

## Dissent in Jest: Humour in the Liberal Moment

On a mild Autumn afternoon on 30 October 2010, over two hundred thousand people (according to most estimates) gathered at the National Mall in Washington D.C. to attend a political rally that had received a level of national and international media attention almost unprecedented in recent years. In addition to those who directly attended, “more than 2 million people watched the live television broadcast; a live stream ... attracted 570,000 views online; ... [and] over 130,000 users joined the organizer’s Facebook page” (Reilly and Boler 2014, 435). Promoted by its organisers as a “clarion call for rationality,” the event was hailed by many as a watershed moment in the mid-term election cycle and as a potential means to revive the flagging fortunes of the incumbent Democrat party, if not the entire political process. Moreover, the involvement in, or tacit recognition of, the project by public figures ranging from Oprah Winfrey to President Barack Obama, not to mention the anxious denunciations of the rally by a host of personalities associated with the conservative media network Fox News, as well as other less openly partisan news organisations, would seem to indicate the wide level of interest in, or at least concern with, the rally across the political and social spectrum. However, as many readers are probably already aware, the guiding force behind this gathering was not a politician, or even a political commentator in the traditional sense, but the comedian and satirist, Jon Stewart, best known as the host of the late night comedy television programme, *The Daily Show*. The gathering in question was what had come to be known as “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or

Fear”: a celebrity-infested variety show-cum-carnival-cum-demonstration that hovered uneasily between satire and earnestness.

Stewart had publicized his rally—originally entitled “The Rally to Restore Sanity”—as an opportunity to argue for the importance of reasonable and rational political discourse, which was in turn positioned as a means to reclaim the American political discussion for those who would normally eschew direct public engagement. Ostensibly forging a middle ground between the extremist Right and the extremist Left—those who resort to volume, disrespect and frequent Hitler analogies to dominate the political conversation—Stewart’s rally sought to carve out a space for those who “may lack the theatrical flair necessary for today’s twenty-four hour, seven-day-a-week news media.” The message of the rally, as well as the overall tone, is perhaps best conveyed through an appeal posted on the rally’s organising website:

We’re looking for the people who think shouting is annoying, counter-productive, and terrible for your throat; who feel that the loudest voices shouldn’t be the only ones that get heard; and who believe that the only time it’s appropriate to draw a Hitler mustache on someone is when that person is actually Hitler. Or Charlie Chaplin in certain roles. (Rally to Restore Sanity [2010](#))

Advertised as a light-hearted event with a serious message, the event was organised around a straightforward demand to purge the political sphere of tendencies, such as insanity and intolerance, that are, pretty much by definition, an anathema to the ideal conduct of contemporary state politics (Fig. [2.1](#)). If any of the participants considered this an odd demand to be couched in terms of humour, no such doubts were on display: this was despite the possibility for comic disruption promised by the Rally to Restore Sanity’s earlier amalgamation with its erstwhile pseudo-competitor, “The March to Keep Fear Alive,” organised by Stewart’s colleague, Stephen Colbert. The official designation of the resulting meta-rally, “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear,” was frequently, perhaps intentionally, overlooked in many press accounts, which referred to the entire event by Stewart’s original name, thereby emphasising the earnest pro-sanity aspects over the satirical fear aspects. While Colbert’s involvement muddies the water somewhat through the introduction of additional levels of absurdity and irony, on the actual day of the event his presence was muted through his constitution as an extreme comic



**Fig. 2.1** Jon Stewart addresses the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear in his patriotic fleece (Cliff [Cliff1006], 2010)

foil in the form of a comedic pantomime bogeyman (surprisingly literally when a giant papier-mâché facsimile of Colbert named “Fearzilla” took to the stage), which served to reinforce the overarching message regarding the desirability of reasonableness. Moreover, nowhere was it questioned whether humour was the best complement to reason, or the thought entertained that humour might be, on some level, unreasonable, even as Colbert’s antics illustrated how unreason could prove an equally fertile soil for humour. It was instead taken for granted that humour and a progressive political praxis were obvious, mutually inclusive and reciprocating fellow travellers.

The reason that I turn to “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” at the opening of my argument is because it offers a near perfect illustration of the contemporary state of relations between democratic politics and humour. I am not concerned with assessing the Left political credentials of the rally or reading it as a comment upon the fortunes of political activism and involvement. Rather, what I take to be notable is the manner in which Stewart’s (and to a lesser and more complicated extent,

Colbert's) rally made remarkably evident the perceived connection between humour and the Left-liberal ideal of tolerant, reasonable critique. The very fact that a comedian would publicly intercede in debates about political climate and rhetoric indicates a belief that humour is by no means alien—and may actually be central—to the concerns of twenty-first century politics. Moreover that, in doing so, Stewart was neither denounced nor ignored, but instead widely hailed as a saviour of the American political sphere—particularly on what is often identified as the Left of American politics—offers a profound comment on a broad acceptance, at least in part, of the general interrelatedness of humour and liberal politics.<sup>1</sup> The anxiety and interest that greeted the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” thus offer a way to begin considering the role of humour in contemporary politics: not just as an indication of the implication of humour in American liberal politics, but as a concrete manifestation of humour as a key fixture in the dominant political ideology of the Anglophone world.

In the light of this assertion, the purpose of this chapter is to consider the central discourse by which humour—in particular politicised humour—has been made sense of within the allegedly “post-ideological” and liberal democratic societies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In doing so, I will trace the political function and power attributed to humour by its advocates, commentators, theorists, philosophers, historians, practitioners and, indeed, its critics, and thereby elucidate the moral, cultural and political weight with which humour is repeatedly invested in the context of (neo)liberalism. For the most part, these attempts to expound the politics of humour can be understood in terms of two broad camps, which present humour as either inevitably trivialising or inherently subversive. Such positions structure the majority of popular and academic responses to Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show*, understood alternately as contributing to an apolitical culture of apathy (Baumgartner and Morris 2006, 361–362; Hart and Hartelius 2007, 263–266) and partisan smugness (Hitchens 2009, 101–110) or as a site of ascendant “public intellectual”-ism, where Stewart functions as a court jester or devotee of Foucauldian parrhesia (Baym 2005, 268–274; Hefflin 2006, 26–31; Jordan 2008; McKain 2005, 424–429; Warner 2010, 37–58). This first tendency reads humour as an exercise opposed to serious critical or political consideration: generally the discourse of pundits and editorialists. This school of thought has some affinity with Neil Postman's anti-entertainment thesis in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

where he asserts that our culture is “being drained by laughter” (1996, 162). More recently, Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris controversially proposed the existence of what they refer to as “The Daily Show Effect,” whereby viewers of late-night comedy treat (state) political matters as a subject of jest, producing a cynical attitude towards politics and other “detrimental effects, [such as] driving down support for political institutions and leaders among those already inclined toward nonparticipation” (2006, 341).

Such accounts of humour as trivialising are relatively rare however—especially in any sustained fashion—when compared with the second competing tendency, which sees in humour a critical and liberatory political project that most often takes the form of a socially desirable dissent from authoritarian or dominating structures of power. Humour, after all, was only a passing concern for Postman, and much of the visibility of Baumgartner and Morris’ thesis has been a consequence of subsequent contestation and counter-argument. This second tendency, whereby humour is celebrated as a critical and subversive strategy, does not wait for adherents, and is at its most celebratory extremes in popular publications such as *The Daily Show and Philosophy* or *The Colbert Show and Philosophy*. Nor is this interpretive mode consigned to the non-academic sphere, but is also present in more scholarly works, such as the anthology *Satire TV*, which takes as a starting premise the notion that “all humor challenges social or scientific norms *at some level*” (Gray et al. 2009, 8–9, italics in original), or volumes whose titles—*Revel with a Cause* (Kercher 2006), *Laughter and Liberation* (Mindess 1971), *Rebellious Laughter* (Boskin 1997)—suggest the ways in which they seek to link humour to the pursuit of a liberal political project. Thus, though Daniel Wickberg’s assertion that “those in cultural studies tell us that popular humor is a ‘transgressive’ or ‘subversive’ expression of ‘resistance’ to oppression” (1998, 219) may overstate the uniformity of the treatment of humour within cultural studies, he does accurately diagnose a certain tendency within the contemporary study of humour: the widespread desire to attribute to humour an inherent progressive political power.

## LIBERALISM AND THE IDEA OF REASONABLE DISSENT

Often understood as a benign and desirable site of affect, humour is frequently tied to the expectations of liberal democratic society, taken up as a measure of social tolerance and self-critique, and declared an

indispensable attribute of the reasonable subject of liberal society. Accordingly, humour has been largely characterised as a positive and critical force inherently compatible with the demands of democratic politics: within the liberal moment, it has been dominantly conceived of as a site of subversion, liberation and a free play of affect wherein the self can critically appraise the political conditions of its existence. Contemporary laudatory accounts of humour have sought to tie humour to a liberatory political project that challenges authoritarian or oppressive governmental technologies by its very nature: a belief that manifests in diverse but related forms across a wide range of theoretical works addressing humour. As Michael Billig notes, very few commentators, it would seem, are willing to come out against humour or present it as anything less than a political panacea—at least in its “good” forms (as defined by those authors)—lest they be deemed an anti-laughter “misogelast” (2005, 14, 37). Even those who criticised, as distinct from critiqued, Stewart’s rally, made clear that they were not against humour per se, but only against its particular partisan, poorly executed, inappropriate or arrogant form in this instance: almost all, with the notable exception of Bob Samuels of *The Huffington Post*, held out the possibility of a good, or at least entertaining while inoffensive, form of humour. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to investigate how and why such readings of humour might appear particularly attractive in the current political moment and, in particular, what it means to conceive of humour as a form of “reasonable dissent” that resonates with the political goals of currently dominant forms of liberal politics.

Such an approach prompts the question, however, of what it might mean to refer to our contemporary moment as “liberal.” Liberalism is a slippery term, especially with regard to the domain of politics and to refer to liberalism is to bring a number of competing definitions and priorities into play. Following Wendy Brown’s conception of liberalism as a “nonsystematic and porous doctrine subject to historical change and local variation,” (1995, 141), I will argue that liberalism is thereby better understood as a flexible cultural logic empty of specific content rather than as a well-defined set of state political institutions, rights and rules. In the sense I refer to it here, liberalism is best understood, following the work of Raymond Williams, as a “structure of feeling” (Williams 1961, 48): one that is characterised by a belief in the inherently positive and desirable nature of freedom as a guiding political and social tenet. As it relates to my discussion of humour, liberalism therefore cannot be

reduced to the demands of any single political movement, but instead functions as an overarching meta-political framework which can inform competing sets of values.<sup>2</sup>

Understood in this manner, liberalism is more than the concern of select political agents, but rather operates as a cultural-political dominant, where the obvious desirability of freedom goes unchallenged not only by mainstream political parties, but by almost all political subjects in the Anglophone liberal democracies (though those terms may be configured in very different ways by those with divergent interests and projects). Liberalism is thus “a contemporary cultural text we inhabit, a discourse whose terms are ‘ordinary’ to a very contemporary ‘us’” (Brown 1995, 142). This is not to say that liberalism is the only cultural-political dominant; there clearly exist competing sets of values—such as patriotism or religion, syndicalism or even fascism—by which we can express our desires and dreams. Instead, taking up another of Williams’ analytic categories, liberalism is best treated as a cultural dominant (1977, 121–127) among several competing residual and emergent ideological forms, in comparison to which, however, it is frequently cast as the only *reasonable* choice. Liberalism can thus be considered properly hegemonic in the sense developed by Stuart Hall from the work of Antonio Gramsci: it is historically-specific, “multi-dimensional, multi-arena,” and exercises “moral and social authority, not simply over its immediate supporters but across society as a whole” (Hall 1986, 15). Nor should my reference to liberalism as a form of rhetoric be taken as a dismissive suggestion that it operates in an illusionary manner, and as such can be swept aside through critical and careful analysis in order to reveal a true set of motives underneath. Rather, I refer to a liberalism that enacts a certain logic, a way of understanding and interpreting the world, which it expresses and provides with form and explanatory power, such that approaching the world through the lens of liberalism leads us to frame social subjects and relations, material situations, problems and their solutions as matters of freedom.

What, though, is the relevance of hegemonic liberalism to the investigation of contemporary humour? One possible suggestion could be that given the centrality of liberalism as a socio-political-cultural mode, it is a necessary aspect of all study, but my rationale is much more precise and direct. I am interested in the advent of liberalism in relation to a particular form of political logic, which I will refer to as “reasonable dissent.” The desirability and perceived effectiveness of reasonable dissent—whose

applicability to the study of humour will be investigated in due course—can be understood as a consequence of twin, often competing demands on the liberal subject: first, that they be reasonable and, second, that they be free. Situated within this nexus of cultural and political priorities, the subject of liberalism is expected to believe, behave and be in certain ways. More precisely, in terms of conduct the contemporary liberal subject is expected to comport herself in a “reasonable,” “decent” and “agreeable” manner: a desire which provides a weak pun on the notion of “civil society,” where civil refers to both non-market citizenship and courteous conduct. To be liberal is to be well-mannered, as Toby Miller notes, “the civic cultural subject ... is produced as a polite and obedient servant of etiquette, within limited definitions of accepted behaviour” (1993, 223). Central to this well-mannered subject is the exercise of reason and reasonableness: a quality of the liberal subject and political project that can be traced back as far as the foundational work of John Locke whose *Two Treatises on Government* enshrines reason and reasonableness as central aspects of his liberal political theory (cf. Locke 2003). This demand that the liberal subject be reasonable was certainly front and centre at Stewart and Colbert’s “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” where the headline rhetoric of “sanity” was far eclipsed in practice by the language of reasonableness. On the associated website, for example, the gathering was advertised as a “call to reason,” while Stewart, in particular, referred to reason and reasonableness through the rally as a short-hand term for the constellation of “common-sense” political values that he sought to evoke. In this vein, Stewart implored the crowd not to bow to Colbert (“reasonable people don’t bow!”), celebrated actor Sam Waterson as “the most reasonable-seeming man in America,” provided an opportunity for infamous public figures to apologise for “momentary unreasonableness,” awarded “medals of reasonableness” to those who had displayed civility and tolerance and opened his final, explicitly earnest speech with the question, “What is reason?” That this sustained substitution of “reasonableness” for “sanity” went unnoted by the many commentators addressing the event speaks volumes regarding not only how reasonableness quickly overtook sanity as a catch-cry for the rally, but also how central the idea of reasonableness is to the contemporary manifestation of liberalism.

Indeed, far beyond the rally, reasonableness plays a central role in liberal thought: see for example John Rawls’ claim that “political liberalism does not attack or criticize any reasonable view” (1996, xxi). Yet,



the meaning of reasonableness or how we might distinguish the reasonable from the unreasonable is unclear.<sup>3</sup> Once, the idea of reason may have implied a coherent vision of a different and better world and, on those grounds, “reasonableness” could certainly have delineated a certain way of being and acting in the world; however, as argued by Max Horkheimer, this sense of “objective reason” has long since given way to “subjective reason” under the conditions of self-interested liberalism (2004, 12–13). Whereas objective reason was conceived as a guiding social, political and ethical principle, the subjective form of reason which is currently ascendant is reason reduced to an instrument: it is reason as a question of means, rather than ends. Re-imagined in such a way, reasonableness refers not to a clearly defined set of manners, but instead to “the adequacy of [one’s] behaviour in terms of generally recognized standards. In most cases to be reasonable means not to be obstinate, which in turn points to conformity with reality as it is” (Horkheimer 2004, 5). In terms of the rally, the particular nature of those standards was made clear through the actions of the quasi-fictional character of Stephen Colbert who provided a foil against which to define the reasonable liberal subject. Familiar to regular viewers of his nightly satirical take on political punditry, *The Colbert Report*, the Colbert character is a cheerfully bigoted, manic and megalomaniacal super-patriot with a fear of difference and change who functioned in the rally as the comic champion of fear and aggressive overreaction. From denouncing Muslims and robots as agents of terror, to the cheerful presentation of alarmist media montages alongside a ten-foot papier-mâché puppet of himself, Colbert was not only a perfect example of the extremes of the unreasonable citizen, he even explicitly presented himself in such terms. For example, at one moment in the rally Colbert screamed at Stewart for “ruin[ing] things with reasonableness” following an amicable compromise ending to a train-themed battle of the bands: as such he represents a useful example of how the well-mannered liberal subject is most clearly defined when held up against its anti-social, extreme and intolerant opposite.

Understood in this way, Colbert emerges as the somewhat unlikely manifestation of what Slavoj Žižek refers to as “violence,” insofar as “opposi[tion to] all forms of violence, from direct physical violence (mass murder, terror) to ideological violence (racism, incitement, sexual discrimination) seems to be the main preoccupation of the tolerant liberal attitude that predominates today” (Žižek 2008, 10). In Žižek’s account, violence becomes the term which names the ultimate political

wrong of liberalism—its meaning expanded beyond physical force to encompass any action that contravenes the desired behaviour of a flexible and accepting liberal attitude i.e. the behaviour satirised by the character of Colbert—and it is in opposition to violence that the liberal subject becomes able to mark herself as such through the practice of tolerance and reasonableness. Through their rejection and, indeed, their mocking of the violent subject personified in Colbert, the liberal subject becomes the reasonable subject: that subject who is accepting and respectful of difference and thereby aligned against violence in all its forms.

The other aspect of Colbert that marks him as an unreasonable subject is his obvious commitment to a worldview explicitly coded as an ideology, which leads the character to offer arguments and accounts of the world that patently conflict with empirical evidence. In his debilitating and self-compromising commitment to an often-invoked but rarely defined ideological project, Colbert is also emblematic of the other distinguishing feature of unreasonableness under liberalism: ideological commitment. As Žižek and others have noted, in liberal contexts, ideology often designates those positions which are seen to fall outside the scope of permissible political practice: “we designate as ideology that which stands out from [the] background: extreme religious zeal or dedication to a particular political orientation” (Žižek 2008, 36). In this liberal context, the ideological is therefore understood to be that which departs from the norms of common-sense and accepted practice: the ideological subject is one who holds beliefs that challenge the central assumptions of the moment on a fundamental level. In this manner, ideology is thus re-configured as dogma. In contrast to this position, the reasonable liberal subject can be understood as that subject who is non- or post-ideological, who is thought to lack any ulterior motive beyond the public attainment of the unquestionable goods of freedom and equality (whatever they might mean). From this perspective, the liberal subject is thought to be able to transcend the messy partisan extremism of the twentieth century, and work towards an equitable and free society within the absolute freedom afforded by the infinitely respectful and tolerant parameters of capitalist democracy. Stewart, with his repeated assertions of his own apoliticism (Reilly 2013, 1243), is a perfect example of this rejection of ideology. This reasonable liberal subject has no axe to grind, no “special interests” in the American parlance, no intellectual or social project other than an earnest desire to advance their rational self-interest and, where possible, to help their fellow citizens.

In this interpretation all the problems of the current moment can be understood as the consequence of ideological deviations from the common liberal consensus. This is indeed the arch-liberal message espoused by Stewart—the “hero” of the Rally—against the villainously ideological and therefore unreasonable Colbert: ideology hurts. Consequently, in the liberal moment, the reasonable subject must aspire to escape ideology and emerge into the light of a pragmatic, reasonable and tolerant world.

### FREEDOM, CAPITALISM AND THE DESIRE FOR DISSENT

Moreover, if this desire to “escape” ideology is important to the reasonable subject—and indeed to liberalism as a whole—it is in part because of its affinity for the second, and perhaps cardinal, virtue of liberalism: freedom. Freedom is marked as an ever-present reference point within the frame of our liberal moment, the contemporary function and value of which can be understood as a consequence of the ultimate negative horizon of the historical memory of totalitarianism (Žižek 2002, 1–3). However, despite its centrality, this definition of freedom works in a very similar manner to the political category of liberalism in that it lacks any single, final meaning and therefore consistently proves itself to be “historically, semiotically, and culturally protean, as well as politically elusive” (Brown 1995, 5). Freedom thus comes to function as what Jeremy Gilbert refers to as an “empty signifier,” which describes “those symbols or terms shared by a community which come to mean literally nothing (or almost-nothing) because they simply signify the very idea of the community as a community” (2008b, 156). This is especially true in the current moment, where, as a consequence of its implication in the (at least ostensibly) opposed discourses of the Third Way and neoliberalism, freedom is rendered almost infinitely flexible, even as its value is constantly highlighted and underscored: freedom here becomes a “performative repetition of discourse” whose repeated performance trumps any substantive, semantic meaning (Boyer and Yurchak 2010, 210–211).

Courtesy of its abstract and ephemeral nature, freedom currently serves as the rallying cry for multiple and contradictory political projects. In the current moment freedom from constraining structures is understood to be as much a concern of the Right as the Left (Brown 1995, 17). The difference between divergent political interpretations of freedom emerges in the manner they perceive and characterise those

structures from which they wish to be free: as the interference of the state or the inequality of social prejudice and entrenched poverty, in the ostensibly competing appeals to freedom in the context of the Third Way and neoliberalism, respectively. Indeed, one can be free from many things—economic dominance, government interference, religious mystification, political correctness, military oppression, racial prejudice—and free to do many things: speak, move, earn, assemble, trade, bear arms, be oneself. Thus, freedom need not hold any particular political valence, and is instead reconfigured as a matter of individual flexibility, resistance and dissent: an abstracted concept of freedom that is equally applicable across political divisions. Hence, in our liberal moment, very few would argue against the need for resistance to domination, though there is clearly some disagreement as to who is dominating whom (perhaps a general rule that could be suggested here is that we construct the dominant as that against which the struggles of our own position might seem the most heroic). As such, almost any struggle can be framed as a demand for freedom, and indeed often is in the contemporary liberal moment. Consequently, it would be the very rare political operator who would couch their project as an attempt to impose a system upon the public (at least in the English-speaking world).

I would like to suggest, then, that freedom is currently concerned above all with the ability of the liberal subject to resist and strike out against oppression in all its forms, wherever it is perceived: in some instances this takes the form of demands for “empowerment,” whereas in others it is couched in terms of “resistance” (Brown 1995, 21). Yet, this call for resistance to structures of power does not always (or often) mark itself as such outside certain political and scholarly circles, but instead usually appears in more prosaic forms: as calls to be creative and original, escape tradition or convention, to express oneself, to value innovation or invention, or in the form of corporate clichés such as “think outside the box.” All these examples share a common rhetoric of an individual standing up to or against wider systems of power or sets of constraining norms. Functioning at this abstracted level, the depoliticised discourse of dissent can be taken up by anyone: it is the rhetoric of recourse for both the global business elite—Richard Branson is characterised by his “lack of respect for figures of authority” (Dearlove 2010, 32)—and radical opponents of global capital—“disobedience to authority is one of the most natural and healthy acts” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 210). Nobody

seeks to be on the side of authority, and certainly no one would admit to possessing it. This is somewhat akin to Gilles Deleuze's "society of control," where increasing flexibility and complexity comes to mark both power and resistance to it: where the individual improvisation of surfing replaces the discipline and rules of "older sports" (1992, 6). Within the confines of such logic, all political and cultural actors seek to position themselves in opposition to prevailing convention. Indeed, scepticism towards authority is sometimes linked figured as a fundamental political value of democracy (Giddens 1998, 21). This becomes possible because "resistance by itself does not contain a critique, a vision, or grounds for organized collective efforts to enact either" (Brown 1995, 49). Under such conditions, cultural and political players from rock musicians to activists, financiers to academics, appeal to the desirability of chaotic Dionysian ferment, understood as action and creativity, over the stifling order of the Apollonian. This creates a cultural, political and social order wherein dissent is the desired mode, and where "the most conspicuous and pronounced feature of contemporary struggles is the desire to rebel, reject and denounce" (Touraine 2001, 50). Hence, not only is the liberal subject expected to be reasonable, they must also seek to challenge authority, demolish hierarchies and seek to declare their unique creative self against an uncaring and stifling establishment.

Thus, although some commentators and theorists have historically attempted to position the liberal impulse of dissent as inherently progressive (the unfortunate caricature constructed of John Fiske and his work serving as a rallying cry in this regard), it is difficult to deny the extent to which this abstract idea of dissent is not only compatible but formative with regards to capitalism. Whereas mid-century critiques of capitalism understood it as a "highly regulated and bureaucratic form of society" capitalism has since proven surprisingly adept at adapting to liberal demands for creativity, fluidity, flexibility and mobility (Gilbert 2008a, 37–47). This is capitalism as what Jeremy Gilbert, following Deleuze and Felix Gutarri, refers to as "a permanently self-revolutionising force, which is in some senses the external limit of every known human society" (2008a, 49). This understanding of capitalism stands opposed to Brown's account of neoliberal capital as the domain of *homo economicus*, that "reduc[es] every value and activity to its cold rationale" (2005, 44), and instead seeks to comprehend how it might not be a force of cold logic, but one of "instantaneous cruelty, ... incomprehensible ferocity ... fundamental immorality" (Baudrillard 1994, 15). After all, while capital

does certainly calculate, it is also the driver of the bourgeois epoch in which “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 1987, 26): clearly a process of heating, rather than cooling, if there ever were one. Based on this difference in temperature, capitalism can be understood as an irrational, as well as rational, system, particularly insofar as contemporarily ascendant ideas such as entrepreneurship can be configured in ways that value, even encourage, dissent.

In re-emphasising this aspect of the capitalism, I follow thinkers such as Boris Groys who suggests that it “is generally known, success in the market does not depend on calculation, on coolly logical reasoning or rational reflection; instead, it requires intuition, obsessiveness, aggressiveness and killer instinct” (1992, 22). Thus while capitalism does have its rational and rationalising tendencies, to conceive of capitalism as an entirely logical process is to overlook the ideological priority afforded liberal discourses of dissent, not to mention the neoliberal fettering of innovation, rule-breaking, and thinking-outside-the-box that speaks to the extent to which contemporary capitalism is not a rigid, mechanical monolith opposed to change, but is, at its heart, a dynamic and liberal system. Ideas of dissent, change, freedom and liberalism should not be considered, therefore, antithetical to capitalism, which is commonly celebrated in terms that posit a preference for the dynamic over the static, the horizontal over the hierarchy, and the spontaneous over the planned. This affinity between discourses of dissent and the prevailing system of liberal capitalism underlies Luc Boltanski’s argument that it is “not an exaggeration to say that capitalism, in its most liberal or radical forms, continuously touches upon the idea of total revolution,” by which Boltanski refers to the belief that liberation from social conditions will allow the “full realisation of humanity” (2002, 3–4). Within the dominant culture of liberalism, the expression of subversive, critical or anti-authoritarian perspectives comes to be seen as an essential political and cultural duty, open to and expected of all. Resistance to the status quo is no longer the sole purview of culture jammers and carnivalesque activists “whose antics and messages are often simply indistinguishable to the wider public from the activities of viral marketers and cutting-edge corporate publicists” (Gilbert 2008b, 102). That is to say, contemporary capitalism is in no way necessarily troubled by notions of dissent, but rather creates the conditions where dissent and affiliated notions become ideological cultural dominants: the impulse to fight against systems thereby becomes the leading prerogative of the system itself.

To be clear, to understand dissent as a ubiquitous and widely valued rhetorical and logical trope is not to call for it to be abandoned, or strip it of its usefulness as a means to unsettle structures of economic, cultural or state politics, nor is this a call to develop a means to determine good from bad dissent. I do not seek to dismiss dissent, or indeed liberalism, as entirely without merit. I am not arguing against dissent, or suggesting that it is always immediately co-opted, captured for, or produced by reactionary or exploitative forces. Rather, to make this argument is to suggest a need to be aware that virtually all political agents and forces not only employ this rhetoric, but, for all we know, may actively believe in it. This is at the heart of what I am characterising as the liberal moment, which is, overall, framed by the desirability of the freedom from domination—understood in terms of empowerment, resistance and transgression—as an organising category of political and cultural thought: this is a culture not just comfortable with dissent, but desiring of it. Under the conditions of contemporary capitalism, it therefore becomes incumbent on the liberal subject to resist their incorporation into organising systems—understood as slippery slopes towards totalitarian oppression—but, it is crucial to note, in a *reasonable* and non-violent manner. The idea of dissent is thus complicated by the notion of reasonableness developed earlier, which is not trumped as a value by dissent, but instead acts alongside it.

This confluence is what brings us the idea of reasonable dissent, which combines the imperative to challenge the status quo with a belief that this should be done in a reasonable, which is to say non-violent and non-ideological, way. Due to its fundamental operation as a means of disruption and opposition, dissent always threatens to enact ideology, even if it does not always realise this threat in any final or stable manner. For example, in any particular, context-specific incarnation, dissent can potentially take on a contingent but concrete political form (although that form is by no means tied to any pre-determined political project) and thereby be marked as unreasonable. Accordingly, even though “non-conformity is the now accepted norm of society” (Niedzviecki 2006, xvi)—especially for privileged, white, middle-class subjects (Hale 2011, 1–10)—concrete manifestations of dissent may not always meet such approval: “even in hyperliberal societies, not all practises of autonomy are equally valued—consider the indigent person resistant to being managed by social services or the teenager hanging around a street corner with nothing to do” (Brown 2006, 257, n. 38). When actually existing

subjects attempt to voice their dissent within a particular context, they risk voiding their claim to tolerance, and opening themselves up to the persuasive and possibly coercive powers of the cultural dominant and the state. Consequently, liberal dissent or resistance always walks a fine line between being hailed as “reasonable” or risking censure as an unreasonable, ideologically informed, and therefore threatening, political act. The challenge, therefore, for the good liberal subject is to square this political circle and engage in a form of “reasonable dissent” that is seen to be opposed to partisan positioning and ideological closure—to engage in a form of dissent that promises to unsettle everything while ostensibly remaining un beholden to any particular political project or position—and which finds one of its most celebrated manifestations in our contemporary cultural context in the form of humour.

### HUMOUR AS REASONABLE DISSENT

Historian of humour, Daniel Wickberg, argues that by the mid-twentieth century “the values that the sense of humor had come to signify—tolerance, sympathy, perspective, balance, freedom—were so closely allied with the meaning of liberal democracy that the idea of humor served as a kind of easily understood shorthand or signpost for democracy itself” (1998, 204). The alignment Wickberg perceives between humour and democracy can be considered indicative of humour’s status as a form of rebellion, of subversion, of an informed and critical dissent insofar as this idea of democracy is also symptomatic of the wider liberal structure of feeling. For the majority of commentators it is a given that humour that serves a positive social and political function is subversive humour, and vice versa: in other words, humour that is thought to do positive political work is thought to do so subversively: “if laughter serves to ridicule oppressive powers or galvanize marginalized peoples, then it is judged as having been put to the service of the good. Conversely, if laughter signals social exclusion or political apathy, then it is said to have been used for malevolent ends” (Hynes and Sharpe 2010, 45). Thus, in contrast to its classical and early modern apologists, contemporary advocates of humour do not stress its potential to aid in controlling a population or reinforcing social norms, but instead imagine humour to exist as an entirely liberatory force in the aid of “the people” or as opposed to the forces that would oppress others. Yet, reasonableness and dissent need not be deemed opposing forces: as considered above, liberalism



privileges a particular notion of an abstracted, depoliticised dissent, which creates the possibility of less politically aggressive and more culturally articulated forms of resistance, which, in turn, are more likely to fit within the parameters of liberal reasonableness. Indeed, it is the ability of humour (as it is currently understood) to overcome the apparent contradiction between the competing desires for dissent and reasonableness which renders it a preferred form of permitted subversion and thus an aesthetic form uniquely desirable within the liberal moment. In a liberal context, humour comes to be valued insofar as it is thought to promote freedom and challenge oppression in a non-confrontational manner; in other words, when it is believed to serve a liberal (a)political function.

The notion of humour, or “true” humour at least, as an inherently subversive practice that challenges social norms and upsets hierarchies and traditions is prevalent in contemporary writing on the subject as has been noted and critiqued by theorists such as Michael Billig (2005) and Alenka Zupančič (2008).<sup>4</sup> According to this subversive model, humour is addressed as a form of dissent (the purposes and limitations of which, however, are usually left extremely vague). Such interpretations, which arise in the work of thinkers as varied as Simon Critchley, Umberto Eco, Louis Kaplan and Andrew Stott, reflect the larger social tendency to imagine humour as a desirable and productive force, which, in line with dominant liberal ideology, is here primarily conceived in terms of boundary-breaking, order-challenging, and carnivalesque freedom: what Zupančič characterises as “the humanist-romantic presentation of comedy as intellectual resistance” (2008, 4). Indeed, in the context of liberalism’s demand to stand against and beyond all forms of ideology, humour can serve as a valuable mark of one’s autonomy by virtue of an oft-afforded ability to “render all our legitimating ideologies and helpful utopias powerless and helpless. This may be humor’s most important function: it often works as a de-ideologizing and disillusioning force” (Zijderwald, quoted in Wickberg 1998, 205). As noted by Billig, the critic who would come out against humour traces a socially dangerous path (2005, 1): under such conditions, the critic must be careful to situate and justify her opposition, most often in localised and specific terms, to avoid an unenviable reputation as a petty dictator, fanatic, egoist or snob.

From a liberal perspective, this understanding of humour informs the wide scope of contemporary politics, from democracy-as-usual to foreign revolutions. The desire to appear beyond ideology, and to harness

humour to one's cause, extends to politicians of all stripes in the current moment, such that a sense of humour has become more than a desirable personality trait, but instead is transformed into a necessary symptom of one's underlying democratic character. This is particularly true of those directly involved in the political process. Thus the public perception that one possesses a sense of humour is not a mark of light-hearted frivolity, but rather a sign of one's political fitness:

In today's environment, it is the political leader who refuses humor and laughter that runs the risk of damaging his credibility. No politician wishes to be accused of lacking a sense of humor. The demagogue and the fanatic, the autocrat and the dogmatist, it is widely believed, are without a sense of humor. Humor is a sign of political flexibility, moderation, willingness to see both sides of a question, capacity for compromise. (Wickberg 1998, 197–198)

It should come as little surprise, then, that American presidents since Franklin Roosevelt have responded to public pressure to demonstrate their ability to take a joke, if not to deliver one (President Trump would seem, however, to reverse this demand: often “joking,” but very rarely happy to be the butt of humour).<sup>5</sup> In his account of the relation between American state politics and late-night comedy, Russell Peterson observes that “presidential aspirants now routinely show up on late-night shows to demonstrate their comedic chops” (2008, 170). This has become almost mandatory, Peterson asserts, because “a late-night guest shot ... affords a candidate the chance to demonstrate that he or she has a sense of humor, just like a regular person” (2008, 171).

Moreover, the liberal and liberalising power of humour is not limited to Anglophone politicians, but has been evoked in wildly different political contexts, such as the popular revolutions of the 2010–2011 Arab Spring and the subsequent uprising in Syria (that preceded that nation's descent into intractable and horrifying civil war). Western reporters and pundits made much of the comic placards and signs hoisted by Egyptian protesters amongst more strident and directly phrased political demands during the protests in Tahrir Square and of the protestors' use of social media to pass along jokes and quips regarding the Mubarak regime. In an article regarding the 2011 Egyptian revolution Anna Louie Sussman of *The Atlantic* declared humour to be “one of the oldest and most subversive political tools there is” (2012), while Michael Slackman of *The*

*New York Times* argued that “humor and sarcasm played a crucial role in [the Egyptian uprising’s] coping and conquering” (2011). Slackman quotes local activists and commentators who also emphasised the role of humour as a revolutionary tool “to motivate people and bring out the crowds” and as one of the “main weapons” of the protestors (2011). In a widely-circulated story from the *Los Angeles Times*, Molly Hennessy-Fiske and Amro Hassan profiled an Egyptian social media activist who drew inspiration from Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert and *Family Guy* (2011). Nor are such claims limited to the Egyptian context. David Smith writes in *The Guardian* that “humour is the weapon of choice against the Libyan government” (2011), while in the context of the early days of the Syrian uprising, Zeina Karam of the Associated Press and journalists at France 24 charted the opposition’s use of social media satire, puppetry, songs and “subversive gallows humour” as a means to critique the Assad government (2012). From Syrian street fighters to American political primary candidates, humour is understood by the Anglophone media as an aesthetic closely intertwined with a desirable political practice of freedom and flexibility: one that challenges oppressive forms of consensus and demonstrates a capacity for free-thinking. This is humour as “an escape from restraint, as an act of freedom in the face of a constrictive social order” (Wickberg 1998, 182) and as a means to attain the liberal aspiration of an ideology-free and therefore “reasonable” existence.

To return to my original example, such an understanding of humour can also be seen at work in *The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear*, which went to great lengths to represent itself as non-partisan and therefore free from the habits of thinking thought to characterise the ideologically compromised. Nowhere does this appear more clearly than in Stewart’s initial announcement of the rally, where, while holding aloft a sign reading “Got Competence?” he quipped “How’s this for the dissatisfied, but non-ideological among us?” What is important in this moment is not the hoary critique that Stewart’s call to go beyond ideology fails to recognise that he himself, and indeed all of us, are always implicated within ideology, but rather the implied (and closely-related) belief that ideology is inherently unhelpful and alien to the political process. In this understanding, humour is not simply a means by which the humourist can deny her ideological co-ordinates; instead, it has come to be seen as inherently oppositional to, or even disruptive of, any and all forms of ideology. Humour here is conceived as a practice destructive of

ideology: a tool by which to clear a space outside of dogmatic and distorting structures of thought (Zupančič 2008, 4). Not only is humour conceived of as a means to attain everyday and democratic freedom; it is also thought, in particular, to convey the desirable defining characteristics of democratic individuals, in particular the tolerant and flexible stance of the pragmatic post-ideological subject. Humour becomes a means to offer critique but to do so from an ostensibly utterly non-ideological position. In the broadest terms possible, this is humour as a force of freedom: not as an addendum, but as the very heart of a liberally focussed culture and politics of well-mannered and reasonable dissent.

### “AGAINST THE ASSAULT OF LAUGHTER NOTHING CAN STAND”

How, though, is humour imagined to carry out this disruptive political work? The precise details of the mechanism by which this subversion is thought to occur differs from theorist to theorist. Perhaps one of the “purest” accounts of humour as a liberal force for dissent can be found in the work of psychologist Harvey Mindess, who offers what he dubs the “liberation theory” of humour.<sup>6</sup> In the tellingly named, *Laughter and Liberation*, Mindess explicitly rejects both Incongruity and Superiority (which he refers to as “degradation”) theories of humour, as too intellectual and too aggressive respectively and instead “proposes that the most fundamental, most important function of humor is its power to release us from the many inhibitions and restrictions under which we live our daily lives” (1971, 237). He thereby identifies as humour that which breaks us free from our normal constrained manner of thinking and understanding the world, and in Mindess’ account we take pleasure in this operation, because being freed of constraints is regarded as fundamentally enjoyable (1971, 241). Mindess comes to this assertion through an extrapolation of his starting assumption that “thinkers simple and profound agree that the ability to see the funny side of things, to savour the ridiculous in life, and to laugh at ourselves and our troubles is an asset of the greatest magnitude” (1971, 13). Accordingly, given his unadulterated embrace of humour as a force for good in the world, and his uncritical acceptance of the desirability of dominant liberal political mores, Mindess concludes that humour must serve liberal causes, or in his own oft-repeated formulation: humour “breaks us free from the ruts of our minds” (1971, 22). Humour is

here understood as a flexibility of the mind that allows an escape from convention and conformity (Mindess 1971, 30–35), and in doing so is thought to make possible a commitment to flexibility and dissent so profound that it can potentially do away with any and all ideological investments:

Were we to take [the satirist's] message to heart, we would no longer support any cause or movement, subscribe to any political or philosophical doctrine. Neither capitalism, nor socialism, black power nor white power, women's rights nor masculine ascendancy, pragmatism nor existentialism could command our allegiance, for we would know full well that all positions are biased, all arguments meretricious, all claims exaggerated. (1971, 105)

For Mindess, humour operates as a key means by which a liberal subject might recognise and realise her own absolute autonomy. In an argument notably similar to that traced in a more critical manner by Wickberg, Mindess suggests that “the religious zealot, the righteous patriot, the racial bigot, and the black power militant are all, it is said, incapable of laughter at the particular topic about which they feel so intensely. The assertion stands to reason, for laughter would soften the single-mindedness and waylay their unswerving drive” (1971, 184). Thus, no ideology can stand before the critical force of humour, which Mindess argues liberates the individual from the intellectual oppression of contingent beliefs and oppressive structures of thought.

I begin with this dramatic and somewhat acritical articulation of humour because Mindess' argument makes explicit a series of logical steps—where the assumed desirability of both humour and liberal freedom leads to the contention that humour invariably does liberal work—that to a greater or lesser extent informs much contemporary thought on humour. And though later and more sophisticated commentators are much less upfront regarding the assumptions that inform their work, the basic moves of Mindess' arguments continue to recur in both popular and academic accounts of humour as an ostensibly critical or liberating aesthetic mode. On the more popular (or at least less rigidly academic) end of the spectrum, this understanding of humour as dissent circulates through popular culture in the form of “truisms” such as the Mark Twain quote—“against the assault of laughter nothing can stand”<sup>7</sup>—which opens this section, and has served as the inspiration for

the title of at least two books on American humour. In common parlance, humour understood in this manner is frequently referred to as “satiric,” particularly by those who regard such humour as desirable. However, in contrast with satire’s historical role as a well-defined genre and set of sub-genres—Juvelian, Horatian, Menippean, Varronian—the contemporary meaning of satire is “becoming more obscure as its fan base expands” (Marc 2009, ix) encompassing any mode of humour that is thought to contain a critical message: a category that is expanded to include not just the work of Al Franken and Michael Moore, *South Park* and George Orwell (Day 2011; Gray et al. 2009), but also the music of Eminem (Braund 2001, 410), the *Scary Movie* series (Magistrale 2005, 187), Dr. Seuss’s *Yertle the Turtle* (Freedman 2009, 102) and even Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* (Dickson-Carr 2001, 182–190). Thus, though such works correspond to the broad definition of satire as “an attempt to diminish a subject through ridicule” (Abrams 1993, 188), the means of diminution operate in increasingly diffuse and indirect ways.

Rather than attempting to refute this contemporary usage as somehow incorrect with respect to a more proper, traditional definition, I believe it is more productive to take up this contemporary meaning as a means to understand better its assumptions and implications for the wider social understanding of humour. As argued by Robert Phiddian, despite frequent assumptions to the contrary, “The satirical is not a brute, formal fact about texts, but a perception of purpose speaking rhetorically through them” (2014, 46). To describe a text as satirical, is not therefore to say anything in particular about the text, beyond the fact that one thinks that behind it lurks an authorial figure who is making a point and, overwhelmingly, a point that is thought to unsettle or contest the social, cultural or political status quo. Thus, while I agree with Phiddian’s point that “satire brings with it no default ideology, whether it be good, bad or indifferent” (2014, 52), I would add that given the aforementioned ideological flexibility of liberal dissent more generally, this lack of coherency is not necessarily an impediment to satire’s recruitment to the equally unclear but nonetheless politically dominant project of liberalism. Consequently, satire is understood here not so much as a particular form of humour, distinguishable by formal traits or genre, but rather as a particular way of looking at humour, one that takes for granted its ability, or at least intent, to disrupt systems of meaning and power (however they may be conceived).

Indeed, even if the precise meaning of satire is somewhat hazy in these accounts, there is apparently little doubt regarding its political force. At its heart, this new notion of satire is the conflation of humour and (often, but not necessarily politicised) critique. Such a view of satire informs Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones and Ethan Thompson's assertion that "the unique ability of satire TV to speak truth to power ... is apparent around the world" (2009, 6). Peterson repeats this claim, declaring that "if 'speaking truth to power' is part of a journalist's job, it is the satirist's primary mission—a higher calling, in fact, than merely being funny" (2008, 8). The connection between truth and humour, as if humour could never not tell the truth, is a common trope in multiple accounts of humour from Michael Gelven's traditional humanistic celebration of high culture humour in *Truth and the Comedic Art* (2000) to Hub Zwart's anti-humanist Nietzschean philosophy in *Ethical Consensus and the Truth of Laughter* (1996). Nor is this simply truth—a truth supportive of its subject would be neither satire, nor likely humour at all—but a subversive, challenging truth: British Prime Minister John Major grasped this potential when he said, of satirical attacks on his person, that they are "intended to destabilise me" (quoted in Batchelor et al. 2010, 81). Yet, while such accounts may suggest that it is possible to distinguish satire as some sort of subset of humour more broadly conceived, in practice, almost all forms of contemporary humour can be, and often are, understood in terms previously reserved for satire. The force of truth need not be limited to satire alone; moving beyond his narrower concern with satire, Peterson also argues that "truth is the essence of comedy" (2008, 125). For once satire is defined as humour that uses "truth" to critique an idea, person, institution or structure of power—as humour that offers a critique of its subject—then all humour can potentially be thought to operate in a manner akin to satire: as can be seen in Mindess' account of humour as liberation. It is not then just that satire, as traditionally construed, frees one from social and political mores: but also that puns free one from rules of grammar and language (Mindess 1971, 86–88), nonsense frees one from regimes of lucid sense (Mindess 1971, 76–83), and "sick humour" frees one from moral obligations (Mindess 1971, 59–70). For Mindess and his heirs, it is not so much the particular target of humour that is important, but the very fact that there is humour, which generates the critical, liberating function.

## THE LAUGHTER THAT SHATTERS: CARNIVAL TENDENCIES IN CONTEMPORARY HUMOUR THEORY

As noted above, the influence of this account of humour extends far beyond Mindess' writings. Indeed, an understanding of humour as liberating and critical, even in the absence of a satirical target, informs much popular and theoretical discussion on the subject. This belief in the critical power of humour underlies Steve Vanderheiden's assertion that "humor can't be disconnected from the broader social project of liberation" (2007, 206) and John Bruns' claim that "comedy's most crucial, though unacknowledged, aspect [is] its critical function" (2009, 175). This ostensible extension of satiric critique to encompass all humour is what makes it possible for Kirby Olson to assert that "comedy is ... rule-breaking and iconoclastic" (2001, 14); for John Morreall to state that "humour ... is a powerful force for liberation in our lives and is clearly a boon to the human race" (1983, 113); and for Sheri Klein to declare that "all humour is subversive, that is, aims to disrupt our assumptions, emotions, patterns of thinking, ways of knowing and the world as we know it" (2007, 132). Indeed, from Kenneth Burke's "comic frame" (1984, 166–168) to Louis Kaplan's treatment of comic transgression of "the confines of officialdom" (2002, 345) and Andrew Stott's interpretation of humour as a divided and doubled experience of social reality, which allows the humourist, in his words, to: "recognize the social order and comically subvert it" (2007, 11), an unquestioned understanding of humour as a productive breaching and breaking of boundaries characterises the majority of contemporary thinking about humour. Even Michel Foucault endorses the liberation of humour in the opening passage of *The Order of Things* where his "laughter that shattered," in response to oft-quoted Borges' account of the Chinese encyclopedia, sets in motion that volume's critical project (2005, xvi). Indeed, the idea is repeated so many times, in so many different contexts, that the notion of humour enacting a critical, transgressive, subversive form of politics would almost appear to become a truism.<sup>8</sup> From art theory to philosophy to literary theory and popular culture studies, humour (and its synonyms) has been embraced as a form that enacts a desirable, complicated, complicating, mutually-informing and constituting project of critique, transgression, dissent and truth-revealing.

To a large extent, such panglossian theorising of humour overlooks the potential harms or negative consequences of humour: a perspective



that will be considered in greater depth in the next chapter. For now, though, I wish to note how a belief in the positive power of humour manifests itself theoretically in the torturous operations some critics enter into to disavow the comic nature of those instances of humour deemed to be conservative or oppressive. Jokes that are thought to be racist or otherwise objectionable are rebranded as “untrue” or non-genuine humour (Critchley 2002, 11–12), so that the designation ‘humour’ may be reserved for those examples that are thought to be properly progressive. There is no substantial justification forthcoming, though, for why purportedly progressive humour might be more ‘truthful’ than openly scornful or abusive humour. Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai suggest that this move is simply the “illogical conflation of taste with ontology” (2017, 241–242), and while I agree with this diagnosis, I would suggest that such taste is so widespread as to operate akin to a cultural norm indicative of the deeply ideologically embedded connection between humour and desirable sociality in our liberal moment.

At the heart of such assumptions regarding humour, then, is the notion that humour either creates or allows for a moment of freedom within the otherwise oppressive political, cultural or ideological spaces of everyday life. In this belief, these accounts of humour can be thought to echo one of the more influential models of the politics of humour—Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival—though most do not do so explicitly. For Bakhtin, the carnival, or the “carnavalesque,” was a comic state of being that occurred regularly during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as a respite from official order and the everyday repression of the lower classes: a site of festivity and liberation wherein boundaries and hierarchies were inverted or overcome, rationalism and fear were revoked and seriousness was repealed, if only briefly. As an aspect of the carnival, laughter is here understood to overcome fear, limitations and authority as an anarchic force that allows the people to confront terror and class oppression (Bakhtin 1984, 90–91). Moreover, Bakhtin argues that this laughter need not be tied to any actual physical carnival, but can also be taken up in other forms, such as literature, where it “consecrate[s] freedom [and liberates] from all that is humdrum and universally accepted” (1984, 34). In Bakhtin’s description of carnival, we can perceive a similar range of rhetorical tropes and values to those present in contemporary, celebratory accounts of humour and laughter.

Probably the most fully developed and influential account of this Bakhtinian model of humour can be found in Simon Critchley’s highly

influential *On Humour* where he claims that “humour is a form of *liberation* or *elevation*” (2002, 9, emphasis in original). Drawing on the Incongruity model of humour (discussed in the Introduction chapter), Critchley asserts that humour functions subversively by revealing the incongruities in the everyday structures of power in order to render the familiar unfamiliar and thereby produce opportunities for critique. Thus, he opens his account of humour with the declaration that:

Jokes tear holes in our usual predictions about the empirical world. We might say that humour is produced by a disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented in the joke, between expectation and actuality. Humour defeats our expectations by producing a novel actuality, by changing the situation in which we find ourselves. (2002, 1)

We can see here how the shift between expectation and actuality, that is to say incongruity, becomes interpreted as a critical project whereby our predictions are thwarted and change is produced. Critchley goes on to repeat and develop this point further and in a more directly political manner, asserting that “by producing a consciousness of contingency humour can change the situation in which we find ourselves, and can even have a *critical* function with respect to society” (2002, 10, emphasis in original). Indeed, this claim recurs throughout Critchley’s celebratory account: humour does desirable, liberal political work whenever it operates through incongruity, whether this entails the incongruity of the animal and the human (2002, 31), of the mind and the body (2002, 41) or of stability and contingency (2002, 74–75). Regardless of its subject, incongruity is thought to shake the stability of any single understanding of the world by introducing the uncertainty of multiple possibilities of interpretation and hence the prospect of transformation and change. Critchley thus offers us a politicised and critical theory of the comic, wherein “humour effects a breakage in the bond connecting the human being to its unreflective, everyday existence” (2002, 41), and frees its subject into new critical spaces of thought and action.

Indeed, Bakhtin’s account of humour as “positive, regenerating [and] creative” (1984, 71), would appear to preface a view of humour as inherently liberatory and critical; a politically optimistic understanding of humour as a political aesthetic that has proven particularly influential. For example, in their celebratory analysis of contemporary satire, Gray, Jones and Thompson approvingly cite Bakhtin to support their

assertion that “all humor challenges social or even scientific norms *at some level*” (2009, 8–9 emphasis in original): in this account, “[Bakhtin] sees the continual reflection, analysis and ridicule of social norms as enacted by humor as a necessary device for warding off the entrenchment of any norm into becoming wholly acceptable and beyond rebuke” (2009, 9–10). For these Bakhtin-influenced theorists, humour does not just function independent of political intention; it inevitably subverts any political project that would make use of it, by foregrounding the contingent nature of the project and its goals. Nor is this perspective limited to those who openly cite Bakhtin, but, as I have suggested, can be thought to inform all those previously considered accounts whereby humour is taken up as a profoundly and inherently subversive form or force. Thus—though not all interpretations of humour as subversion directly evoke the spirit of the carnival—insofar as the carnival represents the ability of (folk) humour to challenge authority and realise the contingent nature of existing structures of power, the notion of the carnival can serve as a useful metonym for the constellation of theoretical approaches that locate in humour an innate capacity for dissent or subversion.

Yet, as I’ve argued in this chapter, we should be cautious regarding the bold political claims of the carnivalesque model: not least because of the manner in which it aligns, rather than departs from, the contemporarily dominant liberal structure of feeling. If we were to read the “Rally to Restore Fear and/or Sanity” in these carnivalesque terms then the humour of the event could be interpreted as a challenge to authority that upsets hierarchies, transgresses boundaries and thereby reclaims power in the name of the people, who, through the medium of humour, are liberated from their daily oppression and are provided with the tools whereby they may challenge the status quo. Regardless of its potential appeal, such a reading lays bare some of the most troubling assumptions of this model. After all, the “Rally to Restore Fear and/or Sanity” did not bring the political establishment crashing down and was, in fact, supported by a wide range of figures from the political and entertainment establishment, not to mention financially underwritten by *The Daily Show*’s parent company: the Viacom media corporation. While such support does not automatically invalidate the suggestion of a radical or critical politics, it should give us pause when attributing to the Rally a politics of unstoppable anarchic dissent: the idea of humour as an unstoppable critical force may be attractive, but such an approach—such an attitude—towards humour is always in danger of overstating the power of

humour: too quickly presuming its political work in advance without enough attention to the particularities of text or context. Because the carnivalesque model decides upon the politics of humour without testing its liberatory hypothesis against a range of concrete manifestations or considering its relation to the wider political context, it risks reducing the politics of humour to an abstraction that bears no fidelity or relation to lived experience of popular humour. At its worst, then, the model of humour as dissent threatens to reduce humour and its politics to fundamentally ahistorical and universal truisms, thereby losing the ability to account for how different instances of humour might do different things or, even more importantly, how the set of formal operations and aesthetic cues that are understood to constitute humour might change over time and in different contexts.

This relation between humour and context becomes particularly pertinent in the contemporary liberal structure of feeling. Under such conditions, the invocation of humour as carnival ceases to be oppositional in any straightforward manner and instead may even come to align with the demands of the dominant political ideology. As noted earlier, the drive towards dissent frequently assigned to humour is hardly oppositional in any straightforward way in the current moment where the liberal structure of feeling encourages, almost compels, its subjects to embrace dissent as the most authentic and desirable form of political action. Understood in relation to the liberal structure of feeling, humour appears as the ultimate expression of this moment, rather than its rebellious rejection. This perhaps should not be too surprising: given the widespread success and adoption of humour as a cultural mode, it would come as something of a shock if it were ultimately oppositional towards a society that loves and embraces it. The proliferation of accounts of humour as a form of reasonable dissent thus bring it into alignment with the central assumptions and priorities of dominant liberal norms. Interpreted in the most pessimistic terms, this situation could be taken to mean the utter incorporation of any politics of humour: as Umberto Eco cautioned, over twenty-five years before the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear,” “in a world of everlasting transgression, nothing remains comic or carnivalesque, nothing can any longer become an object of parody, if not transgression itself” (Eco 1984, 7). Following such logic, the conception of humour as a form of dissent is better understood as a means of bringing it in line, not opposition, with dominant socio-political ideologies premised on varied conceptions of freedom. If this

were the case, then it would perhaps make most sense to abandon the claim to any critical politics of humour: which is exactly the conclusion reached by Billig following his trenchant book-length redefinition of humour as fundamentally reactionary and cruel (241–243).

However, another way of reading this impasse is to take it not as ultimately indicative of the political limitations of humour, as such, but rather as the specific limitations of the carnivalesque model of dissent. Approached in such a manner, the reductive politics of the carnivalesque model do not constitute a reason to abandon the idea of a cultural politics of humour, but rather mark a call to reformulate our theories of humour as a cultural form in more careful and nuanced ways that are attentive to the internal variations and complexity of actual aesthetic manifestations of humour. The limitations of the humour-as-dissent model thus call on us to complicate our account of the politics of humour in ways that go beyond the reductive characterisation of humour as carnival and instead imagine new, more nuanced interpretations of the politics of humour that acknowledge that “both the world and comedy change when there’s a demand for permanent carnival” (Berlant and Ngai 2017, 236). To this end, the next chapter explores where and how the formal properties of actual directly political manifestations of humour both align with and outstrip the carnivalesque model. Reading political humour alongside a model of the politics of humour provides a way to assess the wider viability and legitimacy of those celebratory models that cast humour as a cultural manifestation of reasonable dissent and thereby consider what might lie beyond the horizon of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque paradigm that has overdetermined the study of humour for too long.

## NOTES

1. There were, of course, dissenting voices within the mass media: television commentator David Zurawik, denounced the “postmodern mockery” and “cool smug ridicule” of Stewart and Colbert, arguing that “what we need in this country is not more satire” (2010). Similarly, writing in the *Huffington Post*, Bob Samuels argued that the rally involved the mockery of state politics and institutions, and the idealisation of the individual: the upshot of which is individual non-accountability and implicit support of the free market (2010). Samuels’ argument bears a striking resemblance to that offered by Michael Billig. Taking a slightly different approach,

Timothy Noah, of the online-publication, *Slate*, argued that the rally would prove to be counter-productive because the combination of satire and political conviction would enrage the opposition, producing a higher conservative turn-out at the upcoming mid-term elections (2010). In addition, many commentators criticised the rally for its claim to non-partisan status, despite what were interpreted as clear Leftist overtones.

2. This is not to say that liberalism as discussed here should be understood as somehow separate from the political projects which it informs and that are carried out, often explicitly, in its name. Liberalism as a political philosophy has a long and storied existence stretching back to the French Revolution, but the iteration I am addressing here is specifically located within the political relations and constellations of the 1990s and 2000s. In particular, this contemporary form of liberalism emerges within the context of two related state political approaches: the Third Way and neoliberalism. The Third Way refers to that body of political thought that rejects both laissez-faire capitalism and socialism in favour of a purported third, or middle, path that seeks to use the free market to realise the goals of democratic socialism (Giddens 2000, 1–7); and neoliberalism refers to the extension of market rationality and values to all spheres of political and cultural life, while retaining the notion of the market as a distinct entity (Brown 2005, 39–40).
3. As Samuel Freeman notes, Rawls himself is silent regarding the definition of ‘reasonableness’ which he never addresses in any complete or final way (Freeman 2003, 31).
4. Other critiques of humour-as-dissent can be found in work such as Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering’s anthology, *Beyond A Joke: The Limits of Humour*, which takes as its premise the belief that limits need to be set upon humour to prevent unethical laughter than reinforces prejudice and oppression (2009), and aspects of Paul Lewis’ work also refute celebrations of humour as dissent (although often by denying any particular political function to humour).
5. At the end of his successful campaign for the presidency, Donald Trump infamously fell into one of his many feuds with *Saturday Night Live* after taking furious exception to Alec Baldwin’s impersonations of him. As with many of the norms of liberal capitalist democracy, Trump appears as an exception at this moment, though he certainly conforms with the wider point that public figures wish to be seen to have a sense of humour: especially when they do not seem to actually be possessed of one.
6. Though Mindess originally published his account of humour in 1971, the perception of its continued relevance is made apparent by the decision to republish *Laughter and Liberation* in 2010 with a new introduction provided by prominent humour studies scholar, Arthur Asa Berger.

7. As Russell Peterson points out, this line is, in fact, spoken by Satan in its original context, which perhaps somewhat alters its meaning (2008, 221, n. 29). This has not, however, influenced subsequent decontextualized repetitions of the phrase.
8. The list of examples provided above only skims the surface of the amount of literature that testifies to a belief in the critical power of humour, which informs Richard Zoglin's history of comedians as rebels, avant-garde artists and "antiestablishment provocateurs" (2008, 3–5), John Leland's celebration of contemporary "tricksters" who, he argues, use humour to call social certainties into question (2004, 161–185) and Leonard Freedman's articulation of the common idea that "throughout history the jester has been allowed to speak truth to power" (2009, ix). Joanne Gilbert declares that "comics perform a unique and important social function dating back to the traditions of ancient fools—they hold a mirror to the culture, showing us our (and their) frailties and foibles, eliciting the laughter of recognition" (2004, xiii), while Danielle Jeanine Deveau nationalises her claim that "In Canada, comedy has long served as a vital form of cultural critique, by providing space for a mainstream dialogue on controversial and often overlooked issues" (2011, 133). The idea of humour-as-critique is also a common aspect of more popular writings, such as Blackwell Press' *Philosophy and Pop Culture* series and Open Court's competing *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series, which have addressed a wide range of pop culture comedy. A common line of argument in such volumes involves directly comparing comic characters—like Jerry Seinfeld (Irwin 2000, 3–14), John Stewart (Barad 2007, 69–81; MacMullan 2007, 57–68; Michels and Ventimiglia 2007, 81–92), the boys of *South Park* (Young III 2007, 10–12) and Stephen Colbert (Ralkowski 2009, 145–62)—to Socrates: using their humour to bring established truths into disrepute.

## REFERENCES

- Abrams, M.H. 1993. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College.
- Bakhtin, Mikail. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barad, Judith. 2007. Stewart and Socrates: Speaking Truth to Power. In *The Daily Show and Philosophy*, ed. Jason Holt, 69–80. Malden: Blackwell.
- Batchelor, Tim, Cedar Lewisohn, and Martin Myrone. 2010. Politics. In *Rude Britannia: British Comic Art*, ed. Martin Myrone, 64–87. London: Tate.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Shelia Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Baumgartner, Jody, and Jonathan S. Morris. 2006. *The Daily Show* Effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy, and American Youth. *American Politics Research* 34 (3): 341–367.
- Baym, Geoffrey. 2005. *The Daily Show*: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism. *Political Communication* 22 (3): 259–276.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Sianne Ngai. 2017. Comedy Has Issues. *Critical Inquiry* 43: 233–249.
- Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: Sage.
- Boltanski, Luc. 2002. The Left After May 1968 and the Longing for Total Revolution. *Thesis* 11 69 (1): 1–20.
- Boskin, Joseph. 1997. *Rebellious Laughter: People's Humour in American Culture*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Boyer, Dominic, and Alexei Yurchak. 2010. American Stiob: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal About Contemporary Political Culture in the West. *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2): 179–221.
- Braund, Susanna Morton. 2001. *Libertas* or *Licentia*? Freedom and Criticism in Roman Satire. In *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M. Rosen, 409–428. Leiden: Brill.
- Brown, Wendy. 1995. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, Wendy. 2005. Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy. In *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, Wendy. 2006. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bruns, John. 2009. *Loopholes: Reading Comically*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1984. *Attitudes Towards History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Critchley, Simon. 2002. *On Humour*. London: Routledge.
- Day, Amber. 2011. *Satire and Dissent*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Dearlove, Des. 2010. *The Unauthorised Guide to Doing Business the Richard Branson Way*. Chichester: Capstone.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1992. Postscript on the Societies of Control. *October* 59: 3–7.
- Deveau, Danielle Jeanine. 2011. The Cultural Critique of Gender Parody in Canadian Sketch Comedy. *Topia* 25: 133–152.
- Dickson-Carr, Darryl. 2001. *African American Satire*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Eco, Umberto. 1984. The Frames of Comic ‘Freedom’. In *Carnival!* ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. New York: Mouton.
- Foucault, Michel. 2005. *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.



- Freedman, Leonard. 2009. *The Offensive Art*. Wesport: Praeger.
- Freeman, Samuel. 2003. Introduction: John Rawls: An Overview. In *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman, 1–61. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gelven, Michael. 2000. *Truth and the Comedic Art*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1998. *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Giddens, Anthony. 2000. *The Third Way and Its Critics*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gilbert, Jeremy. 2008a. After '68: Narratives of the New Capitalism. *New Formations* 65: 34–53.
- Gilbert, Jeremy. 2008b. *Anticapitalism and Culture: Radical Theory and Popular Politics*. Oxford: Berg.
- Gilbert, Joanne R. 2004. *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender and Cultural Critique*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Gray, Jonathan, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson. 2009. The State of Satire, the Satire of State. In *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson, 3–36. New York: New York University Press.
- Groys, Boris. 1992. *The Total Art of Stalinism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. 2011. *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 1986. Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 (2): 5–27.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hart, Roderick P., and Johanna E. Hartelius. 2007. The Political Sins of Jon Stewart. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (3): 263–272.
- Hefflin, Kristen. 2006. Laughter Helps Interpret the News. *Television Quarterly* 36 (3/4): 26–31.
- Hennessy-Fiske, Molly, and Amro Hassan. 2011. Cultural Exchange: Bassem Youssef is a Kind of Egyptian Jon Stewart. *Los Angeles Times*, June 5. Accessed 10 Jan 2012.
- Hitchens, Christopher. 2009. Cheap Laughs. *The Atlantic*, October: 101–110.
- Horkheimer, Max. 2004. *Eclipse of Reason*. London: Continuum.
- Hynes, Maria, and Scott Sharpe. 2010. Yea-Saying Laughter. *Parallax* 16 (3): 44–54.
- Irwin, William. 2000. Jerry and Socrates: The Examined Life? In *Seinfeld and Philosophy*, ed. William Irwin, 3–11. Chicago: Open Court.
- Jordan, Matthew. 2008. Thinking with Foucault About Truth-Telling and The Daily Show. *The Electronic Journal of Communication* 18 (2–4). n.p.

- Kaplan, Louis. 2002. 'It Will Get a Terrific Laugh': On the Problematic Pleasures and Politics of Holocaust Humor. In *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, 343–356. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Karam, Zeina. 2012. Syrians Face Crackdown with Creativity, Humor. *Associated Press*, February 1. Accessed 2 Feb 2012.
- Kercher, Stephen E. 2006. *Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Klein, Sheri. 2007. *Art and Laughter*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Leland, John. 2004. *Hip: The History*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Locke, John. 2003. *Two Treatises on Government*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lockyer, Sharon, and Michael Pickering. 2009. Introduction: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Humour and Comedy. In *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*, ed. Sharon Lockyer, and Michael Pickering, 25–44. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacMullan, Terrance. 2007. Jon Stewart and the New Public Intellectual. In *The Daily Show and Philosophy*, ed. Jason Holt, 57–68. Malden: Blackwell.
- Magistrale, Tony. 2005. *Abject Terrors: Surveying the Modern and Postmodern Horror Film*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Marc, David. 2009. Foreward. In *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson, ix–xiv. New York: New York University Press.
- Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. 1987. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Pathfinder Press.
- McKain, Aaron. 2005. Not Necessarily not the News: Gatekeeping, Remediation, and *The Daily Show*. *The Journal of American Culture* 28 (4): 415–430.
- Michels, Steven, and Michael Ventimiglia. 2007. Can *The Daily Show* Save Democracy? Jon Stewart as the Gadfly of Gotham. In *The Daily Show and Philosophy*, ed. Jason Holt, 81–92. Malden: Blackwell.
- Miller, Toby. 1993. *The Well-Tempered Subject: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Mindess, Harvey. 1971. *Laughter and Liberation*. Los Angeles: Nash.
- Morreall, John. 1983. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Niedzviecki, Hal. 2006. *Hello, I'm Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Noah, Timothy. 2010. Stay Home! The Case Against the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear. *Slate.com*, October 19. Accessed 28 Oct 2010.
- Olson, Kirby. 2001. *Comedy After Postmodernism*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University.

- Peterson, Russell L. 2008. *Strange Bedfellows: How Late-Night Comedy Turns Democracy into a Joke*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Phiddian, Robert. 2014. Satire and the Limits of Literary Theory. *Critical Quarterly* 55 (3): 44–58.
- Postman, Neil. 1996. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. London: Methuen.
- Ralkowski, Mark. 2009. Is Stephen Colbert America's Socrates? In *Stephen Colbert and Philosophy*, ed. Aaron Allen Schiller, 145–162. Chicago: Open Court.
- Rally to Restore Sanity. 2010. *The Daily Show*. <http://www.rallytorestoresanity.com>. Accessed 22 Oct 2010.
- Rawls, John. 1996. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Reilly, Ian. 2013. From Critique to Mobilization: The Yes Men and the Utopian Politics of Satirical Fake News. *International Journal of Communication* 7: 1243–1264.
- Reilly, Ian, and Megan Boler. 2014. *The Rally to Restore Sanity*, Prepoliticization, and the Future of Politics. *Communication, Culture and Critique* 7 (4): 435–452.
- Samuels, Bob. 2010. Why Jon Stewart Is Bad for America (and Why You Will Dislike This Article). *The Huffington Post*, October 25. Accessed 26 Oct 2010.
- Slackman, Michael. 2011. When a Punch Line Is no Longer a Lifeline for Egyptians. *New York Times*, April 5. Accessed 10 Jan 2012.
- Smith, David. 2011. Libyan Rebels Find Humour Is the Sharpest Weapon Against Gaddafi. *The Guardian*, July 21. Accessed 14 Jan 2012.
- Stott, Andrew. 2007. *Comedy*. New York: Routledge.
- Sussman, Anna Louie. 2011. Laugh, O Revolution: Humor in the Egyptian Uprising. *The Atlantic.com*, February 23. Accessed 10 Jan 2012.
- Touraine, Alain. 2001. *Beyond Neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Vanderheiden, Steve. 2007. *America (The Book)*: Textbook Parody and Democratic Theory. In *The Daily Show and Philosophy*, ed. Jason Holt, 205–216. Malden: Blackwell.
- Warner, Jamie. 2010. *The Daily Show* and the Politics of Truth. In *Homer Simpson Marches on Washington*, ed. Timothy M. Dale and Joseph J. Foy, 37–58. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Wickberg, Daniel. 1998. *The Senses of Humour: Self and Laughter in Modern America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1961. *The Long Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Young III, William W. 2007. A Lot of Hot Air, or the Corruption of Youth? In *South Park and Philosophy*, ed. Robert Arp, 5–12. Malden: Blackwell.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2002. *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* London: Verso.

- Žižek, Slavoj. 2008. *Violence*. New York: Picador.
- Zoglin, Richard. 2008. *Comedy at the Edge*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Zupančič, Alenka. 2008. *The Odd One In: On Comedy*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Zurawick, David. 2010. Stewart-Colbert Rally: A Nation of Jokers Lost in Irony. *Z on TV*. *The Baltimore Sun*, October 23. Accessed 24 Oct 2010.
- Zwart, Hub. 1996. *Ethical Consensus and the Truth of Laughter*. Dudley: Peeters Publishers.

Humour as Politics

The Political Aesthetics of Contemporary Comedy

Holm, N.

2017, XII, 223 p. 12 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-50949-5