

**Changing Facts
Changing Minds
Changing Worlds**



Changing Facts: Changing Minds; Changing Worlds

**Edited by
Julie Lunn, Stephanie Bizjak
and Sue Summers**

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PART 2

THE ARTS:
CHANGE, CHALLENGE AND UNCERTAINTY

The Larrikin Carnavalesque:

Exploring traditions of subversion and grotesque in Australian humour

Rebecca Higgie

“There are no limits, love”

Australia has a long history of particularly crude, anti-authoritarian humour. In recent years, a satiric double of our Prime Minister has enjoyed a post-coital cuddle under the Australian flag in *At Home with Julia*, and viewers were exposed to Chris Lilley’s ‘sneak nuts’ in *Angry Boys*. Going back over the years, the Chaser breached APEC security to deliver a fake Canadian motorcade and an equally fake Osama bin Laden to just outside George Bush’s hotel, Kath and Kim burst onto our screens, complete with their bad taste fashion and desires to be “effluent” instead of “affluent”, and Pauline Pantsdown was an ARIA-chart topper. Norman Gunston harassed devastated Labor politicians at Gough Whitlam’s sacking, Barry McKenzie “chundered” all over London, and Graham Kennedy welcomed Australians to television by constantly pushing the boundaries of good taste, famously declaring, “there are no limits, love”.¹

This chapter explores this tradition through the “larrikin carnivalesque”, a term that describes a particularly Australian “subversive, anarchic...form of humour [which acts to] destabilise, demystify, mock authority”.² Tony Moore used the larrikin carnivalesque in his 2007 Sydney Institute lecture to describe the aesthetics of the Chaser, *The Glasshouse* and the Barry McKenzie films. The phrase has also turned up in an article by Sue Turnbull on the Chaser’s style.³ In Moore’s lecture and Turnbull’s article, the word “larrikin” signals a crude and cheeky Australian rejection of authority, while “carnavalesque” implies an added element of excess, theatrics and the grotesque. The term carnivalesque is almost synonymous with the work of Bakhtin and, indeed, theorists like John Docker and Wendy Davis have previously used Bakhtin’s

carnival to examine Australian humour. While Moore uses Bakhtin's carnival to explore Australian bohemianism and the aesthetics of Barry McKenzie, the term "larrikin carnivalesque" has yet to be expanded in great depth. By considering the roots of the term through a Bakhtinian paradigm, the larrikin carnivalesque provides a framework that helps explore the aesthetic and political underpinnings of grotesque Australian humour.

Bakhtin's carnival

There are many ways in which the carnival has been analysed. These can be broadly categorised into the historical study of medieval carnival practice itself, and the exploration of the carnivalesque within cultural texts. Much like their literal carnival counterpoint, carnivalesque texts are sites of "numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanities, comic crownings and uncrownings"⁴ where the world is tipped upside down with the "suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions."⁵ The "lower sanctum",⁶ both bodily and hierarchical, is celebrated over the high. The open consuming and excreting orifices – anus, mouth and nose – are celebrated over closed bodily realms, such as the head, mind and reason. Powerful public figures are openly mocked. Dentith identifies that the very point of carnival is to mobilise mocking against "the humourless seriousness of official culture".⁷ The vernacular of carnival, known as the language of Billingsgate, encompasses "curses, oaths, slang, humor, popular tricks and jokes, scatological forms, in fact, all the 'low' and 'dirty' sort of folk humor".⁸ Bakhtin stresses that the carnival has a utopian vision through its mocking and degradation of authority and norms. Carnival laughter is directed at both those being mocked, and those doing the mocking, since the carnivalesque exposes the bodily, excessive ridiculousness of everything and everyone. In this way, Bakhtin's carnival is a regenerating process: "to degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better".⁹

Bakhtin has been criticised as overly idealistic in his definition of carnival as a regenerating, utopian force. While carnival practice often transgressed social norms, it also frequently enforced them. This can be seen in *charivari*, a medieval ritual which forced those who acted outside of society's sexual norms, often "unruly women", to be seated backwards on a donkey and paraded through a jeering crowd.¹⁰ Furthermore, in the carnival setting, uncrownings occur without ramifications because they are contained within the safe carnival space. It is understood that when the carnival is over, previous social and political hierarchies continue. Brottman, in his analysis of football fan culture, calls the carnival "licensed misrule, a contained and officially sanctioned rebellion, after which everybody goes back to work".¹¹ In his examples, football fans uncrown their opponents through aggressive club chants and dress. In

normal social situations outside of this carnivalised space, such behaviour would likely provoke violence. The carnival space, however, manages this aggressive behaviour, allowing fans to assert excessive masculinity without any damage to society as a whole. In this way, the carnival acts as a safety valve, letting off steam in a sanctioned environment to avoid instability overflowing into civil unrest. Dentith uses Shakespeare to summarise this depressurising trait of the carnival, calling it the mere work of "allow'd fools".¹²

When we consider Brottman's example of football fans simulating aggression, we must consider what happens when containment is breached and carnivalised behaviour boils over into actualised violence. Furthermore, we mustn't be too quick to label the carnival a purely conservative force managing social tensions. Medieval carnivals themselves were known to erupt into riots,¹³ and Davis argues that the carnival is not merely a safety valve, but a force that allows for new ways of thinking about social relations.¹⁴ Those new ways of thinking may have real world impacts, influencing ideals and ultimately cultural practice. Theorists such as Stallybrass and White work to discourage this continuing debate as to whether the carnival is truly subversive or just the work of "allow'd fools", instead stressing import on how the carnival and carnivalesque texts transgress hierarchy through symbolic inversions. The carnival cannot be classed as either inherently conservative or progressive; it can "constitute a symbolic rebellion by the weak or a festive scapegoating of the weak, or both at the same time".¹⁵

This can be seen in Thompson's use of the carnivalesque to explain how *South Park* can appear both progressive and conservative. Its crude cartoon cut-out aesthetics, bad taste themes and obscene language are understood as having "characteristics of the carnivalesque".¹⁶ The program's politics have been notoriously difficult to pin down, as it has a history of attacking both left and right wing people, movements and issues. Rather than seeking to claim it for a particular political persuasion, Thompson argues that the bad taste carnivalesque aesthetic "works as a response to the 'official' discourses"¹⁷ offered by society, especially those that rely on the idea that politics can only be understood as a binary between conservative or liberal. He proposes that, rather than conveying a single partisan viewpoint, "*South Park's* carnivalesque mode creates a space for viewers to engage multiple social discourses from a variety of political subjectivities, while undermining the supposed legitimacy of those discourses".¹⁸ This multi-faceted, always varying politics is held together by the aesthetic consistency of the carnivalesque which, instead of appearing politically schizophrenic, enables varying perspectives to be provided in a coherent approach that "[makes] sense (and fun) of culture".¹⁹ Thompson also notes that *South Park's* carnivalesque aesthetic is not always political; it is sometimes little more than "a whole lot of offensive noise, signifying

nothing,"²⁰ even reinforcing "official" attitudes about, for example, women. But this in itself is a pertinent point that the carnivalesque can be progressive or conservative or, as Stam argues, both at the same time.

It should be noted that some theorists, such as Dentith, advise caution when using the carnival as a theoretical framework for contemporary texts because of its historical specificity. Bakhtin wrote in the isolated and restricted intellectual environment of Soviet Russia, and claimed that the carnivalesque went into decline after the 17th century. Stallybrass and White, while labelling Bakhtin's claims nostalgic, draw out the complexity of historical specificity by aligning the modernisation of Europe to the othering of carnivals. Instead of a disappearance, the carnival underwent a symbolic shift during a time where industrialisation and scientific discourse lodged itself into Europe's consciousness. The carnivalesque was evoked in structured formats, such as popular theatre, "precisely because bourgeois culture constructed its self identity by rejecting it."²¹ Reason and the mind, the higher sanctum, were prized as qualities of the upper classes. Docker and Stam, however, criticise Bakhtin, Stallybrass and White for their focus on European carnivals. Any claims of loss or change, they suggest, ignore the carnivals of Latin America and the Caribbean, which continue to flourish from a long and creative tradition.²²

This is not to say that 'authentic' European carnivals have been lost while non-Western carnivals have survived, nor does it mean that the European carnival was merely a construct used by the bourgeois to define the other. Historical and cultural specificity is important, but the intense focus on the European carnival as a paradigm for the carnivalesque often consumes critical analysis of the practice itself. Once a face-to-face interactive event localised in a physical space, the carnival has evolved with industrialisation and globalisation. The carnival can still be seen inhabiting physical space in sub-cultural protest and celebration, such as Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parades, but the contemporary carnivalesque is more often enacted in mediated forms that are more contained in content and interactive potential, yet free from geographic boundaries. Attempts to define an 'authentic' carnival, especially one based around a specific time period, often ignore this fluidity. The change was not sudden, nor did one type of carnival completely replace another, but rather, these shifts illustrate the dynamic nature of cultural phenomena. When observing contemporary contexts, the medieval carnival should instead be seen as a useful metaphor, with focus redirected onto carnivals as symbolic sites of transgression situated within their own historical and cultural contexts.

Many theorists have broken away from the historical confines of the medieval carnival to study its "recurrent organising image,"²³ which continues to permeate throughout contemporary society. Docker goes so far as to define

the 20th century, with its many mass media forms, as another high period of the carnivalesque alongside medieval Europe.²⁴ Stam defines mass media as a "simulacra of carnival-style festivity,"²⁵ arguing that it is not fully carnivalesque because it is rarely subversive. While Stam ascribes the carnival with Bakhtin's nostalgic utopianism, he also observes that mass media forms have a "conflictual heteroglossia pervading producer, text, context and reader/viewer."²⁶ Heteroglossia refers to the polysemy of language. Instead of being fixed, language is employed differently depending on the context in which it is used. In this way, "the evolution of linguistic forms is tied to changes to social relations."²⁷ Therefore, despite the seemingly one-sided performance of mass media, Stam and Docker note that no players in this carnival are passive spectators. Owners of media companies, while in control of mass media production, are nevertheless influenced by viewers' preferences; higher ratings equate to larger advertising revenue. Further complications come into play with public broadcasters that are government funded and regulated, thereby relying on taxpayer money as opposed to commercial advertising. The point is pertinent here as many carnivalesque Australian comedies come from the ABC, a public broadcaster. The dynamic of spectator, performer, owner and sponsor relationships has some affinities with the interactive behaviour of players and spectators in carnival events. With the growing prominence of social media, the potential for interaction has increased, making it even more viable to use Bakhtin to study mass media texts.

The larrikin carnivalesque: an Australian satiric tradition

The carnivalesque is a particularly useful framework to explore the politics and aesthetics of Australian humour since it frequently inverts norms without entirely transgressing authority, often in absurd and grotesque manners. The larrikin carnivalesque, therefore, is a uniquely Australian inversion of official, serious culture. Instead of the clown of medieval Europe, Australia's carnival fool is the larrikin. The language of Billingsgate can be seen in the Strine (broad Australian accent), colloquial Australian phrases and obscenities, often in sacred or serious contexts. The larrikin carnivalesque uncrowns, mocks and subverts within a safe, contained space that acts as both a safety valve and an avenue of symbolic rebellion.

Jones defines Australian humour as "expositions of farce, anarchy or absurdity [that] punctuate the bleak monotony only to subside leaving everything as it was before."²⁸ The larrikin shares many of these qualities, "playing up to the audience, mocking pomposity and smugness, taking the piss out of people... [and being] sceptical, iconoclastic, egalitarian yet suffering fools badly, insouciant and, above all, defiant."²⁹ As well as engaging in overt obscenities, the larrikin's practice of piss-taking, which is "all about appearing to play by

the rules of one language game while in fact playing by the rules of another";³⁰ can be seen as an example of carnivalesque inversion. While the larrikin carnivalesque has not been heavily explored within a Bakhtinian paradigm, Bakhtin has been used to study Australian humour before. Docker has been particularly influential in employing the carnivalesque to Australian mass media. Specifically, he uses the notion of the fool and the grotesque bodily aesthetic in considering Graham Kennedy.

Host of television shows such as *In Melbourne Tonight* and *Blankety Blanks*, Graham Kennedy brought studio audience, producer and film crew out in front of the camera's lens as performers themselves. He would mock himself by acting out displays of implied homosexuality – Kennedy was famously a closeted gay man³¹ – on his show's "straight men".³² The grotesque came in Kennedy's bulging eyes and his constant reference to bodily functions, with skits revolving around toilet humour and sex. Kennedy was a typical carnival clown, "enduring and disturbing, loveable and inspiring of fear, discomfort [and] dislike, for no one is safe from the fool's mocking barbs".³³ While Docker states that clowns and fools "disclose no single discursive meaning",³⁴ he argues that clownish behaviour destabilises the bush legend, "a key trope of historiography in Australia"³⁵ based around a white male-centred rural identity. Tension regarding homosexuality, race-relations, family and gender norms, normally unchallenged or taboo in open conversation, were released within the safely contained space of Kennedy's comedy. This did not necessarily provide a complete transgression of these norms, but allowed for a level of destabilisation. The larrikin – one that not only mocked those in authority but also mocked himself and everyone else – was already a long held image in Australian consciousness. Kennedy brought a new edge to the tradition.

Continuing the tradition in the 1970s, Garry McDonald's character Norman Gunston, "the most boring reporter in Wollongong",³⁶ fumbled onto television on the ABC's *Aunty Jack Show* and later in his own program, *The Norman Gunston Show*. Gunston was a pale-faced scrawny figure with an oily comb-over, a bright blue suit and small squares of toilet paper on his face where he had cut himself shaving. He asked inappropriate questions and his uncoordinated, bumbling nature confused his international guests, "reversing the norm of unequal cultural exchange between the local Australian host and his overseas celebrity guests".³⁷ His grotesque appearance was aided by equally grotesque performances around toilet humour, sex and drugs. McDonald dubbed his character the 'little Aussie bleeder', a play on the more serious 'little Aussie battler', so common to popular discourse on Australian identity and a dig at the Australian notion of hardship associated with a harsh colonial history. It also mocked Gunston as being everything that the Aussie battler is not: spineless, grotesque and foolish.

Gunston bought the carnivalesque to politics through ambush tactics that can be seen in the Chaser programs today. Gunston's appearance on the steps of Parliament House, during the dismissal of the Whitlam Government on 11 November 1975, has been described as a "quintessentially Australian moment".³⁸ When Whitlam emerges to a crowd furious at the Governor-General's action, Gunston interrupts, addressing the crowd in place of Whitlam.

Gunston: [loud and indignant]: What I want to know, is this an affront to the constitution of this country?

Crowd: Yes!

Gunston: [still loud] Or was it just a stroke of good luck for Mr Fraser?

Crowd: No!

Gunston: [suddenly mild] Thanks very much, just wondering...³⁹

Wendy Davis proposes that Gunston's attendance at Whitlam's dismissal "can be understood in terms of the mobile quality of carnival's wondering clowns".⁴⁰ As a bumbling clown, positioned inappropriately in a space of televised political turmoil, Gunston provides a tactical response from within a technology that Foucault would have defined as disciplinary and Deleuze considered controlling. Davis posits that "if television is a technology of control... we can, and should, construct a tactical and elusive relation with television – question, comment, laugh and critique, while realising that it is perhaps futile to try to oppose or escape television's globalising processes".⁴¹ The carnival is one such tactical position.

The Norman Gunston Show's humour formed around the variety show host. It made fun of public figures through Gunston. *The Gillies Report*, on the other hand, satirised through the excessive mimicry of those figures. Broadcast on the ABC in 1984-5, *The Gillies Report* was formatted as a current affairs program intermingled with skits satirising politicians. It is most famous for its satire of Prime Minister Bob Hawke. Max Gillies satirises Hawke's smug confidence, while also drawing out the Prime Minister's nervousness and indecision through mimicry of jerky eye movements and compulsive fiddling with his cufflinks. This Hawke is grotesquely excessive, with an exaggerated Australian drawl and unrealistic arched eyebrows. In one skit, Gillies' Hawke appears in an election advertisement as stereotypical Australians dance around him and sing that the public is gullible and insufferable but, "We can do it if we put Australia first".⁴² Hawke raps that "the deficit's down, everyone's had a tax cut and Australians are talking to each other again. They're happier. You never saw this under Fraser!"⁴³ He then jumps up on his desk and break-dances. A final campaign message flashes on the screen: "Put charisma first". While

break-dancing and rapping seems out of place with the real Hawke, or indeed the behaviour of any prime minister, this excessive display mocks Hawke's widely-recognised 'everybody's mate' persona often embraced in media coverage. *The Gillies Report* uses grotesque realism and comic inversions, where the goal "is not ridicule, it is recognition".⁴⁴ It acts in a carnivalesque way, where the performer and spectator laugh at both everyone and themselves, in what Watson describes as the most interesting of satire: that which, "rather than creating scapegoats...explores the system that we share, and for which everyone must accept responsibility".⁴⁵

The following decade, Simon Hunt, a gay activist opposed to the policies of MP Pauline Hanson, became famous during the 1998 Australian Federal Election as Hanson's excessive parodic double, Pauline Pantsdown. Bogad describes Hunt's performance as electoral guerrilla theatre⁴⁶ and Stratton calls it a "carnavalesque mocking of Hanson's public image".⁴⁷ Both Stratton and Bogad, while not situating their critique within a Bakhtinian paradigm, do use grotesque realism and the carnivalesque as terms to describe Hunt's act. He gave public performances and interviews in drag, with a frizzy red wig, lopsided lipstick and tacky red dresses, mimicking Hanson's accent, phrases and look. Moreover, the language of Billingsgate often took the form of Hanson's own voice, mixed and reworked into songs that mocked Hanson as being dangerously racist and hilariously ignorant. After the success of the songs, one of which was banned, the other of which became an ARIA-nominated hit, Hunt legally changed his name to Pauline Pantsdown and ran for the Senate in the 1998 election. The safety valve question comes into play here: Hunt had no capacity or desire to win a senate seat, nor did he provide a viable alternative to Hanson or her policies. But, as Bogad says, the purpose of the electoral guerrilla's theatre is to "drain the resources and the legitimacy of the greater power through harassing tactics and spectacular 'zaps' and 'hits,' mimetic excess, and the use of the enemies' weapons against them".⁴⁸ In this case, Hunt used Hanson's own voice and her actual dress, even down to the same brand as Hanson herself. This not only attacked Hanson's politics as divisive and unintelligent, but also exposed her "anti-politician" or "ordinary Australian" persona as artificial.⁴⁹

The Chaser: today's carnival fools

The Chaser's now infamous APEC stunt may one day be considered a "quintessentially Australian moment", just as Gunston's place in the dismissal is so fondly remembered. While media commentators debated if the Chaser had 'gone too far', 87% of 28,451 people polled by the *Sydney Morning Herald* found the stunt to be funny.⁵⁰ Hynes, Sharpe and Greg argue that the Chaser appeals to a "familiar image of Australian resistance – namely larrikinism – and this

is crucial to its popularity".⁵¹ The Chaser's popular antics, much like that of Gunston, Gillies, and Pantsdown, suggest a shared concern among the public. In the APEC example, that concern was the extravagant security measures that hampered basic civil rights under the guise of protection. APEC laws allowed police to hold people without bail. Using these new powers, police arrested, strip-searched and locked a 52 year-old man in jail overnight for crossing the road incorrectly ahead of an APEC motorcade.⁵² The arrested man later labelled it "a fool's comedy", yet it was the Chaser that "exposed the clowns and asked us to join in on the laughter".⁵³

The Chaser is the epitome of the larrikin carnivalesque. All their satirical papers, theatre shows and television programs deploy varying degrees of grotesque realism, excessive comic inversions and carnival laughter. They regularly crash press conferences, asking absurd or grotesque questions of public figures so that, over the last decade, politicians have learnt to behave with good humour whenever faced with one of their ambushes. They subvert the image of the politician, the journalist and even the public through highlighting the grotesque lower sanctum. Hansen grinds a blood-splattering cow's head through a soft-serve machine in a satirical McDonald's advertisement⁵⁴, Reucassel squats over a portable camping toilet in front of a busy city newsagent,⁵⁵ and the Rudd ear wax incident is commemorated with a bust sculpture of the Labor leader made entirely out of dripping ear wax, which Licciardello then eats.⁵⁶ In *Yes We Canberra* (YWC), Hansen notes that journalists are starting to time their reports to be in "the thick of the action", airing a clip of *Seven* journalist Mark Riley standing in the way of a police car door as officers try and load an arrested protester into a car. To mock this technique, footage of Riley is superimposed over a scene of a red-haired figure, assumed to be Julia Gillard, bouncing up and down enthusiastically on another figure under the sheets, described as a report where "the PM herself was sharing a private moment with her partner".⁵⁷ This provides a clear example of carnivalesque, where the fool situates the subject of their mockery – in this case, journalism – within a degrading display in order to subvert its claim to authority and seriousness. From giving Tanya Plibersek "Kevin Rudd's gallbladder",⁵⁸ to a satirical advertisement for "Hungry Hacks" where the Angry Angus burger becomes the "Angry Kevin", served with bile, spilt blood and "lovingly rat-fucked by factional leaders",⁵⁹ the grotesque features heavily in the Chaser's humour.

In the Chaser, vernacular and general style is often summed up with the word "undergraduate",⁶⁰ implying a sense of immaturity associated with student pranks. While meant as a criticism, this is a quality the Chaser revel in, laughing at themselves for indeed being immature and grotesque. In one instance, Morrow even calls his fellow Chaser members "stupid undergraduates".⁶¹ They mock themselves, critics that take such undergraduate humour seriously,

and audience members who, despite being so-called elitist ABC viewers, enjoy immature comedy. Furthermore, undergraduate humour also implies a crude, lurid language of Billingsgate, that includes what Bakhtin calls the “unofficial elements of speech”;⁶² such as swearing and other profanities. In the final episode of *YWC* before polling day, the Chaser leave their audience on a song that uses the word “fucked/fucking” 38 times.⁶³ Such language is considered to be a “breach of the established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to conventions, to etiquette, civility, respectability”.⁶⁴ Bakhtin saw such a transgression of established language norms as unifying, where “a group of people initiated in a familiar intercourse...are frank and free in expressing themselves” with their own “particular argot”.⁶⁵ Not only does the use of “unofficial language” establish a vernacular that unifies the Chaser texts, it creates a “special collectivity”⁶⁶ between the Chaser and their audience.

Episode 16, Season 2, of *War on Everything* provides an example that illustrates the aesthetics of grotesque realism, the “unofficial” verbal style of the Chaser’s language of Billingsgate, and the subversive nature of their satiric critique. In their segment “What have we learnt from current affairs this week”, Hansen and Licciardello identify the top three “super menaces” of society, as categorised by current affairs programs. The number one super menace is listed as Asians. The Chaser proposes this after viewing a *Today Tonight (TT)* report where reporter Brian Seymour asks a sample of Asian Australians three questions to test their patriotism: 1. “Who is Don Bradman?” 2. “Do you know the words to Waltzing Matilda?” 3. “Have you ever tried pavlova?” When the interviewees cannot answer, Licciardello acts shocked, exclaiming, “you don’t know what a pavlova is? Take your substantial contribution to the country and piss off!” On the aggressive “piss off”, Licciardello throws a pavlova at the camera, which leaves a dirty smear on screen until the next segment.⁶⁷ Licciardello’s ironic juxtaposition of “substantial contribution” and “piss off” can be interpreted as mocking the superficial media categories that define a valuable Australian citizen, while the pie-throwing follows in the carnivalesque tradition of degradation.

In addition to the pie-throwing, Hansen and Licciardello take to the streets of China Town and ask Asian Australians what they think of *TT* and Brian Seymour. The responses appear scripted, as they share the same kind of undergraduate vernacular. Their interviewees describe Brian Seymour as “a fuckwit” and “a shoddy journalist”. Their final interviewee, a young man in his twenties, answers with, “oh, Brian Seymour? Isn’t he that dickhead arsewipe mother-fucking slut from *Today Tonight* hosted by that bitch...um, can I give a message to Brian Seymour?” Hansen and Licciardello act somewhat intimidated by the young man’s aggression, but let him deliver the message, which is, “Brian Seymour, fuck you!”⁶⁸ The undergraduate vernacular, shared

by the Chaser, its subjects and its audience is aggressive, full of swearing and non-apologetic. This small rebellion against official language unifies those willing to speak it, and assists in creating the undergraduate Chaser style of the larrikin carnivalesque.

Conclusion

In her seminal work in *Serious Frolic*, Jessica Milner Davis defines Australian humour as an “acculturating ritual”. Even though this ritual does highlight differences between Australians through ‘us vs. them’ narratives, it also welcomes them as ‘one of us’ through ‘taking the mickey’, a shared practice that is broadly considered to be an “Australian democratic right”.⁶⁹ While Davis argues that it is more useful to look at how humour is used (what I would define as an element of its politics) rather than “the nature of the humour used”⁷⁰ (its style or aesthetics), this paper suggests that an exploration of the two is actually more useful. The larrikin carnivalesque helps illustrate that Australian humour may involve inclusion, exclusion or subversion. Australian humour, as Davis rightly notes, has an “aggressively normative and socialising function”.⁷¹ Therefore, inclusion in this acculturating ritual is often only granted when one draws on carnivalesque aesthetics such as the grotesque, crude and frequently aggressive. It relies on acceptance through homogenisation. The acculturating ritual of Australian humour does not simply include people if they have a sense of humour; it includes them if they have what has been defined as an Australian sense of humour. This is not to say that Australian humour does not have the potential for a more dynamic scope, but acknowledges the influence of pervasive nationalistic aesthetics. The larrikin carnivalesque provides a useful framework to evaluate the aesthetics and politics of Australian humour by neatly encompassing the national narratives, often of the larrikin, that work alongside a practice that can invert and/or reinforce official culture.

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Notes

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- ⁴ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 11.
- ⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.
- ⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 309.
- ⁷ Dentith, *Bakhtinian thought: an introductory reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 66.
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- ¹² Dentith, *Bakhtinian thought*, 66.
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- ¹⁴ Davis quoted in Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, 195.
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- ¹⁶ Ethan Thompson, "Good, Demo, Bad Taste: South Park as Carnavalesque Satire," in *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, eds. Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P Jones and Ethan Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 219.
- ¹⁷ Thompson, "Good, Demo, Bad Taste," 226.
- ¹⁸ Thompson, "Good, Demo, Bad Taste," 226.
- ¹⁹ Thompson, "Good, Demo, Bad Taste," 220.
- ²⁰ Thompson, "Good, Demo, Bad Taste," 227.
- ²¹ Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 202.
- ²² Stam, *Subversive Pleasures*, 90.
- ²³ Dentith, *Bakhtinian thought*, 78.
- ²⁴ Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, 185.
- ²⁵ Stam, *Subversive Pleasures*, 92.
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Alternative Approaches to Stage Management in Bali

Susan Fenty Studham

In my heart and the wilds of my imagination, I know stage managers (SMs) existed long before the 1600s. I am convinced that SMs existed at least as far back as the days of the cave man. There is no documentation to substantiate this, but I am certain that during the time when humans sat around camp fires to reenact the thrill of the hunt and to tell of the glory of the kill, there was someone in the group who built the fire, cleared the ground for seating, and during the event handed out, at the most dramatic moment, the spear or rock that killed the beast.¹

Following Larry Fazio's speculation in his book on stage management about the existence of stage managers in rituals, story telling or performances of the distant past, this study addresses the present with a similar curiosity about the organization of behind-the-scenes management and shifting perceptions as theatre styles enter the global arena.

My intention in this paper is to begin a conversation on how culture, as pertains to ethnicity, affects approaches to stage management in professional theatre, specifically in the circumstances of a changing theatre scene in Bali. The first 'mega-theatre' opened in Bali in 2010 with an ongoing production of the epic story *Bali Agung*. This paper is an exploration of approaches to stage management in this production, and the education of its practitioners. My central question is: can an altered style of theatre provoke a transformation in the method in which a production is stage managed? As a teacher of the craft as well as an experienced practitioner, I would like to discuss the notion of thinking beyond our own perceived cultural boundaries in order to synthesise styles to best suit a production and where such negotiations and exchanges might lead.