

Laura Mäkelä
Unruly Women in the
Comedy Series *Smack*
the Pony

This article observes the techniques of the comic in the TV-series *Smack the Pony* (Channel 4, GB, 1999-). The article considers the connections between the humour of the series and feminism, and discusses whether the series could be interpreted as feminist. In examining whether the series could create experiences of empowerment for women, the concepts of masquerade (Mary Ann Doane) and "unruly women" (Kathleen Rowe) are introduced.

What is vital in the feminist struggle to redefine gender definitions is the utilisation of visibility and publicity. Visibility has always been connected to power, and by making themselves visible, women could thus acquire power to themselves. However, transgression and parody, the strategies used by unruly women, are not sufficient to crush the hegemony of male power. Transgression is always a fundamental aspect of the comic and, thus, does not necessarily mean anything more than a temporal deviation from the normal.

What is also needed then, is the transformation of representations of the masculine, the change of "the Other". *Smack the Pony* does this by introducing new models of the male. Besides this, it gives women the role of the subject. The series also represents all kinds of women, beautiful and attractive, ugly and repulsive, as misbehaving and obscene. All of them as well as men are being laughed at. In *Smack the Pony* one isn't better than the other.

Maria Siironen
The Whirligig of Irony in
South Park

What kind of animation series has a prologue telling

that no one should watch it? *South Park* (USA 1997-) has. It is situated in a little mountain town, where 8-9 years old schoolboys experience adventures that overstep the bounds of decency. Its' humour is built on characters representing a wide range of social roles. The pluralism of the series is brought to ahead when it parodies political correctness as well as stereotypes.

In *South Park* anyone or anything can and will be laughed at. But do the objects of humour have unequal positions depending on their participation in dominant or minority groups in society? Can members of minority groups be involved to humour without being oppressed? My view is that by exaggerating and twisting stereotypes parody can make them visible and question their grounding.

The spectator plays a major role in recognising irony and is therefore as much responsible in determining the object of laughter as the implicit author or the marketing of the television text. By parodying production, representation and reception of stereotypes *South Park* makes visible the circulation of stereotypes in society.

Using various ways of resisting the closure of meaning *South Park* posits its spectator to negotiate various readings. Its' ambivalent irony delays moral judgements and brings up contradictory meanings. If *South Park's* pluralism is commercial and questionable, at least it highlights the contradictions of what it is selling.

Marjut Huttunen
***Jackass* – An Instrument for the Hegemony of Traditional Masculinity?**

Jackass has gained massive ratings in the American cable TV. There can be found many reasons for

the popularity of the show. Firstly, *Jackass* challenges political correctness of 1980's and 1990's by its flood of bad taste and trash humour. Secondly, the authenticity of stunts in the series links it to popularity of reality television in the beginning of 21st century. Thirdly, the show certainly satisfies voyeuristic desires of TV audiences.

Jackass is a television show that raises quite a few ideological questions. For instance, Bill Nichols accuses in his book *Blurred Boundaries* reality-TV for diminishing active citizenship. However, Nichols might be too harsh in blaming solely reality-TV shows for the negative effects of TV entertainment. In addition, the reality-TV genre has recently evolved from mainly semi-documentaries to a much wider set of shows since Nichols made his thesis in the beginning of 1990's. The carnival and ambivalence of *Jackass*, for example, does not support the idea that the show would barely work for hegemonic ideology.

Certain elements of *Jackass* imply that it reproduces the traditional masculinity. For example, the show can be empowering to groups of white working and lower middle class American men who feel that their position has been threatened by certain social and economic changes. On the other hand, there are some other aspects in the show that contradict the claim. There is a great ambivalence in the way *Jackass* represents male activity, male bonding and masculine game as well as men as vulnerable, chaotic and comical in the very same context of American middle class environments.

Katariina Niiranen
Humour and Nationality in *Fawlty Towers*

The paper discusses an English popular series

Fawlty Towers (GB, 1975) in terms of national identity and humour. What makes the series so humorous? Is it possible to understand English humour without being an Englishman? The intention is to focus on the different aspects of humour and on the questions of national culture. The article will also go further into the analysis of comical methods and discusses them in the British and Finnish contexts.

As a product of popular culture, *Fawlty Towers* can be seen as part of the cultural representation regime, which produces meanings and constructs national identity. Humour, on the other hand, is intertwined with the norms, customs and patterns of thought of national culture. Humour can either enforce stereotypical thinking or introduce more flexible patterns of thought. Humour is also social; it can enforce the sense of solidarity within a group (e.g. a nation) and thus exclude the "others".

The paper offers an interpretation of the humour in *Fawlty Towers* focusing on its comical methods, such as verbal comedy, stereotypes and physical comedy, and discusses them in terms of universal vs. culture-bound humour. The use of stereotypes can be seen as a method for excluding "others" and enforcing the hegemonic main culture. On the other hand, the series also self-reflectively exploits and makes the viewers laugh at the stereotypical image of the "Brit". As a result, the paper argues that *Fawlty Towers* exceeds the boundaries of nationality, using universal and popular comical methods, but at the same time it both strengthens and disintegrates the national identity of the British.