "are becoming obsessional". The context is a doomed attempt to correct Sir Humphrey, who does not (though he might have been about to) misuse "recapitulate".
64. The most sustained play with Latinity is in "The National Education Service" (21 January 1988).
65. "Doing the Honours", *The Diaries*, editorial comment, p. 240.

66. George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”, 1981, pp. 143–57.
67. Rowan Williams, “What Orwell can teach us about the language of terror and war”, 2015; Don Watson, *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language*, 2003.
68. “The Compassionate Society”.
69. See John Wilson, *Politically Speaking*: *The Pragmatic Analysis of Political Language*, 1990, pp. 45–76, on the centrality of implicature.
70. Condren, *Political Vocabularies,* 2017, pp. 134–6, 140.
71. This kind of language is a sub-theme in “The Ministerial Broadcast”. It is paraded most obviously through the voice of the exceptionally dim Sir Desmond Glazebrook, a character whose discourse is largely a matter of clichéd mixed metaphor, in “Conflict of Interest” (23 February 1988).
72. Wilson, *Politically Speaking*, pp. 115–6.
73. Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* (1606), “Rhetoric”, 1835, p. 212.
74. Condren, *Political Vocabularies*, pp. 94–5, 97–9.
75. “Writing on the Wall”.
76. “The Compassionate Society”.
77. “The Moral Dimension”, *The Diaries*, pp. 412, 415.
78. “The Smoke Screen” (23 January 1986).
79. “A Question of Loyalty”, *The Diaries*, p. 331.
80. Handelsmann, “The Satiric Dimension”, pp. 64–6, refers to this as the politics of indeterminacy.
81. Michael Oakeshott, “Political Education” (1951), in *Rationalism in Politics*, 1962 (pp. 111–36); esp. p. 127.
82. See Plato, *The Republic*, 1969, pp. 488–9, for the helmsman (*kubernétés*) as ruler and being theoretically expert (*kubernétikós*) he can take the ship to its destination.; cf. Savile, *The Character of a Trimmer* (c.1685, 1688), in Walter Raleigh, ed., *The Works of George Savile*, 1912, pp. 48–9. But metaphors of storms, sailing and helmsmanship constituted a common field of imagery for politics by the late seventeenth century, see Condren, *Political Vocabularies,* pp. 158–9.
83. Handelsmann, “The Satiric Dimension”, p. 65.
84. Kandiah, “Interviews”, p. 524.
85. “The Whisky Priest”, *The Diaries*, pp. 468, 467.
86. Handelsmann, “Satiric Dimension”, p. 65.
87. The theme is iterated in *The Complete Yes, Prime Minister*, p. 488.
88. Written by Richard Curtis and Ben Elton, Episode 6 of *Blackadder Goes Forth* screened on BBC One, 2 November 1989.
89. For example, as Prime Minister in “The Grand Design”.

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CHAPTER 9

Have They no Shame? Observations on the Effects of Satire

Robert Phiddian

When he insisted that "poetry makes nothing happen", W.H. Auden was writing in January or early February 1939, in the wake of the fall of Barcelona and a few months before the German invasion of Poland. He wrote it in his elegy to the great, wayward, and often political Irish poet William Butler Yeats, and as a provocation to a literary culture that still saw poetry as the central artistic achievement of a nation. In the decades since, however, it has come to look more and more like a truism. Following the year of Donald Trump's election as US president, it is incumbent on scholars of humour to consider whether the same thing should not be said of political satire.

Exhibit A as I write at the close of 2016 is the hail of satirical criticism that lashed Trump from the point at which he announced he was running for office in June 2015. Since he had already been extensively cartooned during his rise to fame in the worlds of both commerce and show business, there was an existing trope on which to improvise, as Bob Mankoff, cartooning editor for *The New Yorker* magazine, has noted.[1] Many cartoons played with body image, especially Trump's exaggerated

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hairstyle, but also with his insistence on self-promotion and with ludicrous aspects of some of his proclaimed policies.[2] It is hard to see how this did anything to dampen Trump's morale or his popularity. Indeed, arguably it raised his profile and may have enhanced his popularity among supporters by burnishing his image as a martyr to the inquisition of elite opinion and "political correctness". When in November 2016 he won the election and was expected to become President Trump, David Sipress, a cartoonist for the *New Yorker* magazine, bravely tackled the issue of all the wasted cartoons. Like other consumables whose time has passed, they had been discarded—either in hopes they would be not needed or in favour of a more serious take on the nation's new leader. As events turned out, they were to prove even more urgently needed by those dismayed at the prospect of four long years of Trumpism. Sipress's cartoon (see Fig. 9.1) shows the typical *New Yorker* couple, with the man being helped to dive head-first into the garbage to retrieve them, and the woman saying to an onlooker, "He thought he wasn't going to need them". Amusingly, the image renders concrete the metaphor of recycling all those searingly dismissive satirical tropes that cartoonists had worked

Fig. 9.1 "Trump Jokes", drawn by David Sipress. Afternoon cartoon for *The New Yorker*, 14 November 2016. Reproduced with kind permission of Condé Nast.

up, first during Trump's campaign for nomination and then in the campaign proper. The urgency of their retrieval conveys a touching faith that one day these satires might work.

The Issue

It is not my intention to further add to the mountain of commentary on "the Donald", nor to engage in the debate about the peculiarly irritable year 2016 that brought Brexit and various other populist insurgencies into international political life, from The Philippines to Hungary and Poland, not to mention France. Instead, the present volume is an excellent opportunity to test across a fairly wide temporal and national canvas the gloomy hypothesis that "political satire makes nothing happen". The guiding questions are:

- How true is it that political satire makes nothing happen?
- Is that a bad thing—to the extent that is true?
- Are there effects other than immediate political success that political satire can claim to generate?

The work collected here provides a rich and equivocal range of answers to these questions. It is the fruit of more than a decade of debate on satire and humour, curated by Jessica Milner Davis through her sterling leadership of the Australasian Humour Studies Network. It is sometimes inflected by examples visible in Australia and New Zealand and more generally is dominated by Anglophone work, but the issues raised are truly international and, as I will go on to argue, fundamentally interdisciplinary.

The "stuff" of political satire in these first years of the twenty-first century has been marked by a series of controversies such as the Danish cartoons portraying the Prophet Mohammed and the *Charlie Hebdo* murders that point to a newly (or at least vastly increased) global circulation of satirical provocation and response. The other signal development during these years has been a substantial expansion of what might be called the satirical-industrial complex, with the alpha-predator being satirical television programmes on the model of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert in the USA. These sit at the tip of a very substantial iceberg that is made up for the most part of a range of online satirical activities that would have been impossible in the mass and printed media that

governed the dynamics of twentieth-century satire. Satire being the artistic and rhetorical mode for indignation, advances in digital media have expanded the scope of its expression and communication beyond any home nation state. At the same time, its breadth of impact upon a spectrum of opinion is becoming more restricted because of the increasing tendency of media since the invention of cable television to preach only to the converted.

Satirists would, generally, prefer to believe that they are doing something important and potentially beneficial for the body politic when they feel driven to call out fools and knaves. The Augustan poet Alexander Pope put the satirist's mission highest of all when (in 1738, another angry year) he praised satire in these terms: "O sacred weapon! left for Truth's defence,/Sole dread of Folly, Vice, and Insolence".[3] This is an extreme vision (like many satirists, Pope was nothing if not a rhetorical extremist), but satire's underlying fiction has always been that it provides an antidote to corruption in public life. Something like this can indeed sometimes occur, when a heroic satirist bravely and effectively tells truth to power. In the Anglophone tradition, the signal examples are probably William Hone's courageous parodic assault on censorship laws in 1819 Britain, and Thomas Nast's mid-nineteenth-century cartoon pursuit of Boss Tweed and Chicago's Tammany Hall system.[4] Much more often, however, satire simply forms part of the noise of politics and plays a role in the wider rhetorical ecology of a city, nation or some other polity. Taken as a whole, the chapters of the present book make a major contribution to scholarly understanding of the actual as opposed to the ideal effects of satire. For, while satire is seldom an antidote to politics, it is always an integral part of the political life in any polity possessing a press that is more or less free.

Does Satire Tell Truth to Power or Just Make Us Feel Better?

The study of political satire has often been held back by confusion about its disciplinary home, particularly owing to the historical tendency born of the study of Ancient Rome and early eighteenth-century Britain to see it primarily as a literary genre. As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, it is in fact much better understood as a critical and often humorous mode that can inhabit texts of many media and home genres.[5] The present chapters support this shift in viewpoint and collectively argue not

so much for a new discipline of satire studies as for an inter-disciplinary approach to studying satire, one with room for perspectives from politics, history, rhetoric, humour studies, practice-led research, psychology, literary and dramatic studies and (above all) media studies. Indeed, recent experience makes it clear that a catholic (even a permissive) understanding of media studies provides the most appropriate zone wherein to imagine the analysis of twenty-first century political satire.

What is important about this inter-disciplinary mix is that it should give equal weight to questions of form, intention and impact. To understand something as satirical is to construe it as having a satirical purpose, something more politically substantial than the comedian's aim of "merely" getting a laugh. But this understanding does not govern any political conclusions drawn. This is because, as is shown in Alison O'Connor's pioneering attempt in Chap. 7 to arrive at satirical impact via experimental methods originally designed to detect the simpler "getting the joke" effect of humour, predisposition and other environmental factors hugely influence audience members' reactions to identical satirical texts. Such contextual anchoring is precisely the sort of thing that many quantitative studies of humour try to filter out of consideration in pursuit of a scientifically precise humour phenomenon. Since context and reality always matter for satire, testing for that involves more than discerning if subjects find something laughable or pleasurable. Thus, O'Connor's strongly-based finding that "being satirised may not have a negative effect on approval ratings" where people have not already aligned themselves with the attitude of the programme by choosing to watch it is a substantial step towards understanding satire more directly and not via the simple proxy of humour.

In 2016, even a casual awareness of what went on during the year of Trump makes this finding intuitively compelling. Trump's followers in the so-called "flyover States" seemed little concerned by what any outsider would judge to be incisive and compelling satirical attacks on him when those came from "the liberal press". My point here is that no approach to political satire siloed to a single home discipline permits you to reach this conclusion other than intuitively. The survey of scholarship on political cartoons by Khin Wee Chen, Ronald Stewart and myself (Chap. 5) strongly makes the case for a multi-pronged approach by arranging—really for the first time—a full picture of the range of scholarly approaches that cartoons have elicited. What is remarkable about this is that together, the 144 studies covered—while not a comprehensive list

of work on cartooning by any means—provide a far more extensive range of content and approach than any individual study was conscious of in its frame of reference. We need, I think, to conceive of political satire not as an immature discipline which requires a specific set of scholarly practices, but as an interdisciplinary field where scholars can build shared understandings of fundamental questions about the purposes and effects of modes recognised as satirical in media and political ecologies. Conal Condren has demonstrated the futility of seeking a black-letter definition of satire as a means to unify the field,[6] so what we need is an understanding that our object of study is a complex family of cultural phenomena with all the broad similarities and specific differences that characterise family resemblances. The sort of mapping provided by me and my colleagues seems to us to be more useful than bickering over definitional matters. By delineating a precise field for political cartoons and the sorts of intellectual equipment useful for working in it, this approach points a way forward for other types of satire.

Since the twenty-first century problem is the profusion of shape-shifting satire let loose in digital media, such non-prescriptive mapping of content and method is essential for any broad or cumulative understanding to work. Lucien Leon, writing as a scholar and a cartoon practitioner, considers in his chapter both the technological opportunities and the economic challenges of being a cartoonist in the new digital media, where mass media (especially newspapers) no longer form the major sustaining pillars of market and agora for the traditional editorial cartoon. We are not yet very far into this technological revolution, but early indications suggest that the space online permits many more satirical voices than before, but does not offer a straightforward model for making an economic living from satirical art. The expansion of the agora also seems to be attended by a fracturing along lines that are rather different from those in the era of mass communication. Audiences for satire are now much less constrained by their location from finding the sort of stuff that they know they like (including satire); but there is an attendant weakening of the sense of individual belonging to a metropolitan culture that is dominated by a handful of leading news organs. There also seems to be a weakening of national traditions of satire like those discussed by Lindsay Foyle and Davis in their introductory chapter or by Nicholas Holm in Chap. 4. Since many other forms of identity can so readily be framed within the global reach of digital media, national identities—such as the Australasian larrikin or the deadpan humorist—have tended to become

less significant nowadays than they perhaps were in the nationalism-obsessed twentieth century. It is a moot point which way native populism will drive developments for the future.

The most topical issue addressed in this volume is the question of whether satire works as a form of populist anti-politics; or whether it can instead be co-opted by political operators to their own ends. If this is taken as a simple binary option, then the chapters by Holm and Mark Rolfe would seem to contradict those by Condren and Rebecca Higgie. However, both positions may often (even occasionally simultaneously) be true—as long as the complex variety of satirical effect is taken as the object of study. Context always matters for satire, and particular texts take on meaning in a rich rhetorical and political ecology of intended and unintended consequences.

Condren and Higgie focus particularly on two fabulous "through the looking-glass" moments. Two of the dominant politicians of their times, Margaret Thatcher in 1984 and Barack Obama in 2014, became the apparent authors of political satire aimed at themselves in programmes that were ambiguously critical of them. Gamekeepers turned poachers, these politicians performed a trope of being able to take a joke against oneself that goes back at least as far as Cleon in Ancient Athens. As judge and chief dramatic auditor, he famously had to show at least some degree of apparent tolerance of barely veiled attacks on him by the great comedian Aristophanes in plays like *The Knights* and *The Wasps*. These would have been played before him and the citizens of Athens at the dramatic festival. On this reading, satire is more likely to foment political cynicism and gamesmanship than to save the nation—as Higgie argues. And it is seriously disconcerting to read in Condren's chapter that Paul Eddington, who played the hapless minister and prime minister in the UK TV *Yes Minister* series, was earnestly approached by both major political parties to stand for parliament. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to expect politicians not to try to manage and if possible suborn the propaganda forces available in satire. And it would be just as naïve to expect satirists to put up with the status of tame humanisers of the powerful for long. What Higgie and Condren really show in their brilliant exercises in close cultural reading is that there is a restless and competitive dialogue between the licensed fools and our elected knaves. Higgie's politicians of the last decade—Obama and Britons Nicholas Clegg and Boris Johnson—used engagement with satirical media programmes to claim some of the authentic gloss of self-irony. Thatcher seems by

contrast to have used her engagement with *Yes Minister* to burnish the image with voters (or at least with political insiders) of her desired reform of the Public Service and their wasteful habits.

None of this is easy to align with a simply instrumental understanding of satire as bravely and effectively telling truth to power (the ideal of *parrhesia* that Rolfe writes about); but it can certainly sit well beside visions of satire as deadpan disengagement (Holm) or anti-politics politics (Rolfe). Satire in relatively open public cultures often does do what Holm claims for his materials:

> The confluence of satire and deadpan in Australasia, then, is certainly not an evacuation of politics, nor a zone of automatically progressive political work: it needs to be understood and approached as a complex political site, where meaning and interpretation always remain "up for grabs". (Chap. 4, this volume)

Satire on this understanding becomes a way for artists and audiences to engage in and respond to politics as usual, in a manner that is generally oppositional. An optimistic (for satirists) metaphor for this is to describe satirical comment as identifying the rust spots in the otherwise burnished surface images of political figures.[7] For a long time, satire has no effect but when sudden pressure is applied, it can provide the point for the veneer of power and success to fracture irrevocably. Rolfe starts his account of the dance between satire and politics in Anglophone electoral politics at, in my view, the correct point of genesis: the long prime ministership of Sir Robert Walpole in the early eighteenth century. It is well worth remembering that, despite the fact that the great Augustan satirists Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay and Henry Fielding wrote long and hard against him, he stayed on top for two decades. Satire certainly does not bring its desired results with any degree of reliability. But when Walpole fell, it was his reputation for corrupt manipulation of the political process that people remembered about him.

A more recent fable from Australia further endorses the image of rust being punctured by satire. Haydon Manning and I have written elsewhere about long-serving Australian prime minister John Howard's 2007 fall from a position of strength to defeat. He had been a national leader for more than a decade, and hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Sydney on Thursday 13 September 2007 was to be a highlight of his re-election campaign for that year. A local satirical TV team, The Chaser,[8] sought to ridicule the overzealous

pomposity of this international event, where security concerns about the presence of many heads of state brought the city to gridlock, denying inner-city residents access to their own homes. Accordingly, the satirists created a small but official-looking motorcade escorting one of their number dressed in the manner of public enemy number one Osama bin Laden—and they made it, reaching well beyond the point at which access was supposedly to be denied by a substantial security wall. In our analysis of the cartoons of the 2007 election, we wrote:[9]

> Satire is by no means always a silver bullet to identify the truth of complex political situations, but it is a good indicator of political 'strength', as [Judith] Brett defines it, and its evanescence. She dates Howard's loss of the aura of strength, plausibly if over-precisely, to a satirical intervention:
>
> 'This was political satire that was reaching far beyond the usual suspects on the liberal left, and in the process turning the government's national-security credentials into a national joke. When the Chaser motorcade breached the Great Wall of Sydney, Howard's days as a strong leader were over.'
>
> Satire doesn't often cause political change, as Brett argues it did in this instance, but it can certainly reflect and accentuate that change when it occurs.

This is a rare moment of instrumental impact for satirists, but it does not have to occur often for its potential to hover always over the political scene, and that of itself has some influence. Like populism, satire in its heroic mode promises to be an antidote to politics as usual; but in practice it tends to be both more and less than that. Because of this, the contributions to this volume provide ample evidence in the multiple cases they analyse that (in rich, complex, and often conflicted ways) satire is an integral part of politics. And this is especially true wherever there is a reasonably free press or communication outlets.

Conclusion

So here is what I think political satire does: it provides individuals and societies with a crucial rhetorical space in which to exercise freedom of speech. Very occasionally it changes the world, but more commonly it provides a play space where (if all goes well) truth can be spoken impudently to power and the negative emotions involved in indignation

(anger, disgust, contempt, disdain) can be exercised cathartically and in relative safety. This is no mean thing, since speech that is more or less free, as enjoyed in many (but not all) materially advanced countries in the twenty-first century, is neither an inevitable nor a robust product of human progress. As David Bromwich reminds us:

> Free speech is an aberration – it is best to begin by admitting that. In most societies throughout history and in all societies some of the time, censorship has been the means by which a ruling group or a visible majority cleanses the channels of communication to ensure that certain conventional practices will go on operating undisturbed.[10]

Satire tends to tread at the limits of tolerance even in the most free societies, and seems on the face of it to be a throwback to forms of shaming and vigilante justice not obviously amenable to civil public discourse. Without satire, however, it is hard to see how the negative emotions might be better exorcised and exercised. Certainly, the rise of nativist populisms across Europe and North America (as yet only relatively faintly echoed in political satire-loving Australia and New Zealand) looks like evidence that these passions of more or less savage indignation continue to exist and are only displaced (often into more aggressively violent forms) if censored in public life.

Historically, the existence of open as opposed to covert or coded satire constitutes a reliable proxy for high levels of freedom of speech in a society, and two things can be said about this with a fair degree of confidence. The first is the heroic Enlightenment point that satire is one way of calling out both organised and disorganised corruption in state or society. Yes, it is arbitrary and potentially wayward rhetorical aggression, since there is no certainty that a satirist will use this available license wisely or even honestly; but where behaviour is shameless, public shaming mechanisms are in fact a necessary check upon it. The second is a more conservative function—something like the catharsis Aristotle proposed long ago as an explanation for the appeal of tragedy. Satire is one way of exercising those hostile emotions such as anger, disgust, contempt and disdain through ridicule but doing so within the tent of accepted public discourse.

To exemplify this function with a hard case, Australia's first female prime minister Julia Gillard (from 2010–2013) received during her term of office a lot of deplorably misogynist online attacks that the authors and willing audiences presumably thought of as both funny and true. While I disagree profoundly with those views (and the claim to humour),

it seems better to me not to suppress such noisome stuff, as that might only build towards more concrete forms of violence. A play-space for symbolic offence and offence taking is a long way from Pope's "sacred Weapon", but a sort of rhetorical garbage removal service is one side of what satire offers to complex societies. Until we actually live in Dr Pangloss's "best of all possible worlds" of emotional and ideological unanimity, space for such catharsis is preferable to actual unrest. Nevertheless, as we move from the mass media that dominated the twentieth century to the multiplicity of today's digital media, that cathartic space is expanding and fragmenting in rapid and unpredictable ways, so that—as this book shows—satire is becoming an increasingly complex and volatile cultural phenomenon.

So, returning to my governing questions, satire does make things happen, but seldom in the "silver bullet" manner dreamed of by militant satirists and their advocates who want corruption and its leading figures to collapse quickly under the force of ridicule. This is not really such a bad thing in fact, because satirists are often ideological extremists motivated by angry passions, and not truly reliable guides to what is right or wrong about the world. They raise alarm in spectacular and often amusing ways, but they have no infallible guidance system that makes them always discern rightly. They constitute only one set of voices in a healthy public debate, but they are a vital one deserving appreciation and protection. That they are often the most choleric of voices serves a valuable function in the ecology of public debate. Any realistic understanding of public cultures needs to recognise that a reasonably free press depends on there being a play space for intemperate views, since pushing them underground cannot actually suppress them, as authoritarian regimes of all stripes have in the past discovered to their cost. Satire can both point to intolerable things in the world and be borderline intolerable itself as it tests the taboos of a group or a society. On balance, it is healthy that both sorts of aggression should be tolerated, as politics can only be the better for exposure to the harsh medicine of ridicule.

Notes

1. Robert Mankoff, "The Cartoon Lounge: The Trump Trope", *New Yorker*, 22 April 2016.
2. The range of Trump cartoons extends from playful if emotive on sites like "Sad and Useless: The Most Depressive Humor Site on the Internet, Donald Trump Cats", 2015, to more biting criticism, for example by Pulitzer

Prize-winning cartoonist Mike Luckovich, who draws for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (see Luckovich 2016).

3. "Epilogue to the Satires, in Two Dialogues: Dialogue 2", ll. 212–3, in Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 1966 [1738], p. 702.
4. Ben Wilson, *The Laughter of Triumph: William Hone and the Fight for the Free Press*, 2005; Fiona Deans Halloran, *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons*, 2013; see also Chap. 2 by Mark Rolfe.
5. Robert Phiddian, "Satire and the Limits of Literary Theories", 2013.
6. Conal Condren, "Satire and Definition", 2012.
7. I owe this metaphor to my colleague Murray Bramwell, with whom I had a decade of the happiest teaching of my career in our Comedy and Satire course at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia.
8. See also Chap. 3 by Rebecca Higgie on this team and their series of TV shows.
9. Haydon Manning and Robert Phiddian, "Campaign Cartoons: No More Man of Steel", p. 56, quoting from Judith Brett, "Exit Right: The Unravelling of John Howard", 2007, p. 45.
10. David Bromwich, "What Are We Allowed to Say?", 22 September 2016.

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