Comedy and Power Conference 9/10th Nov 2018
Sheffield Hallam University

Twitter info: @MixedBill #MixedBill18

Programme Day 1

Friday 9th November - Performance Lab, Sheffield Hallam University, Arundel Gate, S1 2LQ

9.30am: Registration.

9.50am: Opening remarks - Dr Suzanne Speidel, Sheffield Hallam University, UK.

10.00am: Keynote address - Dr Sharon Lockyer, Brunel University, UK. Comedy, Disability, and Sexuality.

11.00am: Break (tea, coffee and water provided)

11.20am: Session 1: Chaired by Dr Rosie White, Northumbria University, UK.

- Madison Trusolino, University of Toronto, Canada:
  “I Want to Kill My Rapist”: Conceptualizing Margaret Cho’s #12DaysofRage Campaign as an Act of Feminist Response-Ability.

- Laura Minor, University of Leeds, UK:
  The Disruptive Properties of Michaela Coel’s Chewing Gum.

- Ellie Tomsett, Birmingham City University, UK:
  Online to IRL: The impact of social media on the live practice of female identifying stand-up comics.

12.40pm: Lunch (provided)

1.30pm: Session 2: Chaired by Dr Suzanne Speidel, Sheffield Hallam University, UK.

- Dr Barbara Plotz, Kings College London, UK:
  “Fat Slapstick” in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema.

- Dr Anna Street, Le Mans Université, France:

- Aimee Merrydew, Keele University, UK:
  “Poking fun at gender conventions”: Rearticulating Trans Identities and Experiences through Satire and Spoken Word Poetry.
3.00pm: Break (tea, coffee and water provided)

3.20pm: Session 3 (workshop)

- ‘Zine reflection activity led by Chella Quint, independent researcher and activist, Sheffield, UK.
- Structured networking session led by Natalie Diddams, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.

4.30pm: Break – option to attend conference meal.

6.30pm: Session 4 (performance paper)

Stand Up As In Between with Dr Kate Fox, stand-up poet.

*Note this final session will occur in The Void Cinema. Sheffield Hallam University, Floor 1, Owen Building, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB. This is 5 mins walk from the Performance Lab – student volunteers will be on hand to assist with directions.

8:00pm: End of Day 1.

Programme Day 2

Sat 10th November Performance Lab, Sheffield Hallam University, Arundel Gate, S1 2LQ

10.00am: Keynote address - Dr Anamik Saha, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Cultures of production and representations of race in comedy.

11.00am: Break (tea, coffee and water provided)

11.20am: Session 5: Chaired by Dr Shelley Roche-Jacques, Sheffield Hallam University, UK.

- Natalie Diddams, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.
  Joyful Laughter: Making waves with the Women’s Comedy Workshop.

- Dr Sam Beale, Middlesex University, UK:
  Checkpoints, charity workers & K Pop: women’s comedy in occupied Palestine.

- Lelia Tavakoli Farsooni, Independent researcher, Manchester, UK:

12.40pm: Lunch (provided)

1.30pm: Session 6: Chaired by Ellie Tomsett, Birmingham City University, UK.

- Adam Carter, Goldsmiths, University of London:
  The value of laughter: Reading the audience in the creative process of stand-up comedy.
• Dr Sarah Illott, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK: *Encounters with the Neighbour in British Multicultural Comedy: From Rising Damp to Attack the Block.*

• Lisa Moore, University of Salford, UK: *Bitches, Politics and Power.*

**3.00pm:** Break and summary ‘Zine activity

**3.20pm: Plenary panel chaired by Dr Kate Fox.**
Steve Canny, BBC Comedy Executive
Isma Almas, stand-up comedian
Dr Anamik Saha Goldsmiths, University of London, UK.

**4.30pm** – Closing remarks – Ellie Tomsett, Birmingham City University, UK.

**4.40pm** – End of Day 2.
Comedy and Power Conference 9/10th Nov 2018
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Abstracts and biographical information

Keynote speakers:

Comedy, Disability and Sexuality
This keynote address explores the complex and dynamic relationship between comedy, disability and sexuality in facilitating, and limiting, the political transformation and disability activism possibilities of comedy performed by comedians with disabilities. Taking a tripartite approach, the paper examines this relationship in terms of production, content and reception of comedy by comedians with disabilities.

Dr Sharon Lockyer: Sharon is the founding director of the Centre for Comedy Studies Research (CCSR) and a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Communications in the Department of Social and Political Sciences at Brunel University London, UK. Her research interests include critical comedy studies, identity politics and comic media representations and the sociology of popular culture. She is editor of Reading Little Britain: Comedy Matters on Contemporary Television (I.B.Tauris 2010) and co-editor of Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour (Palgrave Macmillan 2005, 2009), Controversial Images: Media Representations on the Edge (Palgrave Macmillan 2013) and Screening the Undead: Vampires and Zombies in Film and Television (I.B.Tauris 2014). She has also published in a range of academic journals and is the founding co-editor of the Palgrave Studies in Comedy book series.

@Comedy_Studies
Cultures of production and representations of race in comedy.

Studies of race in comedy studies and the media more generally are mostly focused on the text, that is, the issue of representation. In this paper I will argue for a new emphasis on the production of representations of race in comedy. In particular will consider how the structures and cultures of production within the cultural industries shape the stories - or indeed, jokes - that black and Asian comedians are allowed to tell.

Dr Anamik Saha:

Anamik is the programme leader for BA Media and Communications and co-convenor for MA Race, Media and Social Justice at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Prior to joining the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths he worked in the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds, firstly as an ESRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, then as a Lecturer in Communications Studies. Anamik’s research interests are in ‘race’, cultural industries and cultural production, relating to wider questions of capitalism, culture and race. His doctoral research was based upon an ethnographic study of British Asian cultural production in three cultural sectors – television, theatre and publishing – and looked at how representations of ‘race’ are shaped by the conditions of cultural production, fusing his interests in cultural industries and postcolonial theory. He is interested in the experience of creative labour, particularly from the perspective of minority cultural producers, and has conducted research on popular music, and cities and the aesthetic expressions of urban multiculture. He is the current Chair of the Ethnicity and Race in Communication Division of the International Communications Association. Anamik’s new book Race and the Cultural Industries has recently been published by Polity and will inform his keynote address.

@Anamik1977

Plenary speakers:

Steve Canny: Steve is an Executive Producer for BBC Comedy, Scotland. Steve started his creative career as a theatre director and writer and was associate director for theatre company Complicite from 1999–2004.
He has an extensive background in Radio comedy and was listed as the Executive Producer of the winners of the Gold, Silver and Bronze Sony Awards for Best Comedy in 2011. Across his career he has Executive Produced of more than 300 hours of comedy on Radio 4 including: *The News Quiz*, *Tom Basden’s Party*, *Rudy’s Rare Records*, *Radio 4’s Advent Calendar* and *The Show What You Wrote*.


@cannyscanny

**Isma Almas**: Isma is a stand-up comedian who recently contributed to the BBC3 Comedy show *The Big Asian Stand-up* (2018). Born in Bradford with a childhood split between Pakistan and Yorkshire her comedy is fused by her unique take on life as a British Muslim woman. With an academic background in Social Sciences and Social Work, Isma’s career outside of comedy has included working in a forensic unit for those with significant mental health problems as well as managing independent fostering agencies. Isma won The First Laugh at Sheffield Comedy Festival in 2006, was a semi-finalist in So You Think You’re Funny the same year, and was a Funny Women finalist in 2007.

@ismaalmas

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**Session 1:**

**“I Want to Kill My Rapist”: Conceptualizing Margaret Cho’s #12DaysofRage Campaign as an Act of Feminist Response-Ability.**

In November 2015, two years before the #MeToo movement rose to prominence, comedian Margaret Cho began her online #12DaysofRage campaign—meant to preface the release of her music video: “I Want to Kill My Rapist.” Cho posted a different video for 12 days, each one outlining a different experience she has had with sexual abuse and encouraging others to do the same.
The culminating music video was extremely controversial, featuring a group of young women at camp being trained to, at the end of the video, kill a rapist. In this paper, I take Cho’s music video and campaign as my starting point to examine the ways in which women comedians challenge solutions to sexual assault. Among the more problematic solutions to assault are those that underscore carceral feminism, defined as the deployment of the criminal justice system, which is structurally embedded in white-supremacist and capitalist ideologies, to combat sexual violence.

I argue that Cho’s campaign challenged carceral logics by conceptualizing it as a form of what communication scholar Carrie Rentschler terms a “feminist response-ability” that combines testimonial, advice giving and support. Cho’s campaign created networks of care through cathartic laughter and survivor-oriented storytelling, which, Rentschler argues, is a key element of transformative justice, as it asks not who should be punished, but rather who is hurt and what they need to heal. Cho added to the discussion of what healing looks like by rejecting the idea of forgiveness and suggesting that survivors “murder the rapists inside our minds.”

Madison Trusolino, University of Toronto, Canada: Madison is PhD Student based within the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. She has recently published on Facebook’s unequal treatment of gendered hate speech.

@peskykilljoy

*The Disruptive Properties of Michaela Coel’s Chewing Gum.*

‘Disruptive’ is a term that is used repeatedly in discussions of “fourth-wave” feminism and women in comedy (Mills, 2009; Cochrane, 2014; Gwynne, 2009) – but what does this mean, exactly? In this paper I explore how Michaela Coel - British actress, screenwriter, singer, songwriter, poet, and playwright - can be considered a disruptive author and comedian in her original television sitcom *Chewing Gum* (Channel 4, 2015-17). Michaela Coel’s critically acclaimed series earned her two BAFTAs – one for Best Female Performance in a Comedy Programme and one for Breakthrough Talent. Since then, she has been invited to deliver the prestigious James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture this year at the Edinburgh International Television Festival, an important media event in the UK. Of the forty-two people who have given the speech, Coel is the fifth woman, first person of colour, and youngest to deliver the lecture so far.
With Coel’s power rising in the British television industry, then, I explore how she uses her comedy series to ‘disrupt’ audience expectations and identifications in two ways: via ‘affect’ and performance. I examine how Coel uses ‘cringe comedy’ and the deeply feminist dimensions of affect (Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012), as well as her televisual performance, to subvert stereotypical representations of women and people of colour on TV. Though typically silenced as a black female performer, I argue that Coel gains power through television comedy by making us feel through affect and using her bold, uninhibited performance to proclaim: I’m here.

**Laura Minor, University of Leeds, UK:** Laura is a PhD candidate and White Rose Scholarship holder at the University of Leeds, UK. Her project is entitled ‘Reclaiming Female Authorship in British Television Comedy, 2010–2016’. She has recently published on the TV comedy Shameless.

@lrjdmnr

**Online to IRL: The impact of social media on the live practice of female identifying stand-up comics.**

This paper will consider the ways in which social media (specifically the Twitter platform) impacts upon the work of female identifying stand-up comics. Stand-up comedy has originated and been developed as a form in gendered spaces, most notably the Working Men’s Clubs of the 1960s and 70s. The UK stand-up comedy industry continues to be dominated by white, heterosexual, cis-gendered men. In the current context can social media provide opportunities to challenge this dominance, or does this digital space replicate behaviours female comic performers experience in the live environment?

Stand-up comic performance, which traditionally requires direct address to an audience, is co-constructed through dialogue between performer and audience. This begs the question, what happens when that dialogue is no longer bound to the time and place of the live performance and who has the power in this new relationship? Are there positive and negative aspects of this development that are unique to female comedians? This paper will draw on qualitative data from interviews with comedians and promoters collected as part of a four-year research project with the UK Women in Comedy Festival.
**Ellie Tomsett, Birmingham City University, UK:** Ellie is a Lecturer in Media and leader of the School of Media’s Foundation Programme at Birmingham City University. She is completing her PhD research, entitled *Reflections on UK Comedy’s Glass Ceiling: Stand-Up Comedy and Contemporary Feminisms*, with Sheffield Hallam University. As part of her research Ellie has been Researcher in Residence with the Women in Comedy Festival in Manchester since 2014. In 2017 she co-founded Mixed Bill a comedy and gender research network with colleagues Lisa Moore and Dr Kate Fox, and has written on feminist and post-feminist stand-up comedy and self-deprecatory humour.

@EllieTomsett

**Session 2:**

*“Fat Slapstick” in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema.*

Film comedy has a long tradition of showcasing Othered social groups, often to ridicule and mock them. Film Studies has engaged with this issue to a certain degree, yet so far little attention has been given to the representation of fatness and how it is informed by comedy. My research interest is located within the field of Fat Studies, an interdisciplinary emancipatory project engaging critically with the marginalisation of fatness, and my paper will focus on fatness in contemporary Hollywood comedy. More specifically, I will outline the characteristics of “fat slapstick”, a type of comedy that depicts fat characters as physically unfit, and/or highlights the weight, size and volume of the fat body.

Based on an analysis of a number of commercially successful Hollywood comedies of the last 15 years, such as *Norbit* (2007), *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* (2009), *The Hangover* (2009), *Bridesmaids* (2011) and *How to Be Single* (2016), I will demonstrate how fat slapstick acts as one of the dominant modes of representation for fat characters and how this relates to notions of fatness as hyper-physicality. Furthermore, this paper will argue that not only is the physicality of fat characters being emphasized by their participation in physical comedy, it is also that their fatness is insisted on and constitutes the basis of the comedic effect. Fatness itself is turned into a spectacle and thereby a comic and demeaning image of fatness is constantly being reinforced.
**Dr Barbara Plotz, Kings College London, UK:** Barbara holds a PhD in Film Studies from King’s College London, where she is currently working as a teaching assistant. She has a book forthcoming with I.B. Tauris, entitled *Fat on Film: Gender, Race and Body Size in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Her research interests include representation, popular cinema, horror cinema, the body, and fat studies.

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**Politics, Parody and Puppetry: How News Satire Exposes the Dilemma of Democracy.**

With the rise of fake news and a growing culture of choose-your-own-version news broadcasts, this presentation will explore the genre of news satire, the openly comedic parody of current affairs. Thriving in many forms, from television broadcasts to online journalism, news satire uses a range of figures including puppets and celebrities to recast official reports in acutely ironic interpretations. Adopting a comparative approach across cultures, my research will contrast the vibrant culture of American news satire with the French Les Guignols de l’Info, UK’s former Spitting Image and the South African Puppet Nation ZA shows. The primary emphasis will be on the Comedy Vs Power thematic of the conference, exposing the precise comic mechanisms used to subvert or reinforce dominant discourses.

Special attention will be given to instances of minority empowerment but also to examples of racist or misogynist reiteration. We will interrogate to what extent a thriving comedy scene within the primetime political sphere can be interpreted as a sign of healthy resistance within a democratic order based on self-critique as well as to what extent it entices the complicity of its readers and spectators in simply reinforcing the cycle of power based on majority rule.

**Dr Anna Street, Le Mans Université, France:** Anna holds a double doctorate from the University of Paris—Sorbonne (English Studies – Theater) and from the University of Kent (Comparative Literature) and a Masters in Philosophy from the Sorbonne. She is the author of “Dramatic Measures: Comedy as Philosophical Paradigm” published in the journal *Anglia* (2018), and her work traces a parallel between the development of theories of comedy and philosophy’s increasing reliance upon dramatic techniques. She is a member of the Sorbonne research laboratory VALE and a core convener of the Performance Philosophy network. She has translated ten volumes in the collection *Les Petits Platons* and co-edited the volume *Inter Views in Performance Philosophy: Crossings and Conversations*, published by Palgrave in 2017. Beginning in September, she will be assuming a post as Lecturer in Theater Studies at Le Mans Université.
“Poking fun at gender conventions”: Rearticulating Trans Identities and Experiences through Satire and Spoken Word Poetry.

The transgender community has attracted unprecedented media attention in recent years, leading American Vogue magazine to name 2015 “the year of trans visibility” (Taylor, 2015, para. 2). Despite this increased awareness of trans experiences and civil rights – facilitated by high-profile celebrities such as Orange Is the New Black’s Laverne Cox – the mainstream media continues to cast the everyday lives of the trans community in a negative light. These representations are often produced by cisgender people and promote problematic narratives of what it “means” to be trans: deceptive, predatory, mentally ill, narcissistic, and “trapped” in the “wrong” body. Through an analysis of Julia Serano’s spoken word poetry, this paper explores how comedy becomes a way in which to satirise cultural prejudice and create positive dialogue around gender-nonconformity. Humour, irony, caricature, parody, innuendo and double entendre are some of the satirical tools that Serano deploys in order to ridicule gender hegemonies, gain agency, and encourage social change. Indeed, Serano (2016) states in her introduction to Outspoken: A Decade of Transgender Activism & Trans Feminism that she performs poetry as a way of “poking fun at [oppressive] gender conventions” (p. 14).

Satire and spoken word poetry thus enable Serano to showcase her questioning of normative gender and, perhaps more importantly, encourage the audience to engage in a similar questioning process. As such, the guiding question in this paper is: how does Serano use comical satire as a tool through which to challenge (non-trans) audiences to move beyond hegemonic narratives of (trans)gender identity?

Aimee Merrydew, Keele University, UK: Aimee is a PhD Student and Graduate Teaching Assistant in English Literature at Keele University. Her research is primarily concerned with gender and sexualities in contemporary Anglophone cultures. More specifically, her project seeks to explore how contemporary trans and gender-nonconforming spoken word poets utilise satire as a form of self-representation and resistance to cultural hegemonic discourse. She has recently had a paper published entitled ‘Blossoming into the Desired Body: A Phenomenological Approach to Ely Shipley’s Boy with Flowers’ (2017).

@aimeemerrydew
Session 4:

**Stand Up As In Between**

In this performance paper Dr Kate Fox uses her work for BBC radio & her practice-based PhD to show & tell, with occasional rhyme and punchline, how stand-ups can be the ultimate in-betweeners. Trickster figures who can navigate boundaries of genre to navigate boundaries of class, gender and other positions.

**Dr Kate Fox, Stand-up Poet and Independent researcher, UK:** Kate works mainly as a stand-up poet. She has made two comedy series called *The Price of Happiness* for Radio 4 about things she’s supposed to want but doesn’t. She has been Poet in Residence for the Great North Run, Glastonbury Festival and Radio 4’s Saturday Live, and worked extensively facilitating writing and performing projects for schools, community groups and festivals. She has performed her poetry on BBC1 and BBC2 as well as numerous radio shows. She is currently working on a show for the Great Exhibition of the North, about sung and unsung Northern women, called “Where There’s Muck here’s Bras”.

In 2018 she completed a PhD at the University of Leeds about class, gender, Northern Englishness and stand-up and has published several academic papers and book chapters on comedy and performance. She originally trained as a radio journalist and loves having a varied career which means that one minute she can be interviewing Sting or Sarah Millican on stage, the next, she can be talking about class and comedy at a comedy festival and the next, performing her poems in a pub, an arena or on Radio 3, or sitting down and writing about talking trees, women in mills or a telly vet. Her poetry collections have been published by Burning Eye Books, Smokestack and Valley Press, among others. Kate is a co-founder of Mixed Bill and has written numerous academic articles based on her research - she recently invented a new word for when humour and seriousness combine: Humitas. Find out more about this new term in [The Conversation article](https://theconversation.com/)

@katefoxwriter
DAY 2

Session 5:

Joyful Laughter: Making waves with the Women’s Comedy Workshop.

Despite the regularity with which we do it, laughter has received relatively little attention within the academy. Those who do discuss laughter, do so for the most part in terms of the “humorous” moments that precede it (Emmerson, 2017:2082). This paper proposes a distinctly different approach: shifting focus away from humour to foreground laughter as a phenomenon in its own right. Through this, I argue that we can understand laughter without reducing it to humorous intentionality, even when there is humour present.

Drawing on insights from a series of women’s comedy workshops in Bradford, I will examine the ways in which laughter can enact, disrupt and reconfigure relationships between bodies and space. Defining ‘joyful laughter’ as “the expression of being rejoicing in being” (Kundera, 1996:81), I will also explore laughter’s indeterminate capacities to generate new atmospheres and subjectivities; creating “moving, sensing bodies” (Manning, 2012:xiii) that are capable of experiencing the world differently. Ultimately, I will connect this to an understanding of fourth wave feminism(s), considering how laughter might be functioning within the social movement as a way of unlocking a more hopeful politics for the future.

Natalie Diddams, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK: Natalie is in the 3rd year of her PhD programme at Manchester Metropolitan University; researching comedy and laughter within the fourth wave feminist movement. She works as an Associate Lecturer at MMU and the University of Warwick, teaching within Acting (BA) and Theatre and Performance Studies (BA) respectively.

Natalie is a theatre director and practitioner. Recent productions include The Believers Are But Brothers (international tour), Thesmo (northern tour) and BIRTH (Royal Exchange Manchester). She is also the founder of The Women’s Comedy Workshop at Theatre in the Mill, Bradford.

@NatalieDiddams
In 2016-2017, I worked with comedian Mark Thomas on a project in occupied Palestine, teaching stand-up comedy in a refugee camp on the West Bank. This paper focuses on the comedy produced by the women who took part in the project, considering what their public performances at the end of the course reveal about the place of women in contemporary Palestinian society and the extent and limits of comic licence for women performers working in this context.

The performance conventions of the stand-up form resulted in the women participants unavoidably challenging the religiously and socially conservative community they were attempting to make jokes about. Throughout the workshops these performers developed a range of comic strategies to allow them to offer honest commentaries on their lives and experiences, while simultaneously avoiding or evading public disapproval. These strategies included the adoption of ironic comic attitudes/gestus, grotesque characterisations, and creative forms of self-deprecation and self-censorship.

Making use of footage from the workshops and performances, the women’s personal accounts and my own reflections of working in this context as a white European woman, this paper examines the extent to which their explorations in a culturally unfamiliar performance form gave them comic licence to express their ideas and opinions and confront the limits on their freedom as Palestinians and as women. This work raises questions about how far comedy can significantly challenge power both in the form of oppressive regimes and as pervasive culturally and socially gendered demands and expectations on women.

Dr Sam Beale, Middlesex University, UK: Sam has taught on the Theatre Arts programmes at Middlesex University for over 20 years, specialising in stand-up comedy and solo performance and developing a Solo Performance programme. She regularly collaborates with comic performers as a director, writer and consultant and sometimes performs at and stages comedy/cabaret events. Her doctoral thesis centered on women’s comic performance on the British music hall and her current research interests include women and contemporary shifts in stand-up comedy and autobiographical comic performance.

Muslims have recently been at the centre of security practices, such as the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy or Prevent, which frame Islam as threat to the national cohesion of European states. Muslim women, in particular, embody this issue because they are perceived as subservient women (mothers/wives of terrorists) without agency whilst simultaneously being constructed as threat to the national cohesion of European states (exemplified in attempts to ban the burqa/burqini in France). These security practices have brought about resistance seeking to critique the narratives stigmatizing Muslims as threatening national identity. An emergent site of resistance has come in the form of comedy; or more particularly the emergence of a critical mass of female stand-up comedians of Muslim backgrounds whose comedy challenges the designation of Muslims as a threat (e.g. Samia Orosemane, Shappi Khorsandi). Stand-up comedy as resistance in spite of its potential as political intervention has so far received little attention in International Politics. This paper aims to explore stand-up comedy as a site of everyday resistance and aims to investigate how stand-up comedy, by revealing satirical snap-shots of everyday life, addresses modes of othering inherent in security practices.

Lelia Tavakoli Farsooni, Independent researcher, Manchester, UK: Lelia completed her MA in International Politics with distinction at The University of Manchester in 2017. She also completed her BA in Middle Eastern Languages at the same institution in 2012. Lelia currently holds an offer to undertake PhD research in Politics at Newcastle University.

Session 6:

The value of laughter: Reading the audience in the creative process of stand-up comedy.

As stand-up comedians perform, they receive immediate feedback to their material through audience laughter and non-laughter. This paper explores how comedians ‘read’ reactions, and how their interpretations impact their creative process. This is explored through video observations carried out in three London stand-up comedy spaces, and interviews with twelve stand-up comedians. During the interviews, each performer was asked to review video footage of the audience during their own performance, captured during the video observations. The analysis reveals how some instances of laughter are perceived by comedians as more valuable than others.
Valuations are informed by assumptions about who has taste or a good sense of humour, sometimes marked by classed, gendered and racialised judgements.

The laughter of white middle-class men is often, although crucially not always, centred as the key indicator of whether comedy material is ‘good enough’ to be performed again. In turn, comedians hone their material and performance in the pursuit of ‘valuable laughter’. In this way, the creativity of comedians and the material they produce unwittingly becomes entangled within wider power relations, as part of an ‘affective economy’ (Ahmed, 2004). Analysis also reveals, however, that the affectively-charged comedy space provides disruptions where the comedian’s prosaic assumptions are challenged. Audience laughter can enter into a ‘value struggle’ (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012) with the prevailing attitudes of the comedian – the paper concludes by considering whether these disruptions have any hope of a lasting impact on the creative process.

Adam Carter, Goldsmiths, University of London: Adam Carter is a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London. His research concerns cultural taste in comedy consumption, the politics of affect/emotion (particularly laughter) and cultural policy. Journal article ‘Essex Girls’ in the comedy club: Stand-up, ridicule and value struggles’ currently in review with the European Journal of Cultural Studies.

Encounters with the Neighbour in British Multicultural Comedy: From Rising Damp to Attack the Block.

Contrary to theorists who rely on a distinction between representations and the represented with reference to an independently existing reality, I follow Lasse Thomassen in reasserting the importance of understanding representation as constitutive of everyday: there is ‘no space outside the frame’ (2017: 34). I draw on the figure of the neighbour as the quotidian figure through whom the stranger is made strange (to draw on Sara Ahmed, 2000) in comedies that have reflected and constituted multicultural Britain from the 1970s to the present day. As comedies allow for the critical defamiliarisation of this moment of ‘making strange’ by finding humour in the incongruous, it allows us not to transcend the quotidian nature of the represented, but to re-engage with the everyday in a newly politicised manner. As my range of cinematic and televisual examples demonstrate, the ‘neighbour comedy’ is not always politically progressive in its engagement with stereotype: for every Attack the Block (2011) offering neighbourliness and class unity as a critical counterpoint to the systemic racialisation and privileged plight of the ‘white working class’
(cf. Eddo-Lodge, 2017), there is a *Rising Damp* (1974-1978) that trades ambivalently in the unchecked airing of prejudice and the presentation of the racist’s self-awareness as an object of laughter. Nevertheless, by bringing the anti-racist politics congruent with postcolonial approaches to the study of the ‘neighbour comedy’, it is possible to reiterate the importance of recognising the contingency of representation and reality, so as to advocate for better (more critical, rather than ‘truer’) representations.

**Dr Sarah Illott, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK:** Sarah is a Lecturer in Literature and Film at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her recent publications include *Comedy and the Politics of Representation: Mocking the Weak* (Palgrave, 2018) which she co-edited with Helen Davies. Her chapter within this volume was entitled ‘British multiculturalism, romantic comedy, and the lie of social unification’. She also collaborated with Davies to edit *Gender, Sexuality and the Body in Comedy: Special Edition of the Comedy Studies Journal* which was published in early 2018.

@Dr_Illott

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**Bitches, Politics and Power.**

This paper is based on the comedian Luisa Omielan’s latest touring show *Politics for Bitches* (2018). Omielan’s authentic comic voice is emerging in her exploration of the politics of gender, class, power and death. In this paper I discuss Omielan’s comic expression of these major issues and themes, and question the source of her emerging sense of anger in revealing where the power really resides.

**Lisa Moore, University of Salford, UK:** Lisa is a Lecturer in performance and comedy and University of Salford’s International Lead for the Performance Directorate. She led Salford’s comedy programme from 2010-2015 - which was the first undergrad comedy programme in the UK. Lisa is also a performer and writer and has worked extensively as an actor in professional TV, theatre, and Radio 4 drama. Throughout her career she has worked as an actor /facilitator for theatre companies such as TIPP and Clean Break, practitioners’ who are dedicated to using theatre as a tool for social change. Lisa is in the process of researching for a PhD via publication. Her research looks specifically at auto ethnography, as her own writing is concerned with qualitative research and uses self-reflection and writing to explore personal experiences to connect with wider cultural, political, and social meanings. In 2017 Lisa co-founded Mixed Bill with Ellie Tomsett and Dr Kate Fox.

@Lisamoore4
Mixed Bill was established in 2017 as a comedy and gender research network. The core focus of the network is on raising public awareness of these areas through a series of events. The events are designed to engage a variety of audiences including those working within the comedy industry, academics and the general public. Our first event was at University of Salford in 2017 and focused on women and comedy. This 2-day conference is our second event and we hope you enjoy it.

Currently Mixed Bill is made up of interdisciplinary researchers from Sheffield Hallam, Birmingham City University, University of Salford and Manchester Metropolitan University. The network exists to explore under-researched aspects of comedy and humour and the way this intersects with gender identities. Founding members Ellie Tomsett, Dr Kate Fox and Lisa Moore, as well as new members Dr Suzanne Speidel and Natalie Diddams’ collective research interests include (but are not limited to) performance, cultural studies, contemporary feminisms, creative writing, celebrity studies, visual cultures, film, television, media and gender studies.

Acknowledgements:

Firstly, this event would not have been made possible without the support of Sheffield Hallam University and University of Salford. We are grateful for their help in pulling this event together. Thank you to Dr Sharon Lockyer, Dr Anamik Saha, Steve Canny and Isma Almas for agreeing so readily to participate. In addition to this we wish to thank all those who are chairing panels, our presenters and all our volunteers and students who have given their time up to be with us today.