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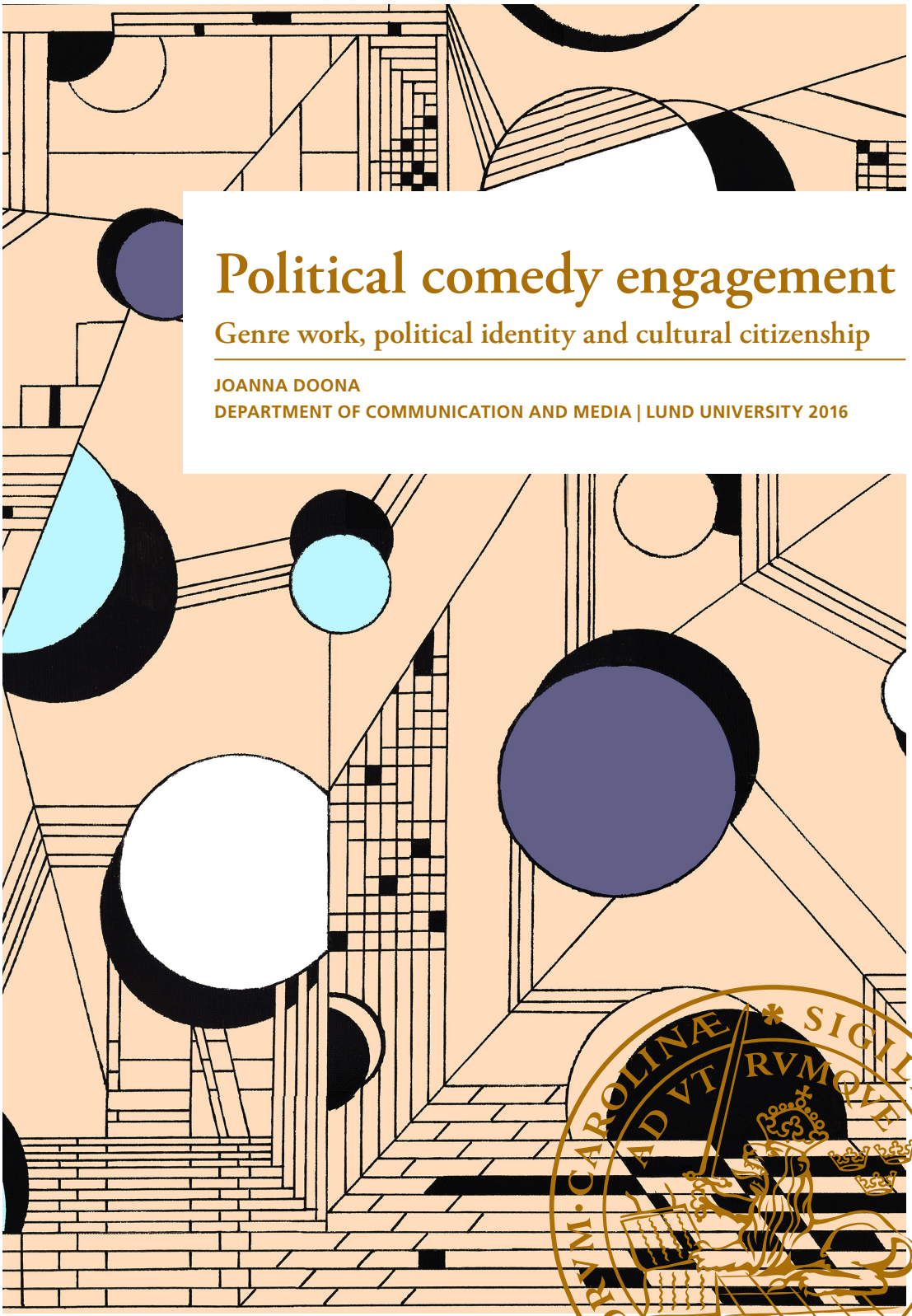

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Abstract

Political comedy is a hybrid genre that mixes political news and analysis with comedy and entertainment. As it becomes more and more popular in most media forms and national contexts, researchers struggle to understand its role in relation to other types of political media, and of citizenship; in this sense, it challenges scholarly conceptualisation of political media and citizenship. Thus, this thesis examines and develops the understanding of how audience engagement in political comedy encourages political and cultural citizenship. The focus on engagement allows the study to emphasise diverse subject positions and their dynamic character. Additionally, it stresses that reasoning is both emotional and rational, rather than either or, which is especially important in the study of political comedy. By mapping contemporary examples of political comedy as well as carrying out in-depth interviews and focus groups with 31 young adult Swedes (18-35 years old) who regularly engage with political comedy (Swedish radio programme Tankesmedjan and/or American television programme The Daily Show), the study's analytical attention is on modes of address as well as audience engagement. Focussing on constructions of genre, so-called 'genre work,' political identity and cultural citizenship, the thesis reiterates contemporary scholarly critique of the modern era ideal type of a dutiful, rational and well-informed citizen, from a normative and empirical standpoint. The study's findings include a challenge to the understanding of 'entertainment' as separate from, and less valuable than, 'information'; and contributes a deeper understanding of how audiences engage with these kinds of political media spaces. It shows how such spaces allow for so-called political play and emotional authenticity, which is important for the developing citizen. Further, it illustrates how audiences enjoy the double mode of engagement that is required by political comedy's mix of serious and silly, whereby they analyse which is what. The thesis contributes knowledge about political comedy audiences being skilled, 'media-savvy' and 'self-informed,' yet lacking in political efficacy. They are highly interested in political news and political issues, but worry about various social aspects of increasing their political participation, which the present study labels as 'uneasy' citizenship. In this context, audiences enjoy the so-called symbolic levelling that results from political comedy's critique of conventional journalism's claim of epistemic authority. Through this, political comedy aids young adults in feeling like citizens, in a political and cultural sense, as it represents critical thinking and promotes an understanding of the perspectives of others. The thesis argues that the growing engagement in political comedy is a symptom of contemporary young adult citizenship, where the use of irony and humour is a way of coping with uneasiness. Hence, the study shows that political comedy engagement is an expression of the need for a wide variety of political media spaces, where different aspects of young adult citizenship can be recognised, including the emotional.

Key words

political comedy, audiences, satire, engagement, citizenship, cultural citizenship, genre, hybridity, identity

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Till Pelle och Mamma

Content

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In my beloved Malmö, August 6th 2016

1. Introducing political comedy audiences

Humour is contradictory: it is universal yet specific, it can strengthen bonds or break them up, cement stereotypes or make us question them, make us feel happy or sad (or both). It isn't easily captured, but is ubiquitous to all kinds of cultures and contexts throughout human history. Yet it is often treated rather oddly, as if it were irrelevant or silly – and it mostly makes it into the headlines when it has caused harm and controversy.

In the context of media and culture, political comedy is growing, in terms of the number of productions and formats, the size of its audiences, and the amount of attention the media and research is giving it (cf. Jones 2013b; Kumar & Combe 2015; Bruun 2012). In both a Swedish and an international context, the role, form and impact of political comedy is debated and contrasted with that of 'serious' political media, such as news and current affairs. Some critics consider political comedy to be a significant resource for citizens, as well as an important part of political debate (cf. Ianucci 2015; Mattsson 2014; Sandklef 2011) – a sentiment which grew after the terror attack directed towards French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* (1970-) in early 2015.

In broadcasting, political comedy is situated within entertainment and comedy, and includes examples such as the British fictional *The Thick of It* (BBC, 2005-2012) and American news satire like *The Daily Show* (Comedy Central, 1996-)[1], programmes which have gained audiences internationally, including in Sweden (cf. Wedholm 2015). Swedish television broadcasting includes examples like the fictional *Starke Man* ('Strong Man,' SVT, 2010-2011) and political parody programmes *Parlamentet* ('The Parliament,' TV4, 1999-2011+2015) and *Snacka om nyheter* ('Talk about the news,' SVT, 1995-

[1] Additional popular examples are *The Colbert Report* (Comedy Central, 2005-2015); *Politically Incorrect* (HBO, 1993-2002), *Real Time with Bill Maher* (HBO, 2003-), *Last Week Tonight* (HBO, 2013-) and *Full Frontal with Sam Bee* (TDS, 2015-).

2003), as well radio programmes such as *Public Service* (SR P1, 2001-) and *Tankesmedjan* ('The Think Tank,' SR P3, 2010-).

Often missing in scholarly and journalistic discussions on the form and function of political comedy is its actual audience. Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore and understand the contemporary popularity of political comedy, by focussing on how it engages its audience. The focus on engagement allows us to gain a deeper understanding of how and why this particular genre draws audiences in, and reflect on how it is situated in contemporary media. The following pages will contextualise and explain this focus further.

Political comedy and citizenship: Situating the research

The scope of scholarly research on political comedy is growing, but has mostly concentrated on its textual and formal characteristics, as well as on the direct impact it might have on its audiences. With a few limited exceptions (cf. Corner et al. 2013; Friedman 2014; Johnson et al. 2010; Jones 2010), the qualitative study of political comedy audiences has been left out of media and communication research. Jeffrey P. Jones writes that so far, academic research on political comedy 'doesn't address the complexity of the audience's relationship to media content' (2010:209), which is why the present study focusses on the engagement of existing audiences.

Political comedy is considered a hybrid genre in the present study, departing somewhat from the genre definitions originating in textual studies of art and literature, where 'comedy' or 'satire' would be more commonly used terms. Corner, Richardson and Parry explain that 'satire' is most often used to define comedy with a 'serious political intent,' but that:

> within many modern societies there is, alongside this, a much broader comic realm in which raillery, mocking and spoofing of the 'official,' continues as a routine accomplishment to national life. However articulated, comic mediations of politics are marked as strongly affective, working from and upon emotional patterns concerning politics and politicians (2013:32).

The emotional dimension of political comedy is significant both to the genre itself and to this thesis, and is one of the reasons why it is associated with both hopes and fears in relation to the political. By concentrating on engagement, the study can include the emotional dimension, and maintain a double focus: on the form of political comedy, and on its audience. This approach is in part inspired by the book *Theorising Media* (2011), wherein John Corner argues that social science research on the media necessitates a contextualising approach

where focus is on power, the subjective, as well as genre and form – rather than just either of these (2011).

Researchers' and other critics' suspicion towards political comedy has to do with the fact that it utilises humorous, often ironic, modes of discourse. Such modes are considered tricky, as they differ from the clear communication that 'straight' news or current affairs programming has. Further, such modes of discourse are considered to be potentially emotionally distancing or problematic on an ethical level, in relation to political discourse (cf. Dahlgren 2009; Gray et al. 2009; Hutcheon 1994). The present study argues against this, in part because it is difficult to assert empirically and rests on a perspective of media impacting its audience in isolation from other factors; but also, because it entails a normative perspective on humour and irony, wherein assumptions about how audiences engage with and make sense of it are made a priori.

Instead, this thesis argues that the humorous and ironic mode of discourse can be seen as an expression of what Richard Rorty called the ironic disposition (1989) which, as Stephen Coleman so succinctly puts it, manifests the late modern 'distaste for fundamentalist certainty' (2013b:383), often – although in no way exclusively – associated with young adults (cf. Hutcheon 1994).

Additionally, since political comedy's humorous mode of discourse is directed at the 'official' as mentioned in the quote from Corner et al. (2013), it arguably also works as a symbolic leveller, as proposed by Robert Hariman (2008). Inspired by, among others, Mikhail Bakhtin (cf. 1968), Hariman argues that parody and satire aids citizens in evening out the imbalance between them and political elites, in the context of public debate. Through this strengthening of citizens' symbolic power and the challenging of 'fundamentalist certainty,' political comedy can potentially support citizens, as well as aid them in connecting to each other and feeling a sense of community, as proposed by among others, Sandra Day (2011).

To capture this, this research project is positioned in the overlapping academic fields of popular culture audiences and media and citizenship, described briefly in the following paragraphs and developed on further throughout the thesis. The majority of studies on political comedy audiences have been carried out in light of the past decades' changes in news and political media consumption habits among teen and young adult audiences, changes which have been interpreted quite differently (cf. Bennett 2008). Some see them as a sign of the fact that contemporary youth isn't interested in news and is 'less civic-minded that prior generations' (Marchi 2012:246), and that the general growth of political entertainment formats can be linked to political disengagement and growing political cynicism (cf. Hart & Hartelius 2007; Postman 1987).

The present study joins the other main line of reasoning, where the diminished consumption of conventional news media 'does not necessarily mean youth are disinterested in news or politics' (Marchi 2012:246), but rather has to do with wider changes in the performance of citizenship and the production of political media (cf. Jones 2013b; Marchi 2012; Coleman 2013b; Bennett 2008). These wider changes have prompted scholars to begin a process of redefining citizenship, wherein a more holistic understanding, fitting in with late modern expressions of engagement and the contemporary media landscape, is proposed. Broader cultural, affective and social factors should be included as they are arguably integral parts of how we reason and perform in relation to the political, which impacts our engagement (Barnhurst 1998; Coleman 2013a).

An important point made in the present study is that there is a need to question the assumption that political and cultural engagement are strictly separated. A productive way of doing this is to approach political comedy engagement through the study of both political and cultural citizenship, to see how they connect and overlap. This double focus on citizenship provides the main theoretical backdrop for this thesis, alongside that of engagement.

Cultural citizenship, discussed by among others Hartley (1996) and developed by Joke Hermes (2005) is defined by the latter as:

> the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture (2005:10).

In the present study political citizenship is mainly informed by the writing of Peter Dahlgren and his idea of the civic circuit (2009). It represents a citizenship model that complements the idea of cultural citizenship, and is defined as 'a formal, legal set of rights and obligations' as well as 'a mode of social agency,' that can 'analytically be seen to have subjective identities that resonate (or not) with people's other elements of identity' (ibid.:57). Identifying as a citizen, Dahlgren argues, is the most important condition for political engagement, a focus which he shares with Hermes and other central voices in this thesis.

Engagement, then, is defined by Dahlgren as 'subjective states, that is, a mobilized, focused attention on some object […] in a sense, a prerequisite for participation' (2009:80), which can be applied to both political and cultural objects (ibid.). The focus on the subjective construction of identity unites these perspectives on political and cultural citizenship, and connects to the question of how and why people become engaged or disengaged. In other words, engagement connects issues of form to issues of audience subjectivity.

Stephen Coleman provides a useful framing of engagement that relates to contemporary changes in both political media and young adult citizenship, which opens up the discussion towards a more holistic understanding, and clarifies the normative perspective on citizenship of the present study:

> to be a democratic citizen is, at the very least, to be informed – not about everything but about enough to feel capable of contributing to the political conversation; to be encouraged to participate – not all the time, but at least some of the time; to feel engaged – at least to the point of not feeling like a permanent outsider; and to experience a sense of political confidence – a subjective belief that one has at least some chance to influence the world around one, and particularly its institutions of governance. Without public space and practices that nurture such basic elements of citizenship, what does it really mean to speak of politics as being democratic? In the face of the complex and paradoxical forces that are opening up and closing down contemporary democratic space, it is important to look at emergent spaces of political communication (2013b:378).

A core argument of the present study is that by widening the scholarly focus on media and citizenship, we might consider political comedy to be one of these 'emergent spaces of political communication' *alongside* others, because its strength lies in precisely this: its ability to make the young adult audience 'feel capable of contributing,' 'at least some of the time,' as Coleman expresses it.

Guiding the perspective on audiences is, among others, the work of Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998), who argue that audiences gain and uphold technical, analytical and interpretative skills that are valuable in themselves, as well as in relation to other parts of life (1998:119f), such as, in the case of political comedy, political and cultural citizenship. Throughout the thesis, audiences will be understood as 'groups of people before whom a performance of one kind or another takes place,' wherein 'performance' means all kinds of 'activity in which the person performing accentuates his or her behaviour under the scrutiny of others' (ibid.:40). The people that make up the audience are referred to as either 'the audience' or 'audiences,' in more general terms, and, in line with how Abercrombie and Longhurst use it, 'audience members' when referring to those who participated in the present study. Thus, the term 'member' here signifies someone who is a part of a specific audience, but also has additional relevance to the conceptualisation of citizenship, where individuals identify more or less as members of various kinds of communities.

The growing popularity of political comedy provides an opportunity for contemporary research to explore what it means to be a citizen, in a cultural as well as a political sense. Many are the theories and scholars that challenge tradi-

tional ideals of a rationally thinking, dutiful and well-informed citizen, as contemporary society seems to have outgrown this modern era model (cf. Barnhurst 1998; van Zoonen 2005; Dahlgren 2009; Bennett 2008; Coleman 2013a; b; Jones 2007; 2010; 2013a; b). Today, young adult audiences are increasingly turning to other forms of media than those traditionally associated with an informed and rational ideal of citizenship; they have diverse views on collectivity; and they seem to approach information and knowledge about the political somewhat differently from previous generations. They are increasingly 'self-informed,' as Coleman expresses it, actively seeking media spaces according to their everyday routines and interests (2013b). Political comedy is one of the spaces that they turn to, and becomes a part of some young adults' regular engagement with news, current affairs and political communication.

Aim and research questions

In light of the above, the present study focusses on political comedy engagement among Swedish young adult audiences (18-35 years old). The ambition is to provide a contextualised understanding of its form and functions in relation to contemporary political and cultural citizenship: what audience members enjoy or may be critical of, and how they feel about it – thereby exploring and filling the knowledge gap on political comedy engagement left by research focussed on texts and quantitative impacts. The focus here is the idea of citizens as self-informing and both rational and emotional in their engagement with political comedy. Put differently, the aim of this thesis is to *examine and understand how audience engagement in political comedy encourages political and cultural citizenship*.

By achieving its aim, this thesis will contribute to the scholarly and in some cases journalistic debates on the audience of popular political hybrid genres, and further, political journalism, creating a contextualised understanding of the changing political media habits among young adult audiences. This has a bearing on how we can consider contemporary young adult citizenship as self-informing (Coleman 2013b) and in need of symbolic levelling (Hariman 2008), in relation to the 'fundamentalist certainty' often found in conventional political journalism (Coleman 2013b) and among political elites more generally. Here, this thesis argues, the dimension of subjective emotions becomes central, since they are part of how we understand and reason (Burkitt 2014) and therefore, how we approach political and cultural citizenship.

To achieve this aim, four research questions have been formulated. They relate to the knowledge gap described above, which has been identified through

an assessment of the previous empirical studies of political comedy audiences and the wider range of textual studies on political comedy that currently exists, as well as the theoretical approaches mentioned. Each corresponds with a chapter in the thesis; the first one is based on the textual mapping of political comedy, and the following three relates to the audience research.

- How is the hybrid form of political comedy situated in the contemporary media landscape, particularly in relation to other forms of political media?
- How do political comedy audience members define and engage with political comedy as a hybrid genre?
- In what ways do political comedy audience members construct political identity and citizenship, in the context of Swedish politics and political issues?
- How does political comedy foster identity construction and cultural citizenship?

The aim and subsequent research questions necessitate a contextualising and exploratory qualitative approach to the audience, which has been largely ignored in previous research on political comedy. Thus, the study rests on empirical data from qualitative in-depth interviews and focus groups with young adult audience members, as well as a textual analysis that maps various forms of political comedy. The data has been examined through a thematic approach wherein contextualisation is emphasised, and where the central concepts of generic hybridity, political identity and cultural citizenship are in focus.

By allowing audiences to speak about how they feel, alongside their beliefs, categorisations and thoughts, scholarly research can gain a more well-rounded perspective of what it might mean to engage with political comedy, and further, to be a young adult citizen in contemporary Sweden. By answering the research questions, the study can contribute an understanding of engagement with political comedy and its modes of discourse, and how this connects to political engagement and cultural citizenship.

The perspective on audiences and popular culture as an 'arena' of cultural citizenship, where we struggle over meaning, as well as 'identity, subjection and subjectivity, community, and inclusion and exclusion' (Hermes 2005:6) are important to establish, as Hermes provides useful ideas on what might be included in a more holistic model of citizenship. By widening our understanding of citizenship, and bringing in and analysing otherwise excluded spaces where citizens feel 'capable of contributing,' as Coleman expresses it (2013b:378),

scholarly discourse on citizenship, media and culture moves forward, towards a more empirically based – and this thesis argues – more democratic perspective.

The study utilises the broader term 'the political' alongside the more formal 'politics,' following Chantal Mouffe's definitions wherein 'the political' captures 'the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society' (1999:754) which in various forms 'emerge in diverse social relations'; while 'politics' implies:

> the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political' (Mouffe 1999:754).

The point of this is that it allows the study to capture the various constructions found in the data, both with respect to the hybridity of political comedy, and with respect to audiences' constructions of citizenship and political identities.

Additionally, it is part of Dahlgren's framework of civic cultures, which combines cultural and political perspectives to the study of engagement. It allows us to 'underscore the importance of free-wheeling conversation [that refers], at least implicitly, to the potential of the political' (2009:100), making it possible to 'accentuate the process by which the conversation can turn into civic talk, an ever-present potential' (ibid.). The point of this, he argues, is that it makes it possible to research civic agency and political participation 'as a process of becoming, conditioned by an array of factors' (ibid.:101).

The growing popularity of political comedy indicates, the present study argues, one way in which audiences engage in this 'process of becoming' that Dahlgren mentions. Rather than considering the shrinking interest in broadcast news among teenaged and young adult audiences an indication of a general loss of political engagement, which implicates a view of entertainment as replacing information, the issue needs to be considered from an empirically based perspective that questions the information/entertainment dichotomy. This dichotomy often lies implicit within these arguments, and indicates further problematic dichotomies, such as that which separates 'rational thought' from emotionality. As, among others, Dahlgren (2009), Coleman (2013a) and Ian Burkitt (2014) argue, people's reasoning consists of both rational and emotional elements. In the context of political comedy and its audience there is a need to provide a deeper understanding concerning the seeming shift in engagement, and link it to a wider social and cultural context, stretching beyond the narrowly defined confines of impact-focussed research.

Methodology and scope

The importance of approaching this topic through contextualised empirical qualitative research is that it creates a more in depth and nuanced understanding in relation to previous research. Audiences need to be considered in different ways, and taken seriously in their understanding of and engagement in political comedy. This approach means that the study does not attempt to create generalisable facts related to notions of direct effect or impact, on issues like the audience' knowledge levels or voting behaviour. Rather, it is focussed on achieving analytic generalisation in relation to the research questions.

Previous research on audiences of political comedy has concentrated mainly on the impacts of specific comedy programmes (cf. Amarasingam 2011; Becker, Xenos, & Waisanen 2010; Baumgartner & Morris 2006), where the interest is centred on what direct effects specific programmes have on their audiences when it comes to various aspects of the modern era ideals of informed and rational citizenship. As Jones explains, the problematic aspects of these studies have to do with their limited perspective on what matters to citizenship, and what doesn't, which then 'closes down the potential meanings in media texts and the understanding of types and forms of audience engagement with those texts' (2013a:4). Instead, the methodological choices made in the study have been informed by a pragmatic, qualitative approach, in line with what Clive Seale (1999) proposes, meaning that we should avoid over-entrenchment by speaking of quality in qualitative research. This is achieved by the use of several approaches, since:

> [i]t is possible to have an encompassing view of quality in qualitative research that respects the contributions made at different 'moments' in its history. […] I regard research as a craft skill, relatively autonomous from the requirement that some people want to impose that it reflect some thoroughly consistent relationship with a philosophical or methodological position (1999:17).

This means asserting quality through various ways, such as discussing coding schemes with other researchers, letting them see samples of the data, as well as using more than one method. Hence, the main methods of in-depth interviews and focus groups were accompanied by questionnaires that participants filled out, concerning biographic information and media habits, as well as a qualitative textual mapping of contemporary political comedy, which is used to position the genre and contextualise various forms of political comedy.

To be able to focus the recruitment of participants, two examples of popular political comedy programmes were chosen. Swedish radio programme *Tan-*

kesmedjan, and American television programme *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* were mentioned in calls for participants, although the participants were then encouraged to speak in wider terms about other examples of political comedy they might engage in, such as stand-up or cartoons. This means that the results of the analysis cannot be seen as solely focussing on broadcast media, even though it is the main focus. These two specific examples of political comedy were chosen based on their popularity among Swedish young adults, but the ambition is to avoid isolating specific media since audiences themselves do not isolate media content from other sources of input and discussion.

More specifically, the study utilises transcript data from eighteen individual interviews and two focus groups, consisting of six and seven participants, carried out in Sweden during 2013 and 2014. There are several reasons to study Swedish young adults. Firstly, although they to a certain extent follow the trend of waning broadcast and press news consumption, they are still relatively loyal news consumers (cf. Hill 2007; Andersson 2007; Wadbring 2016) when considering various kinds of news media. Secondly, Sweden has a high level of participation in elections, and has seen a growth in the last decade, which includes young adult voters: in the age group of 18-35-year-olds, around 82 percent participate in national elections[2]. Related to these two reasons is the fact that the field work of the present study was carried out in a particularly election-heavy time in Sweden. During this period there were two different national elections, which made the media write about the 'super election year'. This makes for a particularly interesting context from a political standpoint: Swedish citizens were preparing to make their voting decisions in the near future, which meant that there was an additional political focus not only in conventional news media, but in other forms of media as well. Despite this, Sweden does follow the international trend wherein political parties in general are losing both active and passive members, and collective action seems to be a less popular form of engagement. Even if Swedes turn out for elections, they are less likely to participate politically through established parties than they were 20 years ago (cf. Petersson 2005)[3]. These factors make Sweden a productive context of study, where some forms of political and cultural engagement can be considered high, while other factors related to such engagement, especially rele-

[2] In the latest national election (2014), c. 81 % of 18-29-year-olds voted, and c. 84 % of 30-34-year-olds, which is just slightly lower than general participation where 85,8 % of the population voted (Statistics Sweden 2016).

[3] According to the established political parties' own figures, most of them gained new members during 2014, which has been connected to the elections held during that year; but during the past 20 years some estimate that about half of the members of established political parties have been lost (cf. *GöteborgsPosten* 2015).

vant to political identity and community construction, are changing, just like in other western countries.

The data has been coded qualitatively in accordance with themes which correspond to the research questions and theoretical framework. This approach is close to what Schrøder, Drotner, Kline and Murray (2003) call a thematic or discursive analysis, which allows for a more explorative style that is beneficial when conducting contextualising audience studies in areas where not much qualitative empirical research has been carried out before.

Thesis outline

The next chapter (2) discusses the main theoretical frameworks that guide the present study, which focus on genre and form and the expectations these create among audiences; humour studies and political comedy, which includes concepts such as the carnivalesque and symbolic levelling; genre work, where the perspective of audiences as productive is outlined; citizenship and media, where the framework of the civic circuit is synthesised with that of cultural citizenship; as well as identity construction and emotions, where the subjective construction of reflexivity and feelings is highlighted. Chapter 3 focusses on the methodological aspects of studying political comedy engagement, as well as the methods used. It argues for a contextualising approach and applies the fallibilistic perspective on methodology, which is a pragmatic way of dealing with the inherent issues of social science research. It then goes on to describe and argue for the choices made throughout the research process, which were guided by the aims of achieving analytical generalisability and allowing for audience members' voices to be heard. The following chapter (4) is a background and mapping chapter that contains an overview of the conceptualisation of hybridity in political entertainment. This chapter also orientates the reader by providing an example of a humour scandal in Sweden, as well as an overview of political comedy, so that the broad range of political comedy as a form becomes clear. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are the main analytical chapters, and focus on audience engagement. In Chapter 5, audience constructions of political comedy are treated through the concept of genre work, and it is established that audience members enjoy the cleverness of political comedy and its media critique; and the chapter shows how comedians work as 'levelling teachers' who guide audiences through complex political discourse. Chapter 6 deals with the audiences' constructions of political identity and citizenship, and charts the various joys and problems that audience members associate with political engagement. It is established that these young adult audience members struggle with particular

aspects of such engagement, such as feeling uneasy and lacking confidence, and that they have issues with political parties or groups as a means of engagement. This is further analysed through discussions on lacking political efficacy and the affective deficit of contemporary democracy, and how that relates to irony and the importance of playful modes of engagement. As these areas of conceptualisation are found in a wider range of fields, this chapter has required more space than the other analytical chapters. In Chapter 7, focus moves to cultural citizenship through the study of audience members' construction of identity and community. Five main themes related to such construction are identified, which in various ways problematise how political comedy engagement can foster identity construction: enjoyment and social context; national contexts; ideology and strong emotions; knowledge and education; and irony and indirection. Political comedy engagement simultaneously connects audiences to each other, and creates boundaries between them, which further argues the point of contextualisation of research and its results. The final chapter (8), summarises the research project, and goes through its key findings in relation to the research questions, highlighting how political comedy challenges the information/entertainment dichotomy; the importance of play and emotional authenticity; the uneasiness and 'stage fright' of young adult political comedy audiences; and the processes of inclusion and exclusion that are connected to political comedy engagement. This chapter ends with a further development of the discussion on political comedy and cultural citizenship, proposing what the values that political comedy engagement defends might be, and how such values might be understood in the context of political journalism and discourse.

2. Theoretical reflections on political comedy engagement

In the quest to understand engagement in political comedy, and explore the connections between cultural and political engagement, there is a need to combine the theoretical perspectives from a few different fields. As Calhoun and Sennett (2007) put it in their call for interdisciplinary work:

> As practice, culture is an achievement, not simply an environment. But this is an achievement of large-scale collective participation as well as an elite memory and exemplary performance. Better, perhaps, culture is an always incomplete, never entirely systematic weaving of achievements together. It is work. It is play. It is projects by which people try to persuade, entertain, lead, deceive, and arouse the passions of others. Because it exists in projects, it exists also in struggles – to get ahead, to redefine beauty, to promote morality, to resist ideological hegemony (2007:7).

This view of the relationship between culture and the political, wherein social dimensions need to be included, guides the theoretical discussions presented in the following chapter, and the thesis as a whole. Using the theoretical framework of cultural citizenship, as conceptualised by Hermes (2005) and of civic culture, conceptualised by Dahlgren (2009), and combining them with that of Corner (2011), the present study approaches political comedy and its young adult audience as illustrative of the connections we find between cultural and political engagement. Importantly, the theoretical discussions in this chapter will, when relevant, be deepened within each analytical chapter. This chapter should be considered an overview for the sake of orientating the reader.

Political comedy's modes of discourse include satire, ridicule, mockery, spoofing (or parody) and raillery (Corner et al. 2013), which all involve both humorous and ironic modes (Hariman 2008) – forms which overlap and are mixed in most examples of political comedy. These forms are characterised by the fact that they are always reflective or referential of something, always using 'something else' to create its content. That something is by definition political.

In a wider perspective, the forms of political comedy are here considered to be types of Calhoun and Sennett's 'project[s] by which people try to persuade, entertain, lead, deceive, and arouse the passions of others' (2007:7); a space where the abovementioned 'struggles' take place, often on a routine basis.

This chapter will treat the most important theoretical perspectives used in the study. The order in which they are presented mirrors that of the empirical chapters, beginning with theories on genre and form, more specifically on humour and political comedy, continuing with scholarly discourse on audiences and genre work, then going on to focus on young adult political engagement and citizenship, and finishing up with relevant theoretical perspectives on subjective identity and emotions.

Genre and form

When researching media, Corner argues, we need to focus our attention to generic form. This holds true even if we are promoting an audience perspective on the media. Social science has been lacking in this respect, and this is problematic, because the forms we encounter when engaged in media connect to our subjective perception of that engagement, as well as to what Corner calls 'social and political order' (2011:51). Political comedy comes in many different hybrid or, as Corner calls them, intergeneric forms[4], which the present study argues is an additional reason for scholars to focus on it.

In other fields, such as film and literature studies, genre as an object of study has occupied researchers to a greater extent. According to among others, Neale (2000), their interest was partly due to a rejection of auteurism or the auteur theory and a growing focus on popular culture and art. These studies have ranged from various 'classificatory exercises' (Ryall 1975:27) through the creation of taxonomies, to the theoretical conceptualisations of genres as such (Neale 2000). Emphasis has shifted from the genre definitions of producers and marketers, to critics, scholars themselves and in some cases, audiences. To distinguish between these, many genre theorists have used Todorov, who wrote about theoretical and historical genres (1975). Jane Feuer problematises them in relation to film and television, arguing that the categories found in literature studies, such as drama, lyric, tragedy and comedy, are overly broad (1992). They cover 'numerous diverse works and numerous cultures and centuries,'

[4] Another concept which is close to these is subgenre, which usually indicates 'specific traditions or groupings within' genres (Neale 2000:7). The difference depends on definitions of genres as such, but has to do with the fact that hybrid or intergeneric forms draw *across* various genres, while sub-genres 'stay' within one genre.

while television and film are 'culturally specific and temporarily limited' (ibid.:105). As Feuer determines, literary genres are more often theoretical, meaning they are 'deduced from a pre-existing theory of literature' (Todorov 1975:21) while television and film studies fit better with the historical genres, as they are products of empirical observation. In both cases, though, '[g]enres are made, not born' (Feuer 1992:108) which is why they can be challenging to study. There is an inherent risk of over-determining the structural aspects of genres so that it becomes impossible track change or consider genres as dynamic (ibid.:113). This is one important reason for why, the present study argues, the audience should be included in analysis of genre. While it is important to follow the generic developments of media, as this may help us understand media and audience engagement as such (Corner 2011), we must not lose sight of the fact that genres change. As Neale notes, the genre criteria created are often neither systematic nor 'long-lived' (2000:18), which has meant that different forms of media and culture have been assessed according to different criteria.

For all such studies, the so-called dilemma of genre studies[5] appears: to be able to study a genre, such as political comedy, we define what it is we are studying 'prematurely,' because we need a working understanding of the genre (such as the one used in this thesis, from Corner et al. 2013); which necessarily means that we a priori exclude possible alternative definitions of the genre. For this reason, this thesis will follow the ambition to 'map' contemporary examples of political comedy, rather than produce any new definitions, focussing more deeply on the definitions of genre found among audience members. Again, as Neale and others (cf. Bolin 2008) remind us, genres should be considered processual. For instance, Hanne Bruun illustrates this point in her studies of television satire in Denmark (cf. 2012; 2011; 2008; 2007), showing how the satire no longer focusses on strictly political issues and stories, 'but also [on] social and lifestyle aspects of modern life in the Danish society' (2008:6). While drawing any such conclusions regarding Sweden falls outside the scope and method of the present study, it is clear that the satire, mockery, raillery and spoofing that are considered the building blocks of political comedy here, can be directed at different 'targets'. And further, the drawing of boundaries between what is considered to be political, social or related to lifestyle varies among scholars and audiences alike.

On the most basic level, genre is labelling of media, signalling to the audience what they should expect (cf. Hill 2007). Hence, focus is on what genre

[5] This has also been referred to as genre criticism's 'circularity' (Turner 2008).

'does in the communication process,' as Bruun puts it (2008:5) and this means that 'function is more important than definition' (ibid.).

Political comedy ranges from fact to fiction, across different media types. This is why the terms genre and form are both used in the thesis – because they indicate slightly different aspects of this focus. While 'genre' will be used to describe the more generally held, and historically charged, categories of media and culture used as labels by media producers and known by audiences, 'form' connotes the more intricate characteristics of 'aesthetic organisation' (Corner 2011:49). Both are of relevance in the study of audience engagement – genre as it is understood and constructed by producers, and by audiences, which do not necessarily match; and form as it has been understood and constructed in research. While political comedy is primarily engaged in for its ability to entertain and amuse its audience, it also holds other kinds of qualities related to form that have been explored in a growing body of research, that are of relevance. Combining these perspectives is one important aspect of the study of engagement in political comedy.

Although producers aren't included as an object of this study, audience constructions of their intent is. Generic labelling says something about the intent of the producer, and the term 'satire' is often used to signal some form of serious intent (cf. Corner et al. 2013), which means that it is regularly considered more important, of higher quality, or somehow in better taste, which the present study's participants are aware of to varying degrees. Additionally, the use of various formal modes doesn't necessarily help audiences when they try to understand possible intent. For instance, political comedy can use raillery to make a 'serious' point, or a more 'straight' mode of discourse without having any serious intent. For audiences engaging with political comedy, the present study argues, part of the enjoyment is derived from trying to determine what is meant to be serious (and what that serious point may be), and what isn't. This is true for irony, humour and comedy in general.

Humour studies and political comedy

Humour, as such, has been studied from many different perspectives; from philosophical, psychological, rhetorical, sociological, literary to media perspectives, establishing the interdisciplinary field of humour studies. At the core of humour, we find the joke. Simon Critchley defines it as a 'specific and meaningful practice' (2002:4) containing an implied understanding between audience and joke-teller; 'namely some agreement about the social world in which we find ourselves as the implicit background to the joke' (2002:4). Important

here is the implicit understanding, and the fact that this understanding can be more or less shared between those interacting. According to Critchley, jokes challenge our understanding of the empirical world, and humour is 'produced by a disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented in the joke, between expectation and actuality' (2002:1). The disjunction between expectation and reality, it is argued, is what lends humour to political discussion and analysis. Gray, Jones and Thompson see humour, or its genre of comedy, as a possible means for social critique, and explain that:

> The initial obstacle blocking many critics of satire from seeing its political potential arises because satire is coded as a subgenre of comedy, and comedy and humour represent for many the opposite of seriousness and rational deliberation. […] Admittedly, some simply do not want humor to have any substance, preferring to regard it as a zone of escape from the real world problems […]. But a closer look […] reveals a form that is always quintessentially about that which it seems to be an escape from, and hence a form that is always already analytical, critical, and rational, albeit to varying degrees (2009:8).

Gray et al. go on to use Critchley to argue that 'all humor challenges social or even scientific norms *at some level*' (2009:8f, italics in original), which means that 'all laughter (in assuming social norms) also challenges or otherwise toys with these norms' (2009:9). The questions, then, are if humourists and audiences are aware of this, and if these challenges are interpreted similarly.

Mary Douglas, used by Critchley among others, sees jokes as 'anti-rites,' insofar as they mock and parody rites or ritual practices of society (1975). That, in turn, is a development of Bakhtin's famous idea of the carnivalesque (1968), which is often referred to in connection to political comedy (cf. Hariman 2008; Gray et al. 2009; Jones 2010). Bakhtin, using the context of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, saw humour as important to public life, and something that has been under-researched throughout modern history:

> The element of laughter was accorded the least place of all in the vast literature devoted to myth, to folk lyrics, and to epics. Even more unfortunate was the fact that the peculiar nature of the people's laughter was completely distorted; entirely alien notions and concepts of humor, formed within the framework of the bourgeois modern culture and aesthetics, were applied to this interpretation. […] And yet, the scope and the importance of this culture were immense in the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture (1968:4).

Further, Bakhtin emphasises the subversive and emancipating, even empowering aspects of these eras:

> The carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organized in their own way, the way of the people. It is outside and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socio-oeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity (1994:225).

Humour, then, is connected to 'the people'. This is why it's important to see it as involving the audience in an explicit manner: it is instantly apparent for everyone in a room if a joke has been appreciated or not, and by how many.

To further nuance scholarly debate on humour, Michael Billig stresses the negatively connoted sides of humour – 'the cruelties of humour' as he calls them (2005b). He believes this aspect of humour to be under-researched in contemporary academic and popular debates. This, he argues, has created an overemphasis on the positive or even healing power of humour, and a lacking focus on the ridiculing aspects of it. This is important, as it contrasts the inviting or inclusive functions of humour, often stressed in debates on political comedy. Billig uses Goffman to explain how humans comply with social order due to a strong fear of embarrassment, making it 'the glue of social life' (2005b:236). This view of embarrassment as a key aspect of social life means that humour in the form of ridicule 'plays […] a key role in the maintenance of social life' (ibid.), but has been underestimated as such by social theorists. Ridicule must be considered from a social-psychological perspective, as it has a powerful disciplining function. This, in turn, is relevant to Hermes' discussion on popular culture, as it is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. Humour is a space where we distinguish between ourselves and others, where we emphasise our values, and where we separate correct behaviour from incorrect behaviour – in other words, it is used in the production of categorisation.

Connected to the ideas of the carnivalesque and the social power dynamics of humour is the writing of Robert Hariman, who argues that satire and parody work as 'symbolic levellers,' which:

> is carefully circumscribed in non-democratic societies: e.g., by keeping the fool within reach of the king's wrath, or jokes within the relatively safe interactions of private life, or the festival within the ritual confides of a specific place and time. When put into public media the widespread, uncontrolled dissemination that followed, comedy in democratic societies becomes a comprehensive available leveler. This democratic sensibility is enchanted by another comic inclination: silliness. Briefly, for the leveling within the parodic performance to be fully effective, it may have to be disseminated at the simplest, most apolitical level of laughter (2008:256f).

Further, Hariman sees satire and parody as leading to 'irreverent democratization of the conventions of public discourse, which in turn keeps public speech closer to its audience and their experiences of the public world' (2008:258). This view of political comedy is detectable in the present study's data. Audience members saw certain comedians as daring to speak 'the truth' when no one else – mainly within political journalism – does. They didn't necessarily believe it would result in actual political change, but they could *feel* levelled with political power, which is valuable in itself, this study argues.

To nuance the discussion further, Critchley makes the point that most humour is 'comedy of recognition' which reinforces consensus instead of criticising anything (2002). Humour cannot be inherently good or bad, political or apolitical, since it can work to reinforce or challenge stereotypes, norms or structures, which Billig comments on as well – it is heavily contextual in that respect (2005b). The 'comedy of recognition' is labelled 'benign' by Critchley, who argues that it plays off social hierarchies in a relatively harmless way; but:

> egregiously, much humour seeks to confirm the status quo either by denigrating a certain sector of society, as in sexist humour, or by laughing at the alleged stupidity of a social outsider (ibid.:11f).

That kind of humour is not about laughing 'at power,' but about 'the powerful laughing at the powerless' (2002:12). What it comes down to, then, is power balances and relations, and what analysis of those relations that the particular humour rests on, as well as how audiences consider them.

According to Linda Hutcheon, irony as a mode of discourse shares many of these characteristics. She stresses the contextual nature of irony and the fact that intent and interpretation might vary greatly, and then goes on to define irony as 'the superimposition or rubbing together of […] meanings (the said and the plural unsaid) with a critical edge created by a difference in context' (1994:19). This makes irony 'transideological' (ibid.:10) – a possible instrument to be used by any kind of ideology or position of power.

Importantly, humour can then be assessed through an analysis of what the object of ridicule is, in relation to both intent and interpretation. This is done to varying degrees by the audience members in the study, as part of their political comedy engagement, and in much of the textual analysis available in contemporary research. If benign humour confirms status quo by ridiculing, for instance, women, less educated people or animals, other kinds of humour can do the opposite, by ridiculing oppressive structures, hypocrisy or people who struggle to uphold the status quo (cf. Critchley 2002). Therefore, the analysis

of humour in general, and engagement in humour, needs to be contextualised to be fully understood.

A common object of ridicule in contemporary political comedy is news media and political journalism, illustrating how these are considered to hold power. According to scholars like Coleman (2013b) and Carlson and Peifer (2013), as part of late modern development, contemporary journalism is being challenged – not only by political comedy. The epistemic authority held by journalism during the modern era is being questioned, for instance by the introduction of alternative forms of discourse (cf. Combe 2015; Baym 2013), or the inclusion of other kinds of journalists (such as citizen journalists). These kinds of development are connected to larger shifts of questioning authority and modern era normative dichotomies, such as rational/emotional or information/entertainment. By using self-deprecation and ironic ambiguity, political comedy behaves differently than news does, and in doing so, exposes the element of performance in professional journalism. For Hariman, this is useful for revealing the boundaries of 'dominant discourse' (2008:251) often set by news outlets and politicians. Within the data, this type of criticism of contemporary news media was prevalent. In the next section, the study's approach to audience constructions is dealt with.

The audience and genre work

By engaging audience members in what may be called genre work (cf. Hill 2007) their constructions of political comedy are exposed. When audiences are engaged with media, they are productive (Shimpach 2011; Hermes 2005) – and in the case of political comedy, it is mainly about the production of pleasure. Considering engagement productive is part of redefining and further distancing audience research from the perspective of the passive media receiver, who is directly influenced by isolated encounters with the media. Here, viewing and listening are not 'just' activities; but are productive activities, where the media audience engage in the production of pleasure, interpretation (Hermes 2005; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998; Shimpach 2011) and cultural practice (Calhoun & Sennett 2007) – and in this process, they gain technical, analytical and interpretative skills (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998). Such productivity and development of skill are related to the more specific focus of the present study: the construction of genre (Hill 2007; Corner 2011), of political identity and citizenship (Dahlgren 2009) and of cultural citizenship (Hermes 2005).

Hermes is focussed on 'the production of hopes, fantasies, and utopias' (2005:41) enabled by 'new means of communication' and 'semiotic self-

determination,' i.e. having the ability to use media for identification (ibid.). The possible points of identification are infinite and unpredictable, as will be shown in the present thesis, because it's not just about identifying with characters or problems, it can be about identifying with political perspectives, modes of discourse, implicit audiences, or aesthetic ideals.

Associated with this is a production of categorisation of genre and hybridity, as political comedy can be seen as a mix of genres, such as comedy and political media, often in the form of news and current affairs. To understand this 'act of classification' (Hill 2007:85) further is important to the study of engagement, and was here specifically used to understand audience members' constructions, interpretations, categorisations, and placement of political comedy, within the hybrid spaces of political media and entertainment. Hill, who has studied hybridity and the audience in other contexts, describes the concept of genre work as 'involv[ing] multiple modes of engagement. It is the work of being both immersed in watching a genre, and reflecting on this experience' (2007:84). Further, she refers to John Ellis' 'working through' (2000), thereby connoting the psychodynamics of how 'television processes the material world into narrativized forms' (Ellis in Hill 2007:84). The genre work of the present study lies close to that, although differs in one key aspect. Instead of drawing on the psychodynamics of genre work, it draws upon the contributions of humour studies discussed above, wherein the function and status of humour are at the centre. What is it that humour 'does' that other forms do not? And how does that relate and compare to other genres which treat the political? This is of special importance, because as Jason Mittell puts it:

> [a]ccording to traditional accounts of generic mixture, the process of blending two (or more) genres together results in a dilution of generic categories – as genres become less pure, they lose their distinction and their usefulness. […] genre mixture confounds these clear categorical imperatives by diluting boundaries and core meanings. But if we look at genres as culturally operative categories, then genre mixing becomes a sight of *heightened* genre discourse (2004:156, italics in original).

The genre work associated with hybrid formats like political comedy is a perpetual process wherein 'viewers highlight how they are not always sure why certain programmes go with others' as well as 'how they change their minds about the relationship between factual programmes and genres' (Hill 2007:85).

In many cases, the present study shows how genre work in relation to political comedy provides insights into wider constructions held by audiences – often critical – related to contemporary political media, citizenship and democ-

racy. It was clear that such criticism was connected to what is often called 'democratic deficits' in the literature on political communication and political media more generally (cf. Dahlgren 2009). The coming section deals with the theoretical aspects of citizenship, and of such criticism, which were used to work through the data.

Citizenship and engagement

The hybridity of political comedy means that academic and journalistic discourse about its value for citizens varies quite widely (cf. Hart & Hartelius 2007; Hariman 2008). In line with arguments presented by scholars like Jones (2006; 2010; 2013a; b) and Combe (2015), political comedy's growing popularity can be linked to wider shifts within contemporary citizenship and political communication. The normative, theoretical and methodological stances of such scholars are that the study of citizenship and media needs to develop, by widening its focus on what kinds of media are considered relevant to citizenship, and in turn, what can be seen as included in citizenship.

One of the central arguments in this discussion is that our understanding of engagement needs to be problematised. As Dahlgren (2009; 2015) reminds us, engagement can be considered the pre-stage to participation, whether it is in the political, or the cultural. Central to the study of engagement is identity, which is linked not only to media, but to a wider set of societal and cultural conditions. We need to be able to see ourselves as citizens, to be citizens, and we need to be able to imagine various realistic venues of engagement, to engage further. Everyone should have a chance to see themselves as potentially political. This reflects the normative ideas of citizenship guiding the analysis in the present thesis, because those who want to engage politically more than they do should be able to, but those who don't shouldn't automatically be considered passive or impaired. Such individuals may be engaged in communities or issues that haven't (yet) gained status as 'political'.

Within the field of political communication, which is the major field traditionally tasked with researching media and democracy, news programming and newspapers have been considered important building blocks of modern democracy. According to this traditional or modern era view and study of citizenship, within western representational democracies, citizens are first and foremost tasked with voting and staying informed enough to be able to do so in a rational manner. During the past few decades, however, there have been changes both in media landscapes, the behaviour of media audiences, and of citizens. What is often called political entertainment has grown more popular,

as referred to earlier, while traditional news has become less popular, especially among younger or young adult audiences (cf. Wadbring 2016; Jones 2013a; Marchi 2012; Bennett 2008; Hill 2007). For many, among those Jones, this means that new scholarly perspectives on political media are needed:

> What is certain is that central aspects of the old regime—including an information hierarchy that privileged news discourses and practices over other forms of media, as well as a rigid dichotomy of assumed value of news and public affairs programming over 'entertainment' or citizen-generated media—can no longer be sustained (2013a:210).

These developments correspond to the larger shift from modern to postmodern or late modern views of research and knowledge within the social sciences (ibid.). As audiences find new sources of information or discussion, media research needs to loosen this 'rigid dichotomy of assumed value' and look elsewhere, or at least broaden the search to include the many and complex manners in which citizens interact with media. During the past decade, new concepts have been proposed by scholars to understand such complexity. For instance, Couldry, Livingstone and Markham use the concept of public connection to describe 'an orientation to any of those issues affecting how we live together that require common resolution' (2007:6), as a way of understanding political engagement in and through the media.

Similarly, Jones proposes that media scholars use a new vocabulary, to aid the abolishment of the normative discussions of 'good' and 'bad' media for citizens (2013a). Researchers solely focussed on news and current affairs miss relevant spaces for political communication, and contribute to a problematic normative assumption of what might be of value for citizenship. This normativity bleeds into a wider societal discourse on distinctions in political media, which is not only scientifically but democratically problematic. During field work for the present study, it became clear that young adult audiences are aware of these distinctions, an awareness which could have a negative impact on their political identity, confidence or belief that they, or others, are able to act as responsible citizens.

Instead of the traditional political communication vocabulary, including words like trust, knowledge and learning, attentiveness, agenda setting etc., Jones suggests moving towards a vocabulary that helps us redefine citizenship and study it better – terms like fandom, performativity, play, participation, emotions and affect (2013a). For the purpose of the present study, though, there is a need to work with both vocabularies, as proposed by Dahlgren (2009). For instance, Coleman (2013a) speaks of feeling (new vocabulary), *as*

well as being informed (traditional vocabulary). This allows for a more well-rounded view of what media 'does' and how its audiences navigate through different types and genres.

In a conference paper from 2015, Dahlgren further explores the notion of engagement. One of the reasons for using the concept is its inclusion of both the rational and the emotional. As mentioned, an important part of the theoretical foundation of the present thesis is the inseparability of the emotional from the rational on the subjective level. The emotional aspects of citizenship and engagement have largely been ignored by media scholars, especially within political communication. Contributions from scholars like Coleman and van Zoonen go against this, as they point to the importance of including focus on 'affective investment' of citizens (van Zoonen 2005:65) and the view of modern era citizenship as suffering from an 'affective deficit' (Coleman 2013a).

Engagement allows us to look closer at what 'draws' audiences and citizens 'into' something, and keeps them there. As Dahlgren points out, modern era models of citizenship have tended to consider citizens as separate from their respective socio-cultural contexts, so that scholars have overlooked what makes someone a citizen (2009). What are the preconditions? This is what focus on engagement can help rectify, in its inclusion of the wider contexts that citizens find themselves in, and also the understanding of human reasoning and cognition as made up of both the emotional, on the subjective level, or affective, on the collective level (cf. Papacharissi 2015), as well as the rational, as they should be considered as inseparable (cf. Burkitt 2014).

Hence, the main perspectives that make up this thesis' view of citizenship and engagement are Coleman's emphasis on emotions (2013a), Hermes' work on the popular culture audience and cultural citizenship (2005) and Dahlgren's framework of the civic circuit (2009), wherein he bridges modern and late modern perspectives on political engagement through the combination of political communication and cultural theories. The civic circuit works as an analytical framework, in which six main components are specified as being of importance to media and citizenship: knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices and identity. While all six components figure in the present thesis, the main focus of its analysis is on identity. To orientate the reader, all six will be treated briefly here, and related to cultural citizenship, before identity is developed further in its own section.

The civic circuit and cultural citizenship

The following section relates the framework of the civic circuit to that of cultural citizenship. These frameworks are united mainly through the focus on identity construction and knowledge in the present study.

As a node in the civic circuit, *knowledge* concerns the fact that 'people must have access to reliable reports, portrays, analysis, discussions, and debates about current affairs' to become civically engaged (Dahlgren 2009:108), including 'not just the questions if citizens already have the knowledge they need, but more important, if they are able to acquire relevant knowledge' (ibid.). This, in turn, is a task of informal and formal education, as well as the media (comparable to the development of skills discussed by Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998). Does political comedy provide this type of knowledge or opportunities for learning? This is one of the issues treated throughout the analysis, as the worries concerning news consumption among young adult audiences, leading to a loss of knowledge, is a central aspect of scholarly debates on political entertainment. According to Dahlgren, scholars fear this weakened engagement in conventional news media will 'result in a loss of legitimacy for democracy as a whole' (2009:1). According to Coleman (2013b), though, these worries might be lessened if we consider young citizens as moving from being 'informed' to being 'self-informed,' meaning they are actively selecting various kinds of sources of knowledge, rather than 'just' relying on the news.

Another critical remark to interject here comes from the cultural perspective, where knowledge isn't clear-cut. Who decides what knowledge is important, and relevant, and how are such decisions made? Hermes (2005) and Hartley (1996, 1999) focus on the concept of the knowledge class, coined by John Frow, since knowledge in the modern era has been guarded by certain groups or communities. According to Hermes, the term is useful as it identifies and explains 'how critics have mostly been in the business of guarding the terrain and exclusive knowledge against the lack of taste and insights if the multitudes' (2005:6). This double focus on knowledge (being informed vs. the knowledge class) is fruitful in the present study, as some of the participants stress the importance of keeping oneself informed, and belong to the knowledge class; they are highly educated and some of them see themselves in future careers within public life, like journalism, PR or politics, i.e. careers connected to political or discursive power. How knowledge or learning is associated with the engagement in political comedy is one thing, but then the ideal of education can be used to produce categorisation and boundaries. As such, knowledge is brought up in the analytical chapters in both ways.

In their introduction to an edited collection on the topic of cultural citizenship, Vega and Boele van Hensbroek (2012) map out some of the different ways the concept has been used. Without arguing for one specific use, they do propose a move from some of the earlier incarnations, where the 'mere "multicultural" application' (ibid.:2) of the concept was prevalent, suggesting that research focus on other aspects as well, because '[c]itizenship is related to culture in terms of the citizen's ability to grasp and recognise his or her own as well as others' interests' (ibid.:3). This is a core argument of the concept of cultural citizenship: it is about understanding the perspective of others, which necessitates that we learn about each other.

Further, they refer to Gerard Delanty (cf. 2007) as well as Nick Stevenson (cf. 2003; 2012) on the consideration of cultural citizenship as related to learning processes (Vega and Boele van Hensbroek 2012:4). Learning, Stevenson argues, is of importance, because '[u]nless the ability to deliberate upon matters of common concern is an ordinary feature of everyday life, such features are unlikely to take root in the wider community' (2012:35). The present thesis proposes that political comedy answers to both the issue of the ability to deliberate and be(come) aware of what's of common concern, and to that of the everyday, since it is built on enjoyable modes of communication that potentially focus on issues of common concern. Stevenson goes on to say that:

> The issue as to what is in the common good needs to become a matter of ongoing controversy. […] the common good is the matter of ongoing social and historical creation. The common good then has to be the outcome of a diversity of perspectives and intellectual challenge rather than simply being imposed by powerful interests and media forms of control (2012:35).

Political comedy's modes of address and the audiences' engagement represent one way of answering to this idea of learning and knowledge, as it simultaneously allows for an understanding of both knowledge and the issue of 'the common good' as 'ongoing social and historical creation' (ibid.).

Moving further along the civic circuit, to *values*, Dahlgren explains that 'democracy will not function if such virtues as tolerance and willingness to follow democratic principles and procedures do not have grounding in everyday life' (2009:110). Values can be divided into substantive values, which includes 'equality, liberty, justice, solidarity, and tolerance' (ibid.) and 'procedural ones, like openness, reciprocity, discussion, and responsibility/accountability' (ibid.). Here, the overlapping of the civic circuit and cultural citizenship is clear: they are somewhat visible in the section above, on the issue of knowledge, but can be slightly problematised through cultural citizenship:

> Democratic civil orders depend upon active forms of identification with civic values, but also with the possibility of passionate encounter. When we encounter others with whom we do not agree the temptation is to portray them as 'irrational'. What is being suggested here is that we might try to understand how different political subjects are positioned within discourses unlike those we currently occupy (Stevenson 2003:25).

Might political comedy facilitate not just such identification with the mentioned values, but also the 'possibility of passionate encounter' and an understanding of various subject positions? Among the audience members in the present study, the ideals of democracy, both substantive and procedural ones, are held in high regard, and heavily discussed, although this may be veiled by the use of an ironic tone. The connection between an ironic mode of discourse, emotions and values is further explored throughout the analysis.

The next part of the circuit is *trust*. In this context, Dahlgren explains: 'the bearers of trust are usually seen as the citizens, and the objects of trust are the institutions or representatives of government' (2009:112). It is 'especially trust among or between groups of citizens that is of interest' (ibid.), which relates directly to the focus on community construction within cultural citizenship. In the ongoing processes of inclusion and exclusion that are inherent in such construction, trust plays an important role. Further, trust is connected to values, and when it comes to political comedy, a general cynical disposition, as being 'untrusting,' is, again, reason for scholarly concern. Being exposed to comedy that ridicules political strategy and rhetoric, for instance, may be challenging to trust, if it is too one-sided. And on another level, the ironic mode of discourse often found in political comedy could be seen as distancing in general, not just between different citizens, but towards political media. The present study argues, though, that the constructions of low trust had less to do with political comedy, and more to do with general engagement in political media and political issues, which will be developed in the analytical chapters.

Then comes the concept of *space*, which is about the fact that 'citizens must be able to encounter and talk to each other' (Dahlgren 2009:114), so that they can connect and 'develop their collective political efforts' (ibid.). This requires a 'context in which they can act together' (ibid.), emphasising 'the accessibility of viable public spheres in the life-worlds of citizens' (2009:115). When it comes to 'large-scale representative democracies' he points out that:

> the representational chain may be very long, and the relevant communicative spaces may feel very remote, which is why it is crucial that decision-making structures and their various levels function and enjoy legitimacy. When such is not the case, the warning signals – not least in the form of civic disengagement – usually make themselves felt (2009:115).

The media and information technology play major roles as communicative spaces alongside more physical ones. Are young adult audiences finding these spaces? Is political comedy such a space? According to Hermes' understanding of cultural citizenship, popular culture is. Her writing on cultural citizenship can be associated with Coleman's self-informed citizen, and further, to Hartley's idea of DIY citizenship (1996; 1999; 2011) where popular culture and media is engaged 'by lay audiences for identity formation, associative relations,' to 'inform themselves and to connect with co-subjects' as well as to 'learn civic virtues' (Hartley 2011:74). One of the central arguments of the present thesis is that the young adult political comedy audience sees political comedy as an inviting low-stakes communicative space, where they are able to understand abstract and complicated political processes, perspectives and arguments, due to its use of ironic and humorous modes of discourse. As mentioned, such modes are not only inviting, but they lend themselves well to analysis and abstract reasoning, as they work by deconstruction (Critchley 2002).

Coleman considers the internet to be a potential 'emerging' communicative space, where young adults characterised by the 'ironic disposition' find information and debate. This disposition has to do with a 'democratic distaste for fundamentalist certainty' (Coleman 2013b:383), which is of great importance to the present study, as it challenges the traditional view of in what kinds of spaces citizens can develop. Irony, both as a disposition and a mode of discourse, is familiar to the young adult political comedy audience. They use it in their everyday, and often consider it to be 'authentic' which, the present study argues, makes it a prime 'accessible' kind of civic space. As authenticity, or rather the perception of authenticity, has become a value of contemporary western society, it is important to this discussion. Van Zoonen makes the point that applying critical perspectives on authenticity means considering it an 'ascribed rather than an innate or essential quality' (2013:46), and this is important, because while political comedy audiences consider irony to be a form of authenticity, that is certainly not the case among all parts of the general public (cf. Hutcheon 1994). This explains why ironic modes in communicative spaces are appreciated by some, but not by others.

Practices, next up, are 'concrete, recurring' (Dahlgren 2009:116) on the levels of individuals, groups and larger collectives. They 'help generate personal

and social meaning to the ideals of democracy' (ibid.) and are closely connected to skills, 'especially communicative competencies' (ibid.:117; again comparable to audience skills in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998). Practices are connected to knowledge too, Dahlgren explains, including things like being able to read and write or use a computer. Practices are central in the scholarly discussions on cultural citizenship as well – specified as reading, consuming, celebrating and criticising – where they, applied by the audience of popular culture, work to construct identity and community (Hermes 2005; Hartley 2011). Similarly, Vega and Boele van Hensbroek write about what they call 'citizenship acts,' which they believe have been defined in an overly limited way in 'classical takes on participation or "active" citizenship' (2012:6), and go on to propose that researchers focus on various kinds of 'linguistic performativity' that aren't usually 'recognised as a public discourse (understood as e.g. "private" or "cultural"), or which are realised apart from its traditional vehicles foremost journalistic mass media' (ibid.). Popular culture and political comedy serves an inviting function: it can be part of a daily or weekly routine, and it is communicated in a mode of discourse familiar to its audience, which means that engagement in it may be seen as an important part of the generation of 'personal and social meaning' that Dahlgren considers incremental to civic engagement (2009:116).

Moving to the last part of the circuit, *identities* refer to 'people's subjective view of themselves as members and participants of democracy' (2009:118), which Dahlgren argues is at the centre of civic cultures, 'with the other five dimensions contributing, reciprocally, to shaping the conditions of its existence' (ibid.:119). Further, identities are 'plural,' as people 'operate in a multitude of different "worlds" or realities', which means that they have 'different sets of knowledge, assumptions, rules and roles for different circumstances' and contexts (ibid.). Moreover, it is important to stress how identities are linked to the affective, since they develop through experience, which is emotionally based (ibid.). The issue of identity, as well as its connection to what Dahlgren calls 'membership' is essential to all kinds of citizenship. In his book on cultural citizenship (which focusses on the United States), Toby Miller begins by stating that '[w]e are in a crisis of belonging' (2007:1), and he is not alone in making this kind of assertion. Depending on where we look, this crisis seems more or less urgent. For instance, while voting is on the rise in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2016), party membership is declining, and the voting patterns and diminishing party loyalties expose how more and more Swedes tend to vote differently in different elections (cf. Dahlgren 2009). In the present study's analysis of participants' constructions, few identified with one specific party.

Rather, they complained about having to vote for a 'package deal,' showing that the issue of belonging is highly complex. This is potentially problematic from the perspective of democracy, as its contemporary western design rests on collective action and representation through parties. But it also has to do with the much discussed 'identity politics,' where difference and discrimination are at the centre. Who is allowed to participate, and on what terms? And who gets to say what is political? As theorists of cultural citizenship remind us, identity, like the construction of knowledge, is necessary to emphasise in the wake of the modern era conceptualisation of citizenship, as it is often embodied by white heterosexual males, often middle aged[6], whose acts and thinking are considered rational (cf. Hermes 2005; Stevenson 2012; Miller 2007).

For the study's participants, these are important questions – not only from their personal viewpoints as non-white, gay, women or young adults – but as legitimate political issues: they care about feminism, anti-racism, human rights, environmentalism and other areas of politics which are often dismissed. The modern era view of emotions as separated from rational reasoning must be modified so that media content which appeals to emotions is considered less threatening, or even the opposite of that, as a resource. As Dahlgren states:

> Affective involvement with political goals and values compatible with democracy not only poses no threat, but contributes to democracy's vibrancy – and to people's sense of their political selves (2009:119).

Political comedy arguably resonates more clearly with the emotional aspects of the subjective experience of citizenship, than do other kinds of political media, and this is one of its core strengths.

Identity construction and emotion

Identity and community construction are significant aspects of engagement because '[i]t is difficult to feel empowered if one is alone, and civic participation is basically a collective activity, people acting in concert with one another' (Dahlgren 2009:121). Here, media representations of different types of identity are important, as well as the representations we find in our social surroundings. Burkitt writes that our sense of self is 'at the centre of out relational engagement with the world and with others' (2014:101). All perception of the world is 'based on the self,' and since 'the self is emotional, so too are these

[6] Of course, other characteristics can be added to this, such as physical or mental function, immigrant status, profession, education level etc.

perceptions at their core' (ibid.). We cannot step out of this – there is no neutral way of engaging with the world, which means that 'emotion has to be at the very heart of rationality, as well as all other ways of perceiving and thinking about the world (ibid.). Thus, the present thesis attempts to focus especially on constructions of emotions that appear in the data, as they are important sources in the quest to understand identity and community construction.

Two studies that have linked cultural citizenship to political comedy illustrate this focus. In a recent article, Kristina Riegert uses cultural citizenship to understand popular Arab blogs (among them satirical ones), because the concept suggest we focus on 'the role of everyday sources and resources (information and entertainment-seeking) in individuals' and groups' constructions of identity and engagement in communities' (2015:461),

which stresses the importance of the routineness that popular culture and political comedy invites. Similarly, El Marzouki connects online satire in Morocco to cultural citizenship, by focussing on the ritual aspect of consuming satirical content. Such ritual consumption and reproduction of satire's 'signs, symbols and meanings' should be considered active and constant participation 'in the construction and transformation of one's political, social, and cultural identity' (2015:293). Both these accounts stress the significance how entertaining formats creates an ongoing, 'ritual' engagement.

Related to this is the issue of representation. Carpentier, among others, stresses that by seeing regular examples in the media, of who and what we are, and who and what we are not, we can easier position ourselves as citizens (2011; see also Couldry 2010). Hermes connects the audiences' feelings of representation to cultural citizenship, saying that:

> For audience members […] the material claim to belong and to be recognized as a co-owner is involved. Cultural citizenship is taking responsibility for (one's piece of) popular culture. We take responsibility for popular culture by judging it, and we use it to find yardsticks to judge others by (2005:16).

When we judge others as well as popular culture, this is emotionally charged. Similarly, Abercrombie and Longhurst comment on how 'fan feelings and identifications are central in the productive construction of identity' (1998:154). Analysing how 'responsibility' and 'judgement' is constructed in relationship to political comedy will provide important insights into how political comedy relates to identity and community construction, and further, what values are defended through the engagement in political comedy.

When engaged, we actively connect to others, by producing and reproducing feelings of belonging to them (Hermes 2005). In political comedy, the

present study argues, the politically, socially and culturally produced identities of audiences 'meet,' which is why it is important to the study of engagement.

As many others have argued (cf. Calhoun 1994; Giddens 1991; van Zoonen 2013), late modern identity can be seen as in flux, as it is subjected to a steady stream of ideals and norms, and those ideals and norms become critiqued and questioned. As mentioned, Corner (2011) argues that issues related to identity and subjectivity are central to the study of media, since late modern society promotes awareness and improvement of the self – a development which is happening 'alongside' what he sees as shifting notions of collectivity and 'social values' (2011:86).

With the so-called 'affective turn' of late modern social science (cf. Wetherell 2012; Papacharissi 2015), the role of emotion connects to the changes in identity and subjectivity. Burkitt is here used as he has written about the relationality of emotion (2014), wherein emotions like fear or joy are seen as constructed in connection to others. The way we think and feel about various situations are part of an ongoing process of 'engagement and reflection' with the social (2014:101). In this line of argument, researchers like Burkitt and Wetherell argue against 'basic emotions research,' wherein emotions are placed within the self in a more isolated fashion (Wetherell 2012:24). This is important to political comedy engagement, as it is argued that audiences enjoy the fact that comedians and the implicit fellow audience recognise and share their feelings about the political.

Summary

This chapter has gone through the main theoretical ideas that have guided the present study and have been used to work through the data. It has established that there are important connections between cultural and political engagement, requiring an interdisciplinary focus. The first section focusses on theoretical perspectives on genre and form, to establish that genres aren't static, yet play a role in creating expectations among audiences. The chapter then moves into discussing humour studies, where the notion of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1968/1994) has given way to important ideas on the role and function of humour in society. It runs through later contributions that are of relevance, such as that of Billig (2005b) who stresses the ridiculing qualities of humour; that of Critchley (2002) who writes about how humour provides an 'alien perspective'; and of Hariman (2008) who sees parody and satire as 'symbolic levellers' of the people and those in power. This section also argues that humour and irony as modes of discourse need to be analysed contextually (cf. Hutcheon 1994).

Following this is a discussion on audience studies, wherein a contextualised approach is argued for, alongside the understanding of the audience as productive – of meaning, practices, categorisation and identity (cf. Hermes 2005; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998). Additionally important is the construction of hybrid genres (cf. Hill 2007; Mittell 2004) and the concept of genre work, which is used to analyse audience engagement. Then the chapter recounts the perspectives on citizenship and media used, wherein Hermes' conceptualisation of cultural citizenship (2005) and Dahlgren's model of the civic circuit (2009) are synthesised. Significantly, these perspectives widen the scope of what citizenship is and how it can be studied, and further, direct attention to a wider range of media that can be relevant to the political. Changes to late modern citizenship indicate that there is a need to question modern era dichotomies, where emotion is separate from reason, and information is separate from entertainment. This is illustrated in the writing of Coleman (2013b), who considers young citizens to be 'self-informing' which means scholars need to consider other kinds of media than those traditionally associated with political communication. The final part of the chapter stresses that emotion and affect are especially relevant to the study of political comedy (cf. Corner et al. 2013), and to identity construction.

3. Researching political comedy engagement

Hermes writes that '[t]he value of popular culture, whatever its textual qualities, is in what audience members *do* with it' (2005:13, italics in original); which describes the analytical focus of the present study well. In the following chapter the methodological issues of researching political comedy and its young adult audience are raised and discussed. First comes an overview of relevant discussions on how to study the audience, especially in the context of the field of political entertainment and its specific epistemological and normative 'camps'; then the chapter turns to the use of multiple methods and qualitative research, and finally, this is followed by a more concrete overview of the implementation of methods used in the study, as well as reflections on the research process as a whole. Importantly, some of this will be developed on within the analytical chapters, when relevant.

Political entertainment research

The number of studies on political comedy within media and communication or media and cultural studies has grown during the last decade (cf. Jones 2013a). American research focussing on programmes like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have been widely reported on in the media (American and international), since the claims of proven effects of the programmes have been many (cf. Holbert et al. 2007; Prior 2003; Becker et al. 2010; Becker 2011; Holbert et al. 2011). This follows a decade-old study made by the Pew Research Institute[7], which claimed that the young American audience was migrating from traditional news sources to political comedy, getting their information on elections through these newer formats[8], and then other similar studies fol-

[7] An American research institute and think thank which focusses on social issues, public opinion and demographical research, established in 2004.

[8] This initial study concluded that 47 percent of those under 30 years of age were 'informed at least occasionally' about presidential campaigns by late-night talk shows (Jones 2010:167).

lowed. Jones (2010; 2013a) makes a strong case against various theoretical and methodological aspects of these studies, especially with regard to their solid focus on isolated impact, as well as their use of the results, in both journalistic and academic texts.

Within a larger study on various types of British media and its audience responses, Corner, Richardson and Parry explore some 'illustrative examples' related to political comedy (2013). This article inspired this work in its earlier stages, as they tentatively conclude that comedy forms may create a sense of 'us' against 'them' (ibid.:43), but that the ironic mode may 'reconcile strands of critique with strands of acceptance' (ibid.).

When searching for research posing alternative types of questions about the political comedy audience, one does not find very much. Focussing on encoding-decoding, Johnson, del Rio and Kemmitt (2010) try to find out if audiences 'miss the joke' in satire, which according to the perspective of the present study is problematic since it considers meaning static and predetermined, and doesn't contextualise engagement. A better example, from this perspective, is found in Perks' 2012 study on the decoding of racial stereotypes satirised on American *Chappelle's Show*[9]. Perks found three decoding positions and argues that the programme can help 'viewers to be more conscious of their own interpretative practices' (2012:290). While the encoding-decoding model has contributed to academia's view of the audience as active, it still has an unnecessary emphasis on such audiences' ability to understand a text as it was 'meant' to be understood (encoded). Perks stresses the need for further exploration of 'the interactions between viewers and satiric texts' (ibid.), especially since textual studies of political comedy often seem to result in worry about growing cynicism or dropping knowledge levels, or reversely, a hope for increased political engagement and knowledge levels (cf. Prior 2010; Kim & Vishak 2008; Hart & Hartelius 2007). To shed light on these issues there is a need to explore them in a manner where audiences are considered contextually, as well as taken seriously, in their understanding of political comedy. As Hermes argues, focus needs to be on 'how audiences take up their roles as cultural citizens by enjoying and making use of popular culture – or, of course, by denouncing, hating, and vilifying it' (2005:13), as it exposes the 'otherwise hidden' aspects of popular culture, 'embedded as they are in everyday audience practice, while they are crucial – for better or for worse – for social cohesion and the continuation of the social order' (ibid.). In general, the research availa-

[9] A sketch comedy programme broadcast in the U.S. between 2003 and 2006, originally on Comedy Central but then sold on to international broadcasters.

ble on political comedy and political entertainment is focussed on specific texts, rather than audience practices and the contextualisation of them in a wider, social environment. Audience perspectives are missing, as among others Jones (2013a) points out, and the present study aims to rectify this though a holistic approach, which includes bringing in perspectives from the existing, textually focussed body of research on political comedy, as well as adding new empirical insight from the audience.

The focus on a specific textual genre, in this case hybrid, is important, because it has to do with the modes in which the audience is addressed and is:

> a key level of analysis […]: what are the interpretative strategies that audiences apply to the main genres of media fact and fiction, and to what extent do different genres serve as resources of action, in institutional settings and within the flow of everyday life (Jensen 2012:184).

The approach is also inspired by Corner's proposed design of media research, mentioned earlier. One of his main arguments is that to achieve a fuller understanding of media, three main aspects need to be taken into account: form, power and subjectivity. Applied here, this has been translated to mean that political comedy needs to be understood through three main foci, each treated in a separate analytical chapter: as a hybrid form or genre, from the perspective of media research, and of the political comedy audience (accessed through genre work); as related to citizenship and political media, which is linked to power; and as related to the construction of cultural citizenship, which connects to the subjective, through the study of audience members' identity production. It should be added, though, that the focus on the subjective also overarches the study in its entirety.

Contextualisation of audience constructions

Sonia Livingstone has written extensively on the developments of audience research (cf. 1998; 2005; 2013). In one of these accounts, she describes a shift from the problematic effects paradigm to a less reductionist form of study. Audience research needs to 'focus away from the moment of textual interpretation and towards the contextualisation of that moment' (Livingstone 1998:3), bringing forth a more 'detailed analysis of the culture of the everyday, stressing the importance of "thick description" as providing grounding for theory, together with an analysis of the ritual aspects of culture and communication' (ibid.), and further, how 'meanings are re/produced in daily life' (ibid.). This kind of ethnographically inspired study is based in constructivist epistemology

and is described by Jensen as 'an attempt to […] avoid both reified texts and decontextualized audiences' (2012:180). The present study applies such an approach to its data, where subjective constructions of individual audience members are in focus, and context factors are taken into account, both in method and analysis, throughout the research process.

To attain this contextualised material, in-depth interviews and focus groups are the main methods used in the study. Hermes (1995) quotes Morley to explain this approach, where:

> in the absence of any significant element of participation observation of actual behaviour beyond the interview, I am left only with the stories that respondents chose to tell me. These stories are, however, themselves both limited by, and indexical of, the cultural and linguistic frames of reference which respondents have available to them, through which to articulate their responses (Morley 1987:24).

The quote clarifies how the data is to be considered; where language is both constructed and constitutive simultaneously, and the 'stories' of audiences are valuable in themselves.

This take on how to consider 'stories' can further be related to that of Brian Fay (1996), who in his discussion on narrative realism and narrative constructivism concludes that they complement each other. He asks:

> Are stories lived or merely told? The best response to this question is to attack the false dichotomy it presumes: *either* lived *or* told? Stories are lived because human activity is inherently narratival in character and form: in acting we 'knit the past and the future together.' But stories are also told in that with hindsight we can appreciate narrative patterns which we could not appreciate at the time of acting. We tell stories *in* acting and we continue to tell stories afterwards about the actions we have performed. To coin new words to express this complex view, we might say that our lives are enstoried and our stories are enlived (ibid.:197, italics in original).

Fay's perspective on 'enstoried' lives and 'enlived' stories allows for a well-rounded approach that matches the present thesis' focus on engagement and subjective constructions of audience members. In interviews and focus group settings, people are asked to reflect on their engagement with various media, which prompts them to retell stories they have told before, build upon them, as well as create new ones. In some instances, they compare these stories, making corrections and reflecting openly on certain 'story lines'.

The growing divides in this area of inquiry, between media impact focussed researchers, and the more contextually or culturally focussed ones, is

clear in the study of the political comedy audience. So much so, that it was the subject of a 2013 special issue of the *International Journal of Communication*, edited by Young and Gray. According to them, the fact that media and cultural studies have focussed on entertainment media, while journalism has been the focus of studies in Journalism and Mass Communication, is part of the reason for this division. Since political entertainment 'sits enticingly in the middle' (2013:522) it has been under-researched, making it an 'ideal venue' for multi-methodological, multiepistemological discussions (ibid.:522f). They go on to explain how different types of researchers tend to handle this divide by ignoring 'the other's shadow presence' (ibid.). But arguably, this is nothing strange, as different views of epistemology naturally create problems when scholars try to meld together research interests. While it is important to be aware of developments in all kinds of research, it is also important to understand the basis of such differences. A lot of the impact-focussed research on political comedy audiences treats them as responders to isolated media texts, and further, see them as tasked with acquiring a priori defined political information, so that they can make rationally based decisions as citizens.

For the purpose of the present thesis, it is fruitful to look at Jones' account of this in that same special issue. He states that beyond the issue of how to consider impact and the isolation of 'the moment of textual interpretation' (Livingstone 1998:3), there is normative contestation in studies of political communication and citizenship. The modern era perspective on citizenship is both epistemologically and normatively problematic as it, again, 'closes down the potential meanings in media texts and the understanding of types and forms of audience engagement with those texts' (Jones 2013a:517) and further, cements an alliance of the 'mutually reinforcing nature of the broadcast-era regime and the social science positivism' (ibid.). The methodological choices made in the present study are in line with attempting to avoid researchers' common practice to, as Jones argues, 'extract citizens from their meaning-making environment' (ibid.:518) – through for instance surveys or experiments – or 'isolate particular aspects of a citizen's logical reasoning abilities' from other kinds of reasoning, 'such as narrative reasoning or emotional affectations (ibid.). This is important, because, as Jones writes, 'we aren't examining how [media texts] *change* us in limited ways, but how they participate in our broader understandings of […] what it means to be citizens' (ibid.:519).

The value of this approach, then, is that it avoids the overly narrow and predetermined perspective on people's roles as citizens, their engagement with political media, and, importantly, their reasoning as either rational/logical or emotional. Rather, we are all engaged in a combination of rational and emo-

tional reasoning, and we cannot isolate one from the other (Burkitt 2014; Coleman 2013a; Jones 2013a; Dahlgren 2009).

The fallibilistic approach

Using more than one method is a way of achieving contextualised accounts of the political comedy audience, as well as combatting the risks associated with certain aspects of the critical/cultural perspective, to gain legitimacy and relevance. Seale provides a useful perspective here, which he calls the fallibilistic approach, that 'requires [an] active and labour-intensive approach towards genuinely self-critical research' (1999:6). He proposes this as an alternative way of doing social science research: a way to avoid being overly dogmatic.

The main point of the fallibilistic approach is that qualitative social science should strive for 'quality' in methodology, and use a wide array of means to ensure such quality, so that 'methodological awareness develops and feeds into practice' (ibid.). Following this, Seale argues, 'we need to accept that "quality" is a somewhat elusive phenomenon that cannot be pre-specified by methodological rules' (ibid.:8). Guiding this research, then, is the allowing of flexibility in the use of methods, while keeping a clear view of the study's base; that audience members are to be studied from a critical contextualised approach, if we are to understand their engagement in the cultural and the political. Context is here to be understood as achieved on a discursive level, guiding both the methods used and the analysis.

As part of the fallibilistic approach, one should be self-critical and able to argue for all choices made in the study, from beginning to end. It also allows researchers 'to treat respondents as competent reporters of experience' (Seale 1999:59) – which is important for accessing that 'narrative reasoning' and 'emotional affectations' that Jones sees as part of the more contextualised approach. Using multiple methods is a way of meeting the demand for self-critique. While the interviews and focus groups make up the main methods of the present study, they are complemented by other means. Seale writes that:

> Interviews are widely used in social research because respondents can act as the eyes and ears of researchers; interviewees can recall and summarize a wide range of observations in seconds, which would take weeks and months of observational work to achieve. They can also speak about things that cannot be observed. Triangulation exercises can then help in adjudicating the accuracy of interview accounts by increasing sensitivity to the variable relationship between an account and the reality to which it refers (1999:59).

The present study, then, presupposes that this kind of empirical examination will provide possibilities to help fulfil its aim of understanding how audience engagement in political comedy encourages political and cultural citizenship, by speaking with actual young adult audience members. As mentioned, this includes an awareness that language is used by participants and researchers, as Seale puts it, 'both as constructing new worlds and as referring to a reality outside the text, a means of communicating past experience as well as imagining new experiences' (ibid.:15).

The way for researchers to combat the (sometimes) contradictory accounts is to heighten methodological awareness and self-critique, rather than questioning the truthfulness of participants or their ability to account for their engagement. This is achieved by questioning what things like the role and position of the researcher, as well as academic traditions, mean for the study. Discussions on the often stiffly defined validity and reliability, which come from positivist views of social science research, can be used in ways that fit qualitative research – they can be seen as resources – but should not be seen as the only ways of ensuring quality. Based on a view of social research as finding one objective 'truth,' their quality-ensuring function are limited (Seale 1999).

Seale's discussion on the topic of objectivity in social science research illustrates the fallibilistic approach further:

> The assault on objectivity takes many forms, among which is the philosophical point that these same facts can never be neutrally produced, leading to the view that scientific statements are no more value free than those produced in everyday life. There are also political objections to objectivity; the superior status claimed by science on the basis of value freedom has in practice become implicated in exploitive social relations; the separation of scientific and personal biography is in fact never possible. All of these points, while sensitizing us to the limits and dangers of attempts to provide objectivity, can miss the point that, like relativism, objectivity is a resource that can be used productively as an attitude of mind by social researchers (ibid.:25).

This means that objectivity and relativity can be seen as complementing each other, rather than absolute categories within which every researcher can be placed. While total objectivity is impossible, it can be a productive ideal. To achieve this on a more concrete level, triangulation has been applied, so that a thicker, more contextualised description and analysis can be reached (cf. Bazeley 2013). If used carefully it can 'help to build plausibility for a particular account as part of a fallibilistic research strategy in which evidence is sought for central claims' (Seale 1999:59). Hence, the main methods of the present study, in-depth interviews and focus groups, are complemented by questionnaires for

the audience members regarding basic biographical data and media habits, as well as a textual mapping of contemporary political comedy.

With these types of qualitative methods, Seale writes about 'member validation' as means to strengthen credibility and quality (1999). There are different degrees of this type of validation; in the present study, letting participants read through the full transcripts was applied, although few were interested of doing that. This, in itself, says something of their regard for the authority of, or trust in, me as a researcher, or research in general; but also something about the limited time one can demand that individuals spend on their participation in research projects. The two participants who opted to read through transcripts were both unemployed journalists, i.e. people with more time, than those studying or working, as well as an interest in or experience of interviews and transcripts as such. They had an awareness of how quotes or passages can be taken out of context, which may have prompted them to double-check. Member validation also serves an ethical purpose, although one should question its value when participants for the most part opted out.

Less demanding (for participants) efforts of validating the understanding of what they were saying, were applied in the moment, i.e. during the interviews and focus group sessions, by asking follow-up questions like, 'Do I understand you correctly if I say that …?' or 'You mean …?' This was done to ensure that multiple perspectives were incorporated and explicit misunderstandings were left out as much as possible. Other ways of ensuring self-awareness was the piloting of interviews (Hill 2012) and re-writing some of the questions to achieve a better quality of communication during the interviews and focus groups.

Another way to ensure quality is in the creation of the coding scheme: By showing parts of transcripts and coding to other researchers, who were asked to see if they would pick out quotes or passages and code them in a similar manner, as recommended by for instance Seale (1999) and Bazeley (2013). As Bazeley explains with the help of Kvale (1997), it isn't about developing 'a "true" understanding of the data' (Bazeley 2013:148) but whether 'in the eyes if the coder and those evaluating the coding, the interpretation makes sense given the conceptual framework of the coder' (ibid).

Designing and implementing audience research

The following will treat the design as well as the implementation of the research, to give a more concrete description of how it was undertaken. The

choice of methods was made in accordance with the aim of the study, the theoretical base it stands on, and with the goal of achieving contextualisation[10].

Piloting phase: questions guides and questionnaires

Piloting is, again, a way of ensuring quality and self-awareness, as well as an important step in the research design process (Hill 2012). Therefore, the process of recruiting participants started with a piloting round. These interviews lasted longer, as they included broader discussions regarding specific uses of words, questions, and me as interviewer, to test the interview guide and focus of the interviews. This resulted in changes made to the interview guide, in terms of focus and sequencing. For instance, the topic of political comedy as a genre was pushed from the beginning towards the middle of the guide, which rendered longer answers and more developed discussions, as interviewees became more comfortable and reflexive. After three such interviews, the main recruitment phase started, and the semi-structured question guides were finalised (see Appendix A).

The question guides were designed to maintain a conversation-like situation, so that participants would feel safer and more confident – as well as allowing them to veer off in unexpected directions or elaborate on various topics. The guides began with more basic questions, and then successively moved into more complex territory, or differently expressed, from focus on enjoyment derived from political comedy, to learning, to finally connecting this to a discussion of political comedy and the political. This part of the interview focussed on the participants' constructions of the political, establishing what they considered to be political, as well as how they considered themselves as citizens, and what it means to be politically engaged. Here they were asked to relate to their personal engagement or disengagement, and speak more freely about how they connected political comedy to a wider political culture; as well as what image of the political they found in political comedy. Also, the guides were designed in a manner which allowed participants to 'set the pace,' as Silverman puts it (2010a:194), which showed considerable differences between partici-

[10] Observations were originally planned as a part of the study, to further this understanding, but when it became clear that almost none of the participants visited live comedy settings, this was deemed less relevant to the sample of this particular study. Instead, the qualitative textual mapping of contemporary political comedy, more descriptive in character, as well as the questionnaires filled out by participants, will be used as tools for contextualisation of their subjective constructions.

pants: some spoke confidently and freely, while others gave shorter answers and relied on direct questions.

The question guides used for the two focus group sessions had similar but fewer questions. During these sessions, the sequencing mattered less, as the natural flow of conversation often made participants veer into new areas of inquiry before being prompted.

Additionally, the need for the abovementioned questionnaire, charting participants' general biographical information and media habits, was identified during the piloting phase. Originally, these areas were part of the interview, but it was soon obvious that they only took up time, and didn't fit with the rest of the interview with regard to the pacing, and the intended conversational style. The questionnaire contained closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix D) and was handed out at the start of every interview and focus group session, where it worked quite well as a conversation starter.

Another important part of piloting was identifying what examples of political comedy were mentioned by participants, to see how they would define the genre: if they would focus on a few or several different examples. The purpose of this was to determine if there was a need to name specific programmes in the call for participants, or if it would be sufficient to mention the genre of political comedy. As there was little certainty among these participants regarding the boundaries of political comedy as a genre, two political comedy programmes were chosen for the call for participants. During interviews and focus groups, those programmes worked as 'nodes' that helped focus the conversations and following analysis. This aspect of the study illustrates the previously mentioned dilemma of using genres as a level of analysis, where the researcher in some way has to define, yet not over-define a genre, at this stage of the research process.

Participants were still encouraged to bring up other examples of political comedy, so to call these two programmes 'cases' would be misleading. Rather, the purpose of choosing these examples was to simplify recruitment. The programmes were chosen because they are well known in Swedish media discourse, have relatively high ratings, and because they were the most common examples mentioned by participants during the piloting phase. By choosing American *The Daily Show* and Swedish *Tankesmedjan*, the study covers two similar yet in some important aspects different programmes. They share some basic characteristics, such as their type of content, target audience, frequency of broadcast, website and social media activity; but diverge in others, like country of origin, media type and mode of funding (see Chapter 4 as well as Appendix B for a fuller description and comparison). When these two examples were chosen, the main phase of recruitment began.

Textual mapping of contemporary political comedy

For the purpose of orientating the study and the reader, providing a background, and situating the analysis within contemporary media, a textual mapping of various forms of political comedy has been carried out. The result of this mapping follows a review of generic labelling in political comedy and the conceptual messiness that characterises political comedy and entertainment, so that the subsequent analysis dedicated to the audience becomes more focussed.

The mapping was based on a few different sources. Previous research and writing on historical and contemporary political comedy and satire, in Sweden and mainly English speaking contexts (cf. Hariman 2008; Bolin 2013, Sjögren 1997; Lind 2015; Bruun 2012; 2007) was one of the important areas of study. Smaller-scale studies found in journals, edited collections (cf. Tsakona & Popa 2011) and special issues of *Popular Communication* (2012, 10:1-2), *International Journal of Communication* (2013, 7) and *International Communication Gazette* (2015, 77:3) were helpful in this part of the process.

Beyond that, two main sources informed the textual mapping. Firstly, journalistic sources in the form of news and entertainment articles and opinion pieces were used mainly to gain a better view of what examples are popular, and of the examples of political comedy used for recruitment, *Tankesmedjan* and *The Daily Show*. Using Google for broadcast sources, and the two main newspaper databases in Sweden, Retriever and ArtikelSök, the search words 'political comedy' ('politisk komedi' in Swedish) and 'satire' ('satir') produced an amount of around one hundred articles[11] that were reviewed more closely. The selection of these was based on relevance: articles and other kinds of material which focussed on contemporary political comedy in broadcast media, directed at young adults, were deemed especially interesting. These searches were carried out during 2013, the same year as most of the field work was carried out, and then followed by two additional, more specific searches. The first one focussed on a controversial joke made by *Tankesmedjan* comedian Jonatan Unge, looking specifically at 2013 and 2014, which is used as an illustration of humour controversy in contemporary Sweden; the second one focussed on the retirement of Jon Stewart from *The Daily Show* in August of 2015, which made news in Swedish and international media outlets. The first of these two events was chosen because it was brought up by a few of the participants of the

[11] The search in Retriever resulted in 2 055 hits for the word 'satir' (most of which came from schedules of television channels) and 4 hits for the words 'politisk komedi'; in Artikelsök 35 hits came up for the word 'satir' and none for 'politisk komedi'. Together these databases cover most Swedish press outlets.

study, and the second because it sparked media attention to both *The Daily Show* as a programme, and Jon Stewart as a comedian and host, where their cultural and political significance was touched upon.

A third source was found online, where the blogs, podcasts and webpages of comedians, the official websites of the Swedish Broadcasting Association, Swedish Public Radio and other relevant institutions, as well as of *Tankesmedjan*, *The Daily Show* and other relevant programmes, were included. Online resources such as Wikipedia and the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) were helpful in guiding parts of the mapping, even though additional sources were used to complement the information found there.

The material collected in this part of the study was used for a descriptive mapping, so that the hybrid genre of political comedy could be generically situated. This part of the research was carried out throughout the process of fieldwork, analysis and writing phases, hence both informing and being informed by the main part of the empirical work in this study, which concerns the audience. A detailed description of that part of the process follows below.

Sampling and recruitment in accordance with the theoretical base

Purposive or theoretical sampling has been used in this study, as the aim demands focus on a particular group: a specific nationality (Swedish); a specific age group (young adults, 18-35 years old); and a specific audience (regular viewers or listeners of political comedy). Denzin and Lincoln explain that this type of sampling seeks out 'groups, settings and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur' (1994:202). As the present study does not aim to produce generalisable truths about whole populations in relation to political comedy, it follows a theoretical logic, constructing sampling that is meaningful to that logic (Silverman 2010a).

Purposive or theoretical sampling 'demands that we think critically about the parameters of the population we are studying' (Silverman 2010a:141); thus the sampling was carried out with an aim to have different 'types' represented, i.e. include as much variety, within the parameters of sampling mentioned, as possible. Seale refers to Glaser and Strauss (1967), who argued for theoretical sampling on the basis that it can expand 'the scope of an emerging theory' (Seale 1999:92). Such sampling means that the researcher is selecting cases, interviewees or settings to find aspects 'that might challenge the limitations of the existing theory' (ibid.). This meant making sure the sample wasn't overly biased, and that various demographics were represented, which was done by focussing on age, gender, urban or rural living, and in what part of the country

they lived, as well as different stages and types of careers, employment status and in the case of students their subjects of study.

Recruitment was done by spreading a call for participants in different places[12]. Potential participants were invited to contact me if they considered themselves as 'liking'[13] political comedy, 'such as' *The Daily Show* or *Tankesmedjan*. The recruitment and fieldwork phase began in the autumn of 2013 and ended in the spring of 2014, lasting for about six months[14]. After contacting me participants were given a choice between participating in an in-depth interview or focus group, where most preferred the former. At the end of the study, the call for participants was changed so that it didn't include the in-depth interview alternative, since the focus groups were proving difficult to recruit for. At this time, I visited a live broadcast done in front of an audience of *Tankesmedjan*, giving me the chance to introduce the project and the call for participants to the audience there. At the end of the recruitment process, the study included 31 participants (16 women and 15 men), 18 of which were interviewed, and the remaining in focus groups (6 and 7). (For a full list of the study's participants, see Appendix C.)

Interviews and focus groups

The locations for the in-depth interviews were chosen according to the wishes of the participants. They could choose between their homes or a more public place, such as a meeting room at the university, or a café close to where they lived. Very few wanted to be interviewed at home: for some it had to do with the fact that they didn't live alone, while others had less concrete reasons or were less open with their reasons. Looking back, it may have been better to insist on conducting interviews at home to a greater extent, as most people should be more comfortable in their homes, although there were examples of less successful interviews conducted in participants' homes as well.

The focus groups were held in semi-public spaces. The first one was arranged through an ex-student who had moved to more northern parts of Swe-

[12] On Facebook, by sharing among friends, family and colleagues, which was then shared further (snowball sampling), during September and October of 2013; on the department's website (as a side banner, from October 2013 to March 2014); on the website of *Tankesmedjan* (under the heading 'Help a researcher,' first on the main page for a week in October 2013, and then as a side banner for an additional week); and on physical message boards in places such as cafés and student hangouts (October 2013 to March 2014).

[13] In Swedish, 'tycker om,' meaning 'appreciate' or 'like'.

[14] The advertising on the departments' website was there during five of those months, while the one on the *Tankesmedjan* website was moved to a less visible part of the main page after about a week (in October 2014), and then removed altogether after a few weeks.

den, who spread the call for participants among friends, classmates and colleagues there (she herself was not a part of the focus group). This resulted in a group of people who didn't know each other, with the exception of one couple, and two colleagues. The session was held in a municipality office building, in which one of the focus group participants worked, after the work day had ended. The second one was held in southern Sweden, based on the audience attending the live broadcast and a few of their friends who came along, and took place in a meeting room at a university.

All participants were given cinema vouchers as reimbursement (worth around 12-15 Euros), and were offered coffee/tea and snacks during the interview or focus group session. They were informed that they would be anonymous, that they'd be given pseudonyms in all notes and documentation, and that they could contact me at any time to see transcripts or, further on, the thesis itself (for more on these issues, cf. Kvale 1997). As very little of the content of the interviews and focus group discussions was private or secret in the eyes of the participants, the issues of confidentiality were relatively easy to handle. Alongside this more typical ethical disclosure, it was important to make clear that their statements wouldn't be analysed in regard to some form of objective truth or facts checking scheme, as some seemed to worry about.

It was made clear at the beginning of each interview and focus group that I had seen and listened to *Tankesmedjan* and *The Daily Show* extensively at that point in time, both as part of their respective audiences, and later on in the academic context. Rapley (2004), writing about in-depth interviews, comments on the importance of 'intimate reciprocity,' using Johnson (2002): 'To progressively and incrementally build a mutual sense of cooperative self-disclosure and trust the interviewer must offer some form of strict or complementary reciprocity' (Rapley 2004:23). My perspective on the interaction with participants followed Rapley's in general: that it is about 'trying to understand their experience, opinions and ideas' (ibid.:25). Even though the interactions are routinely referred to as 'conversations,' to communicate this view of a more loosely held discussion rather than a stiff question-answer interaction, Rapley is right in noting that interviews are 'never just' conversations, even though they might be 'conversational,' since the interviewer always has 'some level of control,' meaning she or he decides what to follow up on, which topics are relevant and when to finish the interaction (ibid.:26). The way interviewers talk impacts the way the interviewee talks, and because of that, it needs to be taken into account throughout the analysis.

One way of making interviews conversational was to briefly explain media and communication studies, as well as audience studies more specifically, in the

interview or focus group settings. This made some participants less nervous about their knowledge levels, which they expressed concern about initially. As Schrøder et al. explain, most people have never been asked to 'perform in the speech event of the "research interview," so they enter the interview setting as novices' (2003:149) even though they might have experiences of other types of interviews. For this reason, it was important to explicitly explain the 'speech event' both before and during it, so that the interviewer 'casts the informant conversationally in the participant role required by the study' (ibid.). For instance, as audience members would express concern about their lacking knowledge in various areas that the interview touched upon, I would reiterate how that isn't a focus in these kinds of research interviews and focus groups.

Theoretical saturation, coding and data analysis

Interviews were conducted until the data was theoretically saturated, when no further variations within the data were found (Seale 1999:93). Concretely, this meant that participants' answers were appearing more and more similar, and nothing 'new' was being said. The same went for the focus groups, which were expected to produce quite different material from the interviews. Some things did differ, although much less so than anticipated. Thus, after eighteen in-depth interviews and two focus groups the data collection phase was ended.

The sessions were recorded in their entirety, and then transcribed. The transcriptions where made in full, but then edited to exclude things that weren't relevant for the study, such as practically oriented talk, or 'small talk'. As the intention was to create a socially comfortable situation for the participants, they would be allowed or even encouraged to go into these more 'irrelevant' areas, warranting such an edit of the transcripts. Laughter and longer pauses were included in the transcripts[15], so that there would be a possibility to include the participants' use of humour, their levels of determination, and if they were 'thinking-while-speaking,' in the analysis.

The data was then ready for coding. First, transcripts were read through closely, to mark quotes or passages which seemed significant. As stated by Bazeley, this was important to get a 'sense of the whole, to capture the essential nature of what was being spoken' (2013:101). It was important to start in this 'looser' fashion, not deciding on a specific coding scheme right away. As Seale puts it, coding is:

[15] Laughter was marked '[laughter]'; pauses were marked '…'. Edits, where one word or more had been edited out, were marked '[…]'.

> an attempt to fix meanings, constructing a particular vision of the world that excludes other possible viewpoints. […] However, coding that fixes meanings too early in the analytic process may stultify creative thought, blocking the analyst's capacity for seeing new things. The early stages of coding are therefore more appropriately called 'indexing,' acting as a signpost to interesting bits of data (1999:154).

So after relevant passages had been identified, they were ordered into a coding or indexing scheme (see a discussion on the labelling of this in Bazeley 2013). This basic but structured coding scheme was guided by what areas of discussion, or themes, were brought up by the participants themselves; as well as by the theoretical aim of the study – which had informed the questions guide as well, which in turn had an impact on which areas participants would speak of.

In other words, the themes that emerged during the first few read-throughs were related to the theoretical framework of the study. As Bazeley recommends, different 'analytic thoughts' would be noted (2013:102) as they appeared, alongside the coding process. In some cases these grew into fully-fledged analytical themes visible in the analysis chapters.

The main codes were: 'identity/community construction,' 'news/entertainment,' 'knowledge' and 'political engagement/citizenship'. This rougher coding was done in Microsoft Word (cf. Bazeley 2013, Schrøder et al. 2003), which has the functions identified as needed in this particular project. Each code was given a colour and a shorter tag name[16], making it searchable as well as possible to read in the context of the full transcript. Four separate documents were produced, one for each main code.

Coding helps serve different purposes: 'both to *represent* and to *access* that passage along with other data that are the same or similar' (Bazeley 2013:126, italics in original) since qualitative coding aims for 'data retention' rather than 'data reduction' (ibid.). The coding process had two main phases, as Bazeley recommends, the initial stage being about 'identification and labelling,' referred to as initial or open coding, where a priori or emergent codes are used; and the next stage being about refining or developing analytical categories, 'focusing data' (ibid.). Hence, the next phase meant going into each code and creating sub-codes, guided by the theoretical interests of the study more exclusively. During this point the theoretical work in the thesis was intensified, by additional reading and literature reviewing, and a back-and-forth process began, as recommended by Bazeley among others. To give an example, the 'identity' code was broken into the sub-codes 'self-identity,' 'political identity,' 'oth-

[16] An asterisk followed by an upper-case word, such as *IDENTITY

ers' identity,' 'community'. The data from those sub-codes was then, after further review of literature and close reading of quotes, grouped into themes related to, for instance, the construction of identity and community, which were 'social context,' 'national context,' 'ideology,' 'knowledge and education,' and 'irony'. The sub-codes where selected through this back and back-and-forth process between the data and literature. The last step in this process was relating those themes to the analytical frameworks and relevant theoretical concepts used to work through the data. In addition to this, the data from the questionnaire was compiled in tables in Microsoft Word, as they were used for context rather than statistical analysis.

As with the rest of the study, an ambition to keep to a contextualising approach is applied to the method of analysis. As many writers conclude, analysis goes on from beginning to end in a project (cf. Rapley 2004), not just while looking at finished compilations of codes. Resting on the notes of thoughts mentioned earlier, the results of the secondary methods, and of course, mainly, the results of the coding process, this more explicitly analytical phase was characterised by a form of discursive or thematic approach (cf. Schrøder et al. 2003; Boyatzis 1998; Aronson 1994), where the theoretical interests of the thesis guided what questions were posed to the data, such as how participants construct their identity, which also allowed the participants' voices to come through. The goal was to be able to carry out analytic generalisation, following these steps recommended by Schrøder et al.:

> looking for use or user patterns in the discursive landscape, as mapped by the thematic analysis, answering questions like, 'Can the informants be meaningfully grouped into distinguishable types of viewer/listener/reader/user or the media in question? […] the generalizing interpretation should remain sensitive to the diversity and possible ambivalence of the data, while at the same time seeking to reduce this diversity (2003:170).

A final way to add to the contextualising approach, and provide transparency for the reader, is found in how quotes are represented in the analysis chapters. In some cases the dialogue between me as interviewer or focus group moderator is included, to expose the tone or context of participants' statements, and in other cases they stand alone, or together with other participant's statements, for comparison.

Reflections on the research process

Some of the problems faced during these phases of research have been commented on throughout, like problems in recruiting for focus groups. The next section contains a critical reflection on the process as a whole.

The study's goal, on a methodological level, was to avoid isolating certain aspects of audience engagement. In doing so, one might argue that the study should have been 'more ethnographic' in its design. But that would have meant a slightly different theoretical focus, as the live comedy audience seems to be more sporadic in its engagement. And, for theoretical and practical reasons, studies need limits. Hence, being able to speak in depth, at length to audience members about their ongoing engagement was prioritised. During the interviews it was apparent that they would follow their favourite examples of political comedy in solitude: in their flats or during their commute, in front of their computers or through their smart phone or car radio. Political comedy, it seemed, was on the whole consumed individually, and then, in some cases, discussed online or among friends.

Related to this is the 'dilemma' of genre studies (cf. Neale 2000), mentioned throughout the present thesis. To be able to recruit participants and carry out the textual mapping, it is necessary to define the genre, but this potentially means that certain forms of political comedy are left out of the analysis. For instance, since focus has been on broadcast political comedy, other forms, such as stand-up acts or user-generated forms, were left out. The use of genre work, wherein audience members' conceptualisation of the genre is in focus, helps mitigate this problem somewhat.

One might also argue that while the sampling of participants was broad, when it comes to age, gender and what type of area they lived in (rural or urban), there could have been a greater mix of educational levels among them. Even if Sweden is a fairly highly educated country in general[17], further variations might have been found in the material had participants been more mixed in this way. Some of the participants come from less educated backgrounds, they were the first in their families to receive post-secondary education, which compensated for this to a certain degree. Also, a portion of the participants worked in or studied media in various ways, indicating that political comedy draws 'media interested' audiences, although there is no further research to establish this notion fully.

[17] According to Statistics Sweden (SCB), 'around half of 25-64-year-olds in Sweden (4,9 million people) have upper secondary school as their highest level of education. More than a third of all Swedes aged 25-64 have achieved some form of post-secondary education' (2015).

While being aware that one always 'isolates' participants, in the sense that one brackets certain aspects of them as relevant and others as less or not relevant, the goal was a contextualised account, as mentioned throughout this thesis. Hopefully, this is done with, as Seale puts it, enough self-critical abilities, as well as an ability to show you – the audience of this thesis – which choices have been made along the way.

Summary

This chapter has aimed to clarify the methodological ideas of the study, including an epistemological and normative discussion on political comedy audience engagement, and a more concrete recapitulation of the methods and data analysis. Arguing for an approach to audience research that is contextualised (cf. Livingstone 1998; Hill 2007) the chapter deals with important discussions in contemporary research on political entertainment, as well as in audience studies more generally. Guided by Hermes' framework of cultural citizenship, the chapter argues for focus to be on what audiences 'do' with media (2005), a perspective which has been lacking in studies of the audience of political comedy (cf. Jones 2013a; Day 2011). Rather than concentrating on how media impacts us, media and communication studies should focus on achieving a understanding of what conditions of language and meaning citizens encounter in the media (Jones 2013a). Further, the chapter gives an account of Seale's (1999) 'fallibilistic approach' as it helps avoid over-entrenchment in qualitative research. This allows for a perspective of objectivity and relativity as resources, instead of distinct camps, and proposes striving for 'quality' by various means. In the case of the present study, quality is achieved through the use of more than one method, i.e. interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and a textual mapping of the political comedy genre. The final part of the chapter details the research process: from the piloting phase and the construction of question guides; to how the textual mapping was done; to the purposive sampling and recruitment of young adult political comedy audience members; on to how the interviews and focus groups were conducted; to the stage of data analysis and qualitative coding, which ended at the point of theoretical saturation. The very last part of the chapter brings up some of the reflections on the research process that have come up, which concerns issues such as the 'lack' of ethnographic methods and the high education levels of the participants.

4. The hybrid forms of political comedy

The generic labelling of a comedy programme has a substantial impact on how audiences understand it, as it touches on a very basic question: is this to be taken seriously? Therefore, understanding and categorisations of genre, among audiences, critics and scholars are important objects of study. They aid exploration and classification, in our everyday relations with form. As Corner notes:

> A primary justification for close attention to form in media research is not, as it is in much humanities commentary on the arts, the intrinsic interest of exploring expressive creativity, 'how pleasing things are done,' but a recognition that form is necessary to an understanding of the media's sociality, of its constitutive connections with individual consciousness and with social and political order (2011:51).

To that end, this chapter aims to invite the reader into the scholarly discourse on hybridity regarding entertainment and information, to establish its importance in relation to political comedy. While the relevance of the concept of hybridity may be debated in some areas, the present study argues that when it comes to comedy, discussions on hybrid forms are important, as the audiences' understanding of comedic or satirical intent plays an extremely vital role: whether or not something is meant to be funny or not, as well as serious or not, very much impacts how we look upon it. This chapter attempts to bring some order to the conceptual disarray that surrounds political comedy, where notions of political entertainment, infotainment and politicotainment are discussed, to orient the following analysis. An illustrative case of a controversial segment in *Tankesmedjan*, wherein comedian Jonatan Unge seemingly mocked sufferers from diabetes, is used to exemplify this to the reader, as well as provide additional context to the further reading of this thesis.

Secondly, the chapter provides a more concrete part, where the present study's textual mapping of some of the contemporary forms of political comedy are in focus, to guide the study and situate political comedy in the contem-

porary media landscape. Included here is an overview of previous research on political comedy, to further position the study. Finally, the two programmes used for recruitment, *The Daily Show* and *Tankesmedjan*, are especially probed, so that readers who are unfamiliar with them can follow the main analysis presented in the following chapters.

Hybridity and inter-generic space

As has been stated throughout this study, political comedy can be seen as a hybrid genre. The concept of hybridity has been debated among scholars, and it is important to state that while the exact concepts may vary, the underlying point of such debates relate to the fact that media and cultural artefacts are packaged and branded or profiled in both traditional and new ways. Some argue that contemporary media is so hybrid that there no longer is a need to speak of genres (Jones 2013a) or even hybridity, but as Hill points out in relation to the study of audiences, they still try to navigate and 'make order out of chaos' (Hill 2007:2), and so do producers and media companies. What type of genre a programme belongs to is important as it sends a signal to the audience of what to expect (ibid.). Corner writes that:

> Deciding what 'kind' of thing a given item of mediation belongs to informs a sense of what kind of formal 'rules' it might follow in its construction, what kinds of satisfaction it might give and what kind of criteria might be most appropriate to judgements of its quality (2011:74).

Whether or not the concept of hybridity is frequently applicable, the present study argues that it is in the case of political comedy, as its basic elements of raillery, mockery, satire and spoofing (Corner et al. 2013) can be found in many different forms of media and culture. Political comedy is difficult to summarize neatly, as it ranges from fact to fiction (a distinction which is quite hard to make in relation to many of the subgenres of political comedy)[18]; spans across such various textual forms as cartoons, literature, television programmes, films, stand-up comedy, plays, street art, memes, and so on; and encompasses what might be considered high – as well as low brow culture (for a list of examples in different forms, see Appendix E).

For Corner, hybrid media is 'inter-generic,' describing 'the accelerated shifts and proliferating developments of formal usage that many areas of medi-

[18] For instance, Bruun situates satire 'somewhere between the factual genres and fiction' (2007:189).

ation have undergone' (2011:76). Because, as Turner writes (2008), television (and, the present study would add, radio) works a bit differently from film with respect to genre's hybridity, since television programmes often are serialised. This creates attentiveness among producers and broadcast networks for certain kinds of audiences' input, such as ratings, downloads or streaming figures, phone calls and email correspondence, as well as comments in various online spaces. Such input can have effects on decisions made with regards to continuing or cancelling programmes, or recruiting or replacing a certain host. Such input also creates what Turner calls a 'cumulative effect' on the genre, where it becomes 'tweaked' in different ways (ibid.). Moreover, Turner notes, technological changes that affect both the audience engagement with the programmes, and the ways in which they can provide feedback to producers, through for instance, emails and website statistics, potentially also contribute to the development of genres in ways we might characterise as hybridised.

Also, television programming is often made up of segments, that makes it different from film (Ellis 1992), which again applies to radio programming as well, so that different segments can be classified differently. For audiences, engagement is shaped in part by the frame of such segments, such as the host, the studio, a specific topic – as well as by genre expectations (Bolin 2008).

As mentioned in a previous chapter, Corner agrees that genre might be difficult to deal with from a scholarly perspective, and suggests a double focus on genre and form, as it includes a wider set of issues:

> Form is an active constituent in the production of meaning and of pleasure, but its interplay with audience or reader subjectivity, including the selective taking up by them of the 'subject positions' which textual organisation and performance cue them towards, is variously placed within consciousness. The placing may shift considerably even within a viewing or reading of the same item let alone across a range of items (2011:77).

As Corner argues, form connects to subject positions, and in this capacity it is most relevant here, reiterating the need for scholars who are interested in hybridity, inter-generic space, or form more generally, to study audiences. If something is meant to be funny it will be engaged with in a different way than if it isn't. Further, in the case of political comedy, there needs to be a certain amount of humour if it is to be defined as comedy. As Corner writes, an important variable to include is the potential of audiences disengaging from an object of engagement, due to boredom or something else. He calls this 'slipping "out" of communicative connection' (2011:77), which, he writes, 'may involve conscious recognition of form, and then a heightened recognition of

genre, as part of the self-consciousness of "not liking it" and of identifying the reason for this' (ibid.). This is true for increased or heightened engagement as well, and according to Corner, researchers need to explore how audiences 'work upon media materials,' to understand 'how forms, and ideas of genre, work at the level of apprehension' (ibid.) – even though this is complex methodologically. It was apparent in the interviews and focus groups that audience members sometimes slipped 'out' of communicative connections in the manner described by Corner. Hence, an important part of understanding engagement and disengagement lies in understanding how audiences construct, and relate to, form and genre. Engagement means continually classifying and producing categorisation, on both conscious and semi-conscious levels, in a kind of monitoring fashion. This production is based on various ideals and markers of quality that each individual has, which potentially changes over time. For instance, while news programming might be considered somehow 'healthy' or 'important' to engage with, to a majority of Swedish audiences (cf. Andersson 2007; Wadbring 2016), comedy is seen more as a leisurely form, where people might be less loyal on a regular basis, as they engage in it more 'for themselves,' for enjoyment (although, as with news avoiders, the opposite can be true as well). Intergeneric or hybrid formats wherein elements of news are mixed with elements of comedy, potentially bring together two quite opposing types of engagement, which this and the following chapters attempt to capture.

In the case of political media, Baym concludes that the concept of genre might be replaced with that of discursive modes (2013). After studying political talk in the American television programmes *Meet the Press* (NBC, 1947-), *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* (NBC, 1992-2014), *The Daily Show*, and *Hannity* (Fox News, 2009-), which vary in their focus on politics and entertainment, he concludes that genres 'cannot be assumed to determine content or be seen as isomorphic with political relevance' (2013:204). He goes on to state that what 'remains unclear is the relationship that real audiences […] have with various discursive modes' (ibid.:205). While genre might have lost its function as a 'predictive analytical tool' (ibid.) that can be connected to 'democratic value,' it arguably still has relevance, and cannot be equated with discursive modes. Rather, genre as a concept encompasses more than discursive modes: It carries with it additional aspects of content, form and aesthetics, and has meaning to audiences and producers, in a way that discursive modes do not; and further, a genre can include more than one discursive mode. As Baym writes, some genres may open up or close down opportunities for certain discursive modes, which is why the present study utilises genre, form and modes to refer to slightly different aspects of political comedy.

In the case of political comedy, the main issue is with the levels of seriousness and humour. Labelling something as comedic, satirical or ironic will make audiences aware of the fact that what is being said may not be literal or even serious[19]. Even if audience members are aware of such labelling, some might struggle with specific utterances or segments, wondering if they are meant as serious or not. This in turn greatly impacts on constructions of humour and satire, among such audience members. It seems, though, that those who experience these kinds of struggles as excessively taxing avoid engaging with political comedy, while the existing audiences find them enjoyable.

The labelling of humour

To orientate the reader somewhat: the definition of political comedy from a scholarly standpoint tends to centre on the concept of satire. As Corner, Richardson and Parry state, the term satire 'suggests comedy with serious political intent' (2013:32), but, they go on to say, in contemporary society, there is a 'broader comic realm' that includes 'raillery, mocking and spoofing of the "official"' (ibid.). So while some political comedy may have a 'serious' intent, it doesn't have to. According to Bruun, producers, broadcasters and audiences 'have genre-based expectations for television satire' (2007:188), where she points to what she calls 'contextual dependency': 'satire must have a strong reference to social, political and cultural reality outside the discursive universe of the texts in itself' (ibid.). This dependency is not only required of the satire itself, but of its audiences, at least to a certain extent. According to Bruun, this kind of shared contextual knowledge made Danish satire television programmes into 'small cultural prisms' (ibid.:192) which meant that the 'programmes became perfect for integrating viewers in fan-like relationships' (ibid.), which can be observed in the present study, too. In this context, audience members follow certain comedians and spend time and energy on trying to decipher exactly what is meant by certain statements or segments, which is aided by their continual engagement with those comedians.

[19] This was illustrated in the Swedish context when then Minister of Justice, Beatrice Ask, interpreted a satirical text from *The Daily Currant* (2014) about the legalisation of cannabis in Colorado as serious, and used it to argue against legalisation. The article stated that during the first 24 hours of being legal in Colorado, cannabis had killed 37 people. On Facebook, Ask posted a link to the article with the comment: 'Stupid and sad. My first bill proposal in the youth party was called Fight Drugs! In this matter I haven't changed my opinion at all.' Ask and her press officer Per Clareus said 'the minister was aware the article was fake and was trying to criticise the website for joking about such a serious matter, but was misunderstood' (*The Guardian* 2014), but criticism of her reaction remained (Stenquist 2014).

The issue of intent is marginalised in audience studies, and can be seen as problematic as it moves focus from the audience to the producer. But in the case of political comedy, it holds importance because audience members would wonder whether or not a particular example of comedy had serious intent, which impacted on their constructions of programmes in vital ways. Moreover, satirical and comical intent hold a special legal status in Sweden (and other countries) which impacts how vulnerable it is to criticism and penalty from the Swedish Broadcasting Commission (Myndigheten för radio och tv) in the wake of controversies. This, in turn, is important as it is linked to the so often asked question what the boundaries of humour are. Can you joke about everything? In Swedish public service broadcasting, the answer to this question has varied throughout the years (Sjögren 1997).

Much of political comedy plays off power structures, by commenting, reinforcing, or questioning them – and here, it must be remembered that the political comedy producers and audience are parts of such power relations themselves. Smith puts it as follows:

> Responses to humor are colored by the power relations between the joker and the audience—for example, subordinates laugh at the jokes of superiors more often than the reverse (Coser 1960). Since the humor frame cloaks jokers' motives with ambiguity, joke targets interpret jokers' motives and modulate their humor response based on their reading of the social context, including their relationship with the jokers and the way power is distributed between them (Smith 2009:163).

The ambiguity referred to by Smith is yet another factor which complicates the issue of comedy and intent, as some comedians aim to confuse. As, for instance, Swedish musician, cartoonist and comedian Simon Gärdenfors has put it, part of the fun with humour of the obscene type – from his perspective – is the fact that he knows that some parts of the audience will be confused about intent (2015). Instead of 'just' aiming for laughter and amusement, some comedians have other aims; such as creative innovation, challenging the audience, and pushing boundaries; while a third type of comedian aims more for education or political analysis (as with satire). Amusement is always there as an umbrella aim of comedy, but for some there is an additional intent which audiences are more or less aware of or interested in.

In Sweden, anyone can make a formal complaint about what they consider to be harmful or in other ways problematic media content in broadcast me-

dia[20]. Such complaints are reported to the Swedish Broadcasting Commission, which comes under the Ministry of Culture. Satirical content, like *Tankesmedjan*, is judged differently than, for instance, mainstream news content. For example, there is rule of impartiality for news content:

> Impartiality must be observed by hosts, reporters and others who through their position in a programme can be seen as a representative for the broadcaster. This provision means that a host or report cannot make evaluative statements or take a position in controversial issues. In more personal commentaries or review segments, and in personal chronicles, evaluative opinions may occur, if the feature's character is considered to be obvious to the audience. In programmes or segments that have an obvious satirical or ironic character, there is an even wider scope of approval of what can be stated (Söderman 2013, author's translation).

As *Tankesmedjan* has been reported by members of the public several times (cf. Skoglund 2011; Westin 2012; Forsberg 2012; Byttnér 2014), the question of what the boundaries of humorous content are has appeared in Swedish media from time to time. For instance, content has been reported for being in bad taste, surpassing the 'limits of humour' (Skoglund 2011), which isn't in itself an offence according to the regulations. On the other hand, there are critics who have complained about the opposite, saying that due to these restrictions, which create fear among producers, public service media outlets rarely produces quality satire (cf. Fjellborg 2014; Croneman 2014).

Some of the controversial cases of political comedy clearly illustrate the importance of genre with respect to humour specifically, as interpretations of certain segments or jokes stand in opposition to what has been intended; producers and various parts of the audience are to all intents and purposes potentially in conflict with each other, regarding interpretation. Interesting in this context is how the word 'satire' is used over 'comedy' or 'political comedy'. The stance of the Broadcasting Commission creates a situation in which all types of programmes that deal with politics and the political through humour label themselves 'satire' to be on the safe side. In this way, the label of 'satire' signifies a slight difference from the scholarly definition used here, as it refers to the intent of being funny rather than serious (as the definition from Corner et al. 2013 quoted above assumes). In both Swedish and English, the standard definition of satire are quite similar: in Swedish, satire ('satir') is 'ridiculing

[20] For instance, regulations demand (depending on broadcast designation) a certain level of impartialness, factuality, and respect for private life, and regulates product placement, representations of violence and pornography, and so on (Swedish Broadcasting Commission 2015).

text; quick and sharp mockery or ridicule' (SAOL 2006, author's translation) or 'literary work in which folly or evil in people's behavior are held up to ridicule; trenchant wit; sarcasm' (Webster 2003). Hence, the label of satire is filled with meaning *in relation to* something: the scholarly definition is about contrasting satire from other forms of political humour, while the definitions in dictionaries and the Broadcasting Association contrast it from news and 'serious' content. Also, there are taste hierarchies at play here, as satire is often considered to be a more serious and therefore artistically and intellectually valuable form, in comparison to forms such as slapstick (Friedman 2014).

A good example of what happens when producers and part of the audience aren't in agreement on comedy in the Swedish context can be found in a case from 2013, when *Tankesmedjan* was reported by members of the public for being disrespectful towards diabetics. In a segment in November of that year, comedian Jonatan Unge spoke about a political proposition to provide diabetics with free insulin pumps. In the segment, Unge – who was often positioned as the parodic right-winger in the programme at that time, railed against diabetics, saying among other things that:

> why do they have to be so freaking annoying all the time? […]. Say what you want about diabetics, but you can't accuse them of stoically enduring their suffering in silence […]. Sure, it's a life-threatening disease. But why do they have to be so 'in your face' all the time? (quoted in Melin 2013, author's translation).

The negative reactions were more widespread than usual, and prompted the producers of *Tankesmedjan*, who rarely comment on formal complaints (if they do they tend to remind critics of the satirical label of the programme), to respond through P3's publisher Sseruwagi on the channel's Facebook page:

> We've received a lot of emails and comments concerning a segment in yesterday's programme about diabetics' rights to free insulin pumps. A lot of people feel sad and violated by the segment, which of course wasn't our intention. *Tankesmedjan* is an explicit humour and satire programme and therefore doesn't have to adhere to standards of impartiality and factuality. But we've understood from the reactions that this hasn't been clearly stated and we will discuss the specific broadcast with the editorial staff. We understand that it is a tough disorder to live with and are genuinely sad about the fact that so many people feel violated. The segment has already been reported to the Broadcasting Commission [and we shall not] comment further on the issue until the Committee has made its decision (Sseruwagi 2013, author's translation).

The reactions on the Facebook page, both to the segment itself and the comment made by the responsible publisher Sseruwagi, shows the variations of

interpretations available. While some defended the programme and were annoyed by the fact that the jokes were taken as serious, others wrote about the difficulties facing those with diabetes, and their families. In a news article about the controversy, a 23-year-old mother of a newly diagnosed one-year-old said:

> It's terrible to joke about this. Should my son learn that this is something to be ashamed of […]? There are a lot of us who want an apology, this isn't okay. Swedish Radio should have checked what [Unge] was going to say before it was broadcast (Melin 2013, author's translation).

Likewise, the Swedish Diabetes Association published an open letter directed at P3 on their webpage, writing that:

> We at the Swedish Diabetes Association, and many of our members, have heard and been offended by your programme *Tankesmedjan*, where you attempt to joke about people with diabetes. Of course everyone is allowed to make jokes, even about serious diseases like diabetes, but if you do that, at least make sure you are educated about the topic! (Swedish Diabetes Association 2013).

They then focussed on the factual mistakes made by Unge, for example explaining the differences between different types of diabetes, how many sufferers die from diabetes every year in Sweden, and what an insulin pump is used for.

In the comments above, criticism is directed both at the tastelessness and amorality of joking with sufferers of diabetes, and at the factual 'mistakes' made. From the perspective of the sufferer, those issues are important to communicate to the producers and comedians of *Tankesmedjan*, as well as to a wider public. But for those defending the programme, such issues are irrelevant. One person received 55 likes on a comment posted beneath the apology published by Sseruwagi:

> Hi! We live in a society where satirists are apologizing for making satire. Damned humans! (comment on *Tankesmedjan* i P3:s Facebook page, 2013-11-22, author's translation).

In the end, the segment caused 126 formal complaints, which is well above average, but while the committee wasn't unanimous in its decision *Tankesmedjan* wasn't found formally guilty. Instead, the committee directed criticism towards the programme, saying that Unge's comments were characterised by 'raillery and sharp wording' which could be considered both tasteless and disturbing (Byttnér 2013). As the case illustrates, the labelling of comedic content is of importance because its contestation divides audiences into interpretative

camps, associated with wider emotional, moral and social issues. The division between those who respond positively, thereby confirming the comedic label, and those who react with what Billig calls 'unlaughter' (2005b), which means they reject such comedic labels, is an important way in which humour is used to construct and maintain social boundaries (Smith 2009).

Conceptual messiness

As the research on hybrid genres related to the political and entertainment and comedy grows, so does the body of concepts related to it. This section will deal with a few of the more popular concepts and how they relate to the current developments in media and audience research.

The concept of politicotainment 'denotes the ways in which politics and political life are interpreted, negotiated, and represented by the entertainment industry' (Riegert 2007:1). It is not the same as infotainment, Riegert notes, which is used to describe 'journalism in which entertainment values take precedence over information content' (McNair 2000:4). According to Riegert, infotainment thereby connotes 'familiar complaints' about the changing nature of journalism, with accusations of superficiality, excessive use of pundits, and the increase of game frames on political debates (ibid.). While the concept of infotainment has been debated in scholarly and journalistic discourse since the early 1990s (Hill 2007), it is clear that such connotations depend on underlying normative stances on the information/entertainment dichotomy. As Hartley ironically phrases it: 'surely entertainment is characterized by escapism, while politics ought not to be confused with private pleasure consumption' (2007:21). For Hartley, the discussion is rooted in a relatively new, modern era separation of politics and entertainment:

> Despite the warnings of the Frankfurt School critics against the aestheticization of politics, of Hannah Arendt against populist demagoguery, or even Susan Sontag against 'fascinating fascism,' there is no type of popular political participation, ancient or modern, that is not also mediated, spectacular, irrational, and emotion-laden. Democratic polities, as well as totalitarian ones, are served by 'politicotainment' both routinely in the daily news round and at crucial times of heightened political risk such as elections, wars, scandals, and economic downturns. Semiotic as well as social leadership has always been needed to capture the popular imagination, alongside or even in advance of reasoned argument. […] when the idea of the rational 'informed citizen' took over in the United States in the 1880s from the previous model of political participation based on spectacular partisanship, actual voting numbers dropped. People had to be brought back to the ballot box by showbiz razzmatazz and campaigning chutzpah (2007:24).

Hartley, who has written extensively on the topic, adds to the mix the concept of 'democratainment,' which specifies how routine entertainment formats represent and teach 'aspects of contemporary citizenship to vast cross-demographic populations' (2007:26; see also 2004). As is apparent, there are both positive and negative connotations ascribed to the various concepts related to intergeneric space between politics and entertainment. What they all show is the need for scholars to be aware of the history of news, entertainment and political communication, as Hartley is in the longer quote above.

Genres work as labels, and when those labels no longer apply, the common fears reappear about the ability of the audience to understand what it is they are engaged in. But, as Hartley and others like him (cf. Baym 2005; Jones 2013a; Gray et al. 2009) state, this may be changing. As part of a broader shift in media scholarship, the dichotomy of information and entertainment – which can be connected to other modern era dichotomies such as male/female, citizen/consumer and public/private – is increasingly challenged[21].

One of the more productive writers in this area is the previously quoted Baym, who summarises the current media environment as 'rapidly expanded and complexified,' due to 'forces of multiplication, fragmentation, and hybridization' (2013:489), which in turn can be linked to 'economic reorganization, technological transformations, and cultural reimaginations' that has prompted new experimental formats 'aimed at increasingly narrow and differentiated audiences' (ibid.). These changes have many different consequences, and should, again, be placed within an historical context. What might be considered a blurring of boundaries could also be seen as a return to the way things were before the strict modern era dichotomisation described became the ideal. This doesn't mean that it shouldn't be analysed or criticised, but it does mean that scholars need to be careful in doing so. Important, though, is that producers of media, and its audience, perceive the changes. In their view, the changes can be 'felt' – and are in some cases seen as dramatic and threatening, which is something scholarly discourse cannot ignore.

In line with these changes – perceived in media and among audiences – Harrington proposes that journalism should be considered 'not in the singular but as a range of journalisms which operate in different ways, fulfil different requirements, and appeal to different niche audience groups' (2011:49). According to Carlson and Peifer, conventional journalism faces a 'crisis of author-

[21] Another dichotomy often used in these types of discussions is 'soft' versus 'hard' news (cf. Baum & Jamison 2011), which in most texts seem to be interchangeable with the distinction between political entertainment (soft) and traditional news (hard), which further communicates the idea that they are associated with broader paradigms of distinction.

ity,' wherein political comedy such as *The Daily Show* has 'challenged journalism's epistemic authority by endlessly lampooning its failures and excesses' (2013:334). This not only related to the authority claims of journalism, but to what Jones calls the increasingly 'media-savvy' audience (2010:182) that during the past decades have gained a greater understanding of how broadcast media is produced. While contemporary radio and television could be seen as characterised by what Espen Ytreberg has called 'a glut of informality' where a strategic kind of 'being genuine' is practised among 'celebrity hosts, anchorpersons and reporters' (2002:492f), audiences are often aware of this strategy. These two factors are among the reasons for broadcast political comedy's recent success; political comedy benefits from and furthers this struggle for authenticity and the media-savvy of audiences.

Hence, when dichotomies like information and entertainment or rational and emotional are challenged, the authority of journalists and news anchors is questioned. The difference between a journalist and a citizen, or a comedian in this case, is tested. In the aforementioned study by Baym, where he studies discursive modes in various political programmes who have interviewed American politician Ron Paul, this is illustrated as follows:

> At the interview's close, [Jon] Stewart returns to his sociable standpoint. 'It's great to see you,' he tells Paul, 'I always enjoy our conversations.' Here Stewart offers a label for his approach to public-affairs interviewing. Having long said his goal is to 'improve conversation' (Baym 2010), he seeks to enact a more deliberative model of political exchange, a reasonable dialogue built on civility and mutual respect. With Paul, he performs as neither journalist nor pundit, but citizen. Bolstered by his televisual appeal, his claim to authority ultimately rests on his command of fact and facility with logic—not on his institutional weight, nor ideological bluster, but rather on what Habermas has called the unforced force of the better argument (Baym 2013:512).

While Baym might be overly focussed on 'facts,' ignoring the emotional appeals used by Stewart in *The Daily Show*, his reasoning about the programme corresponds with the normative ideas of cultural citizenship. It's about improving conversation, to aid understanding between different perspectives. For those who follow the programme, it is clear that Stewart and Paul represent different ideological perspectives, but this is explicitly addressed and doesn't stop them from conversing respectfully. In this manner, Stewart and others like him use alternative discursive modes and represent another form of journalism, to use Harrington's phrasing. As Baym points out, Stewart's 'claim to authority' is different from that of conventional political journalism, and because of that provides something else; not necessarily better or worse, but different.

In yet another interesting account of the current development, Bolin (2007) makes the point that in discussions on the blurring of boundaries, most of the focus has been on how information and news have been colonised by entertainment, while the opposite seems ignored entirely. The fact that entertainment formats are increasingly under the influence of journalistic formats and practices, following a 'diversification of the role of the journalists and also an expansion of the field of journalism' (Bolin 2007:74) is overlooked. This shines a light on the problems of strict classification of media professionals, as well as how unevenly these matters have been treated in scholarly debates. When journalists and scholars worry about the spread of infotainment, they avoid recognising the proliferation of journalistic professionals, forms and practices in the 'opposite direction,' which the present study considers to be potential evidence of the pervasiveness of taste hierarchies among such individuals and their institutions. They are problematic, as they prevent criticism of journalistic authority and devalue the work of comedians and others like them.

The Daily Show and *Tankesmedjan*, as well as other similar programmes, focus on criticising mainstream news media: it is one of the staples of contemporary political comedy (cf. Gray et al. 2009; Bruun 2012). Painter and Hodges calls this 'holding traditional broadcast media accountable to the public' (2010:268) and lists four distinctive ways in which *The Daily Show* does so: it points out falsehood; it highlights inconsistencies; it examines when 'inconsequential news is blown out of proportion'; and it criticises 'the very nature of broadcast news' (ibid.). It should be mentioned that there are news outlets that invite such criticism. The parody programme *Public Service* in Swedish Radio P1 illustrates this, as it (like its predecessor *På Håret*) is broadcast as part of a longer Sunday morning news and current affairs programme called *Good morning, world!* ('Godmorgon, världen!'). Similarly, satirical cartoons have been a staple of Swedish and international dailies, which are generally considered as mainstream news sources (additional examples can be found in Sjögren 1997).

Political comedy's use of irony, parody and self-deprecation is what makes it different from conventional news, as it invites something different from the engagement of its audience, characterised by ambiguity. Hariman explores parody specifically, and writes that the 'parodic imitation simultaneously praises and blames' (2008:251). He goes on to say that '[p]arody works in great part by exceeding tacit limits on expression—the appropriate, the rational—but it does so to reveal limitations that others would like to keep hidden' (ibid.). Professional journalism works hard to protect its claims of neutrality, factuality and democratic functions. This way, it achieves domination of political information, which is problematic. For Hariman, parody and satire help 'expos[e]

the limitations of dominant discourses,' thereby 'counter[ing] idealization, mythic enchantment, and other forms of hegemony' (ibid.). Since journalism, whether it is more or less inviting of parody and other forms of criticism, has had the privilege to dominate political discourse, its expressions of concern regarding factuality or the audience's ability to acquire relevant information needs to be scrutinised. It is not enough to embed parody or other forms of political comedy within conventional news frames; to be able to create other 'journalisms' or achieve different discursive modes, political comedy also needs to be independent from that which it is meant to challenge.

The range of political comedy

To invite the reader into the world of political comedy and further situate various hybrid forms of political comedy within contemporary media, the next section maps contemporary examples and forms of political comedy.

Forms of political comedy

Beginning with the forms that political comedy can take, Hariman (2008:248) provides a useful mapping of what he calls 'the discursive field of political humour' in the American context. He begins by listing 'the familiar forms,' which include editorial cartoons, comic strips, satirical magazines (*Mad*, 1952¬, available in Swedish since 1960), animated sitcoms (*South Park*, Comedy Central, 1997-), variety shows (*Saturday Night Live*, NBC, 1975-), and late-night monologues (such as *Late Night with David Letterman*, CBS, 1993-2015, now hosted by Stephen Colbert). Hariman then goes on to mention theatrical or improvisation shows, comedic songs, and stand-up comedy on stage and on television, which can be 'circulated further as audio recordings, movies, and spin-off books' (ibid.). Added to this are roasts – which are less common in the Swedish context but nonetheless a part of the comedic landscape – 'and other ritual play' (like the White House Correspondents' Association dinner) as well as certain forms of drag shows and what he calls 'camp events'; artistic installations, mockumentaries and satiric films, parodic web sites and satirical viral videos; 'street theatre, culture jamming, caricatures and effigies in political demonstrations,' and bumper stickers with one-liners (ibid.).

Yet another category is made up of what Hariman calls 'fake news' in newspapers (*The Onion*, 1988-) and on television (*The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* 2005-2014), fake speeches, editorials, letters, memos, flow charts, advertisements, and so on. In attempting to cover all forms, Hariman even includes

humorous campaign ads from political candidates and interest groups, and 'not least, the jokes that appear continually in conversations, speeches, blogs, and your inbox' (ibid.). Hariman seems to miss radio programmes and literature, but other than that his list seems all-encompassing.

While some things are different in the Swedish and Scandinavian context, it is clear that most cultural contexts can be seen as represented when mapping political comedy. Bruun charts 'political satire as a modality' (2012:169) in the Danish and Scandinavian context (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), concluding that the Scandinavian public service companies have increased their various forms of satire during the past decade or two, in part inspiring each other, and in part finding inspiration in British and American programmes. Sjögren similarly makes the point that Swedish radio and television history includes examples of original programming, as well as copied formats from the Anglo-Saxon world (1997). As with other media genres, British and American popular culture is widespread in the Scandinavian countries: for instance, Bruun mentions British programmes such as *That Was the Week That Was* (BBC, 1962-1963), *Brass Eye* (Channel 4, 1997-2001) and *The Office* (BBC Two, 2001; with spinoffs in the U.S., Canada, Sweden, Germany, Israel, France and Chile), *The Ali G Show* (Channel 4, 2000-2004) and *Little Britain* (BBC One, 2003-2007); and the fact that the audience members in the present study were engaged in or at least aware of *The Daily Show* and performers such as Jon Stewart is yet another piece of evidence of that.

In a study of online political humour in the UK general election 2005, Shifman, Coleman and Ward (2007) examine online humorous games, cartoons and posters, reaching the conclusion that 'the way that humour is used is paradoxical, since it often attempts to encourage participation but portrays politics as a cynical game' (2007:465). The online environment is increasingly represented in research on political comedy, as it is both a venue for political campaigning and a space for users to create and spread their own versions of political comedy (cf. Sienkiewicz 2012 on Palestinian *Watan ala Watar* and its viral spreading; Tay 2014, on memes in the American presidential election of 2012; Paganoni 2008 on political humour in blogs; and Chen 2013, on online Singaporean political comedy).

One of the latest contributions concerning the online environment is a special issue of *The International Communication Gazette* (77:3, edited by Kumar and Combe) in 2015 entitled 'Political parody and satire as subversive speech in the global digital sphere,' where the essays address six different contexts 'in order to understand the various ways in which [parody and satire are] intervening within political and social discourse within national public spheres'

(Kumar & Combe 2015:211). According to the editors, the issue shows that while the examples of online parody and satire differ, 'the iterations each create an alternative space for social and political critique, outside the institutions of traditional media due to the proliferation of networked devices' (ibid.): see for instance Yang & Jiang on online satire in China; Kumar on 'memes, viral videos and subversive parody' in India, Eko on online cartoons in Sub-Saharan Africa; or Rahimi on satirical cultures in Iran.

According to Kumar and Combe, one of the most important characteristics of satire is 'its intensive transactive reader response dynamic' where 'satirists are especially attuned to precipitating an exact kind of partnership with their contemporary readership' (2015:213). Although the present study agrees that there is a need to focus '[a]s much critical attention […] to the satiric narrate as to the satiric narrator' (ibid.), the assumption that comedy requires a deeper understanding between comedian or performer, and audience, is hard to establish empirically. It certainly seems so, especially within the niche environment that networked media provides, but this is probably true for other media forms as well, such as specific subcultural forms. In other words, while the present thesis confirms that there is an intense process of identification going on for political comedy audiences which relates to the various interpretative communities they belong to (cf. Day 2011; Hutcheon 1994), this doesn't mean that such processes cannot be found in audiences of other genres or forms as well, especially in the fragmented media and audience context.

Especially popular during the past decade or two is the form of political comedy usually categorised as news satire, mentioned in Hariman's mapping and throughout this chapter. Here, the body of research is quite large, with various methodological and theoretical approaches represented (with a notable absence of qualitative audience studies), for instance by Amarasingam 2011, Baumgartner and Morris 2006, Baym 2005, 2007 and 2013 and Gray, Jones and Thompson 2009[22]. *The Daily Show*, and its sister programme *The Colbert Report* (no longer on air), are the two most famous contemporary examples, and have inspired international productions, such as Swedish *Tankesmedjan*. These programmes are characterised by what they *don't do* rather than the opposite. Day explains how Stewart and Colbert don't do impersonations or create fiction about politicians. Instead, they conduct interviews with 'real public figures,' scrutinise current news and 'do the investigative work of match-

[22] See also Becker, Xenos & Waisanen 2010; Cao 2010; Carlson & Peifer 2010; Day 2009; 2013; Feldman 2007; Goodnow 2011; Hart & Hartelius 2007; Hoffman 2013; Holt 2007; Jones 2007; 2010; Kim & Vishak 2008; Meddaugh 2010; Painter & Hodges 2010; Prior 2003.

ing a politician's or pundit's statements, with past actions and positions' (2013:415). This is true for *Tankesmedjan* as well, and several other similar examples – too many to list here, as it seems to be one of the fastest growing formats for political comedy today. In a special issue of *Popular Communication* (10:1-2), focussed on news parody and satire globally, Baym and Jones state that news satire and parody seems to be universal, showing that 'what some have labelled, or mislabelled "fake news"—plays an increasingly important discursive function (2012:2). Providing an overview that may already be somewhat out of date, these articles provide research on similar programmes and their functions in their respective countries (cf. Harrington on Australia; Doyle on France; Cosentino on Italy; Kleinen-von Königslöw & Keel on Germany; Kumar on India; Shifman on Israel; Semati on Iran; Bardan on Romania; for additional examples of such programmes, cf. Iqbal 2011).

Other examples of international research on political comedy include the work of Day (cf. 2011), who among other things writes about activists' use of comedy (exemplified by, for example, the activists and documentary filmmakers 'Yes Men,' who use comedic stunts and other public events to communicate a political message); Harrington (2011) on the new forms of journalism found in Australian *The Chaser's War on Everything*; Görkem (2015) on the use of political comedy in Turkish demonstrations; Stewart (2014) on political comedy cartoons dealing with the disasters in Japan following the earthquake of 2011; Tsakona & Popa (eds., 2011) on the often forgotten Central and Eastern European political comedy; and Ferré-Pavia, Sintes & Gayà (2015) on the perceived effects of the popular Spanish *Polònia*. Finally, the edited collection *A Decade of Dark Humor: How Comedy, Irony and Satire Shaped Post-9/11 America* (edited by Gournelos and Greene 2011) provides various textual approaches to American political comedy during the 21st century. The collection takes the fear of using humour during the time immediately after the attacks on the U.S. on September 11th as its starting point, and considers the first decade of the 21st century as characterised by humorous or ironic expression as well as by a polarised discourse of 'good and evil' (2011:xi). According to Gourdelos and Greene, the traumatic events of September 11th prompted 'a reinvigorated opposition movement to dominant media, industry, political and economic interests' (ibid.); and the book highlights how humour, in various forms, is used to deal with trauma and fear. For instance, Greene focusses on counternarratives and ironic intervention in *South Park* and *The Colbert Report*; Benke writes about political economy and humour through the case of satiric treatments of the Enron scandal; and Lewis discusses 'ethics of humor for the digital age' (2011).

Swedish political comedy

In the Swedish context there are quite a few comedians, programmes and other utterances of political comedy, and again, it is not possible to mention all. In various forms, the comedy duo 'Hasse och Tage'[23] (Hans Alfredson and Tage Danielsson) are one of the most well-known acts. Their work includes stage, radio, film and television performances, in the form of skits, revues and what today might be likened to an early form of stand-up. They were active as a duo from the early 1960s to 1985, when Danielsson passed away, but previous to establishing their act, the two comedians worked at Swedish Radio in the 1950s: Danielsson became head of entertainment in 1956, and in 1958 he and Alfredson created an early form of news and political satire radio programme called *Mosebacke Monarki* ('The Monarchy of Mosebacke,' SR 1958-1970), which was centred on the fictional state Mosebacke, from where news reports were broadcast (cf. Sjögren 1997:82). In 1963, the world of Mosebacke was moved into television, in *Aktuellt från Mosebacke Monarki* (SVT, 1967) and *Nyheter och bulletiner från Mosebacke Monarki*[24] (SVT, 1968, cf. Sjögren 1997). Alfredson and Danielsson both came from so-called university 'spex,' which is a traditional form of humorous and musical stage performance (close to the revue) that is practiced at universities in Sweden. It is still quite common for Swedish comedians to have been involved with spex during their college years, or, for that matter, other student-organised cultural forms, such as radio and television production.

Revue has been one of the main forms of Swedish political comedy during the 20th century (as in the neighbouring country of Denmark, see Bruun 2012). Often, perhaps because of the relatively small scale of the Swedish comedy market, Swedish comedians and satirists have published and performed in several various media forms, such as revues, music, daily newspapers and literature; and then later on, also in radio, on records, on television and online. Karl Gerhard (1891-1964) is one of the most prominent early figures, when it comes to the satirical type of revue (cf. Lind 2015). His *Köpmännen i Nordens Venedig* (1936)[25] is considered representative of the tradition wherein Swedish towns and cities organise their own new year's revues. Still popular, news and events of the past year are satirised in front of a live audience, around the time

[23] They would also go under 'Hasseåtage' and 'AB Svenska Ord'.
[24] Translates into Current in Mosebacke Monarchy and News and bulletins from Mosebacke Monarchy.
[25] Translates into *The Merchants in the Venice of the North*, a nickname for Stockholm and a parody of the title of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

of New Year. For instance, *Arlövsrevyn*[26], which puts on about 80 performances around New Year's every year (Arlövsrevyn 2015) is the southernmost region of Scania's (Skåne) most well-known new year's revue (and by now known in most of the country, as it has been shown on national television in 2011; for further reading, cf. Sjögren 1997). Also worth mentioning here are the comedy group *Galenskaparna och After Shave*[27], who have performed on stage, film and television, with a mix of music, satire and physical comedy; the writer Kar de Mumma[28]; and the comedic duo *Magnus och Brasse*[29].

In print, satirical writing and cartoons have been prevalent. Swedish dailies have consistently published such content and even though it might not be as popular among, for instance, the audience members represented in the present study, it still remains. In the context of magazines and other types of press, *Grönköpings Veckoblad*[30] (parts of which were broadcast in its own radio programme *Dagsnyheter från Grönköping*, which translates into *Daily News from Grönköping*, SR 1945-47, see Sjögren 1997:61) and the newer *Galago* should be mentioned. Perhaps more relevant when focussing on young adult audiences, *Galago*[31] started in 1980, and comes out four times per year. The magazine represents a new wave of Swedish satirical and autobiographical graphic novels and cartoons directed at adults, and a long list of cartoonists have been published in the magazine throughout its existence. During the 2000s, several courses and educational programmes in the art of cartooning were started (cf. Serieskolan 2015; Falkenström 2014), seeing many of their graduates make a name for themselves. Several of them were mentioned by the participants of the present study, and most of them do comedy and satire in other forms as well, including Liv Strömquist, Sara Granér, Nanna Johansson and Sara Hansson (previous performers of *Tankesmedjan* and part of the feminist cartoonist

[26] 1995-, translates to *The Arlöv Revue*. Arlöv is a small town located between the cities of Malmö and Lund.

[27] Translates into nonsensical *The Lunaticians and After Shave* and is a combination of humour group *The Madness creators*, and barbershop group *After Shave*, active from 1982.

[28] The pen name of Erik Harald Zetterström (1904-1997).

[29] Mostly active during the 1970s, the duo consisted of Magnus Härenstam (1941-2015) and Brasse Brännström (1945-2014). One of their most well-known shows is 'Varning för barn' ('Beware of children').

[30] 1902-, originated as a part of the paper *Söndags-Nisse*, and became its own magazine in 1916. It was founded by Hasse Zetterström and even though its title translates into *The Grönköping Weekly*, it comes out once a month. Grönköping is a satirised version of a small town, wherein events of the world and Sweden are parodied as if they took place in Grönköping.

[31] Throughout its existence it has gained credibility among fans and critics, although at times it has struggled to gain a profit, changing formats and publishing collections of graphic novels. It has been translated into Italian and English under the names of *Ponti* and *From the Shadow of the Northern Light* (previously *Galago INT*).

collective Dotterbolaget), as well as Simon Gärdenfors, Martin Kellerman, Marcus Nyblom, Nina Hemmingson, Jan Stenmark, Mats Jonsson and David Liljemark, many of whom started to gain semi-celebrity in the Swedish underground fanzine scene during the 1980s and 1990s.

In the beginning of the broadcast era, Sweden saw developments in entertainment (cf. Sjögren 1997). For instance, the 'meta-television show' *Skäggen* (*The Beards*, SVT 1963)[32] was met with varying levels of enthusiasm from the audience when it first appeared (Bolin 2013:265), but was 'often highlighted in the broadcasters' own accounts, and among critics and researchers' (ibid.). This kind of programme can be seen as a type of 'experiment with the medium' containing 'meta commentaries on the narrative and generic character of the medium itself' (ibid.). Such programmes can be understood as early versions of television and news parody (ibid.).

Later during the broadcast era, the group *Helt Apropå*[33], who had a television programme with the same name between 1985 and 1992, are often mentioned in the context of political comedy on Swedish television. It commented on the news of the week and was among other things famous for its parodic imitations of the Swedish prime minister at the time, Ingvar Carlsson, wherein his long face was represented by the sole of a shoe with glasses on. In 1999, the television channel TV4 started its own political comedy panel programme *Parlamentet*[34], in which many Swedish comedians have participated as either the 'blue' or the 'red' part of the panel, representing parodic versions of right- and left-wing parties. This production can be seen more as a parody of politicians, with semi-improvised discussions amongst them and a straight-faced host. A third television production worth mentioning is *Snacka om nyheter*[35], a panel programme which aired between 1995 and 2003 on SVT, which was based on the British *Have I Got News For You* (BBC One, 1990-).

In radio, the previously mentioned performers have been important figures as well. Well-known programmes include the programme *Public Service* (P1, 2001-), which consists of an eponymous group which performs topical

[32] In the British context, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (BBC, 1969-1974) can be categorised as such a meta-television show (Bolin 2013:265).

[33] Which can be translated into *By the way*, and consisted of comedians Elizabeth Banke, Fritte Friberg, Cecilia Haglund, Kryddan Peterson, Stellan Sundahl and Lotta Thorell.

[34] Comedians who have appeared on the programme, and in some cases gained popularity because of it, include Helge Skoog, Johan Wahlström, Lasse Eriksson, Annika Lantz, Henrik Hjelt, Sissela Kyle, Pia Johansson, Babben Larsson, Magnus Betnér, Henrik Dorsin, Johan Glans, Björn Gustavsson, Soran Ismail, Per Andersson, André Wickström.

[35] Translates to *Talk about news*; performers included Stellan Sundahl, Sven Melander, Kajsa Ingemarsson, Stefan Grundin, Ronny Eriksson, Lasse Eriksson, Kristoffer Appelquist and Annika Lantz.

parody and satire in skit form on a weekly basis, directed towards an adult audience (as part of the Swedish Radio P1 Sunday morning programme *Godmorgon Världen!* it is branded as the more grown-up, and perhaps more conservative, alternative to *Tankesmedjan*).

During the 1990s and onwards, the youth-focussed public service radio channel P3 has been known for its own brand of comedy[36], often based in the broadcast divisions located in Malmö or Gothenburg, rather than in Stockholm, where most of national public service radio is produced. While Swedish comedy of the 1990s is often seen as quite apolitical, represented by, for instance, the popular comedy group Killinggänget, who were active on radio, stage, in television and film, mostly during the 1990s and early 2000s, the newer P3 comedy has been seen almost as its own subgenre of comedy, in which political and social commentary has been mixed with nonsensical or absurdist humour. Programmes such as *Hej Domstol* (2003-2006)[37], which mixed absurdism, social commentary and personal attacks on Swedish celebrities, and *Pang Prego* (2007-2010)[38], which consisted of satirical commentary, jokes and songs, featured a lot of the same comedians that then went on to form the first generation of comedians of *Tankesmedjan*, and have then gone on to other forms of satirical and autobiographical humour.

The fact that the most well-known art education for cartoonists is placed in the southern city of Malmö, and part of the referenced humour of P3 is produced there (including *Tankesmedjan*), make some speak of 'Malmö comedians' as an established group or collective, with some central figures. In an article from 2014, the main regional daily newspaper *Sydsvenskan* asks what 'Malmö humour' is, and tries to answer the question by speaking to some of the more established stand-up comedians, as well as the audience of a stand-up club. They characterise the Malmö brand of humour as playful, experimental, intellectual, rough and a bit more political than comedy from other places, which over the years has attracted those who are interested in pursuing a career in that type of comedy. This is of relevance as some of interviewees and focus group participants reference 'Malmö humour' (not because of the article, which was written after the fieldwork was carried out).

[36] Including, for instance, *Clownen Luktar Bensin* (1998-2002), *Deluxe* (2004-2007), *Mammas Nya Kille* (2005-2015), *Pippirull* (1998-2003), *Rally* (1995-2002), *Roll on* (2004-2007), *Så funkar det* (2001-2003).

[37] With comedians Jesper Rönndahl, Kalle Lind, Ola Norén and Valdemar 'Valle' Westesson, Ada Berger, Maja Salomonsson, Liv Strömquist, Råland Ulvselius and Robin Paulsson.

[38] With comedians Josefin Johansson, Nanna Johansson, Kristoffer 'Kringlan' Svensson, Simon Svensson, Freja Hallberg, Emma Molin, Jesper Rönndahl, Liv Strömquist, Sarah Holmdahl and Sara Hansson.

Tankesmedjan and *The Daily Show*

The two main examples of political comedy mentioned in the present study were chosen after the piloting phase, as they came up again and again among the most common examples mentioned by interviewees, and were some of the highest rated examples. They have some key similarities as they both belong to the subgenre news satire (see these listed in detail in Appendix B). This section will describe them and some of the other examples that came up during the interviews and focus group sessions.

Tankesmedjan is a radio programme broadcast four times a week between four and five in the afternoon (excluding music it is about 30 minutes long) on the radio channel P3, which is a part of Swedish public service radio. P3 is aimed at teens and young adults, and describes itself as 'young public service' (Swedish Radio 2014b). According to the programme's producer, it is difficult to get exact ratings for this particular programme, as it shares time slots with other programmes. In general it has about 300,000-350,000 listeners per broadcast (email from Wallin 2014), which may be considered relatively high for Swedish afternoon radio, as morning radio get the highest ratings. The most popular programme on P3 is morning show *Morgonpasset* (1992-), which averages about 600,000 listeners (Swedish Radio 2013).

Translated into English, *Tankesmedjan* means *The Think Tank*, and the basic idea is to parody a think tank. The programme's tagline can be translated to 'We tell everyone what to think' ('Vi säger det alla ska tänka'). It has been on air since 2010, with various recurring performers, most of them stand-up comedians, cartoonists and writers. Some of the performers most often mentioned by the study's audience members were Liv Strömquist, Nanna Johansson and Sara Granér, all politically focussed graphic novelists, and stand-up comedians Simon Svensson, Jonatan Unge, Petrina Karlsson and Ola Söderholm. At the time of writing, most of them have moved on to other programmes, mainly podcasts, in line with the hiring policies of Swedish public service radio, which entail short term contracts. The fact that popular comedians have been replaced by others, sometimes less popular ones, due to this hiring policy, came up a few times during the interviews and focus groups, and has been satirised in the programme itself. In a recent news piece on the relative success that earlier performers of the programme have had in podcasting, this was touched upon once again. A programme director at P3 was interviewed, and said that:

> We want P3 to be like an incubator for promising talent. They grow here, cultivate their brand, and then move on in their careers. In many cases to very successful humour podcasts. […] not everybody can stay there: if comedians from the 90s were still here we wouldn't be able to let in new voices, and there wouldn't be all these podcasts. It's good for Swedish comedy that there is this diversity (Swedish television 2015, author's translation).

In the piece, the abovementioned comedians Unge and Strömquist are asked to comment, as they now represent some of those new, successful podcasts[39]. They question P3's statement, saying that the public service channel is putting a positive spin on its own rough hiring policy:

> But most of those we speak to who have worked at P3 question this explanation. Rather, they say, the abundance of talent and the platform monopoly [of public service] has created a situation in which P3 doesn't have to hire anyone. 'I think it's an afterthought. If not they've been extremely forward-looking with their personnel policies, as they've done it like this long before there were any comedy podcasts,' says Jonatan Unge. 'That said I want to underscore that I really, really love Swedish Radio, if anyone there is reading this,' he says, making a melodramatic hand gesture. 'Take me back!' […] Whether a conscious strategy, or the consequence of a bad personnel policy, seems to depend on who you ask. 'It's really important that Swedish Radio take in young people, but I also think they have to consider quality: To have a tradition wherein you value people's craftsmanship,' says Liv Strömquist, who chose to leave Swedish Radio on her own initiative. For sure, the range of radio [sic: podcast] comedy in Sweden keeps growing fast, already outnumbering that of Swedish Radio several times. The issue still remaining is the role of Swedish Radio in a new media landscape, where the radio monopoly in comedy has finally ended, once and for all (Swedish Television 2015, author's translation).

As the piece from SVT points out, the number of comedy podcasts has grown exponentially. Most of this growth has taken place during the past two or three years, which is one of the reasons for why they weren't mentioned by the interviewees and focus group participants in the study.

The issue of Swedish Public Radio's hiring policy has been widely discussed, not only with regards to P3 (all of the Swedish Radio channels have similar policies). In 2011, the then vice president of the company, Cilla Benkö,

[39] Strömquist co-hosts *Lilla Drevet* (2013-, funded by *Aftonbladet* and sponsors) with several of ex-performers in *Tankesmedjan*, including Unge, Söderholm, Svensson, Moa Lundqvist and Nanna Johansson, focussing on news satire in the same style as *Tankesmedjan*, as well as *En varg söker sin pod* (2012-, funded by newspaper *Expressen* and sponsors) with film director and writer Caroline Ringskog Ferrada Noli, focussed on feminism, culture and politics. Unge co-hosts *Februaripodden* (2015-, crowdfunded) with Söderholm, which discusses and satirises sex and relationships, as well as *Della Sport* (2014-, crowdfunded) with Simon Svensson and Kristoffer Svensson, which satirises sport and sports journalism, as well as *Spela Spel* (2015-, sponsored and crowdfunded) with Nanna Johansson, focussed on gaming and e-sports.

commented on what is often referred to as the 'LAS-issue'[40], after she had told participants at a seminar hosted by the School of Journalism at the University of Gothenburg that 'those who are really good at what they do can get permanent employment at Swedish Public Radio' (Benkö 2011), a comment which gained some criticism. In a blog post she defended the statement by referring to the 'uncertain economic future' of public service in Sweden, which means that the organisation needs to be 'extremely restrictive when it comes to hiring new staff'. She ends the post as follows: 'Again – is this an ideal situation? No! But the way things are today, I don't see a future in which reality will change radically' (ibid.). In previous blog posts, other executives of the company have relayed the same message: that with the uncertainty about the scope and size of future Swedish Public Service radio, restrictive hiring policies will prevail (see also Svegfors 2012). In the case of *Tankesmedjan*, at least one of the early hosts of the programme, stand-up comedian Emma Knyckare, has gained permanent employment and gone on to host other programmes, while the others haven't. This means that from an audience engagement perspective, programmes such as *Tankesmedjan* are vulnerable. The audience members who follow their favourite comedians, do so more passionately than those who casually switched on their radio at certain points of the day; and when their favourites left the programme, so would they. Instead, they would re-listen to old clips of the programme, found in the archive available on P3's website.

Tankesmedjan is made up of recurring segments, such as mock debates and opinion pieces, which satirise news and current political stories, as well as the media's handling of those stories. It's available through FM radio and on SR's webpage and mobile app, both for online streaming and for download of podcast versions, where the music is edited out. Most of the present study's interviewees and focus groups participants who followed the programme claim to have used the podcast version, because of the convenience of listening when you want to, or avoiding the music.

The Daily Show is a talk show aired four times a week on American cable channel Comedy Central[41]. According to a press release from Comedy Central (2013), the programme averages about 2,5 million viewers in the U.S, often beating other late night talk shows in the 18-49 demographic. That demographic makes up 75 % of the total (journalen.se 2015), and the programme's website is the most visited among the competitors (Comedy Central 2014b).

[40] LAS is a part of Swedish labour legislation which allows for a maximum number of years of short term contracts (two or three years), after which an employer has to either provide permanent employment or terminate the employment entirely.

[41] Owned by MTV Networks, a part of Viacom.

In the late summer of 2015, host Jon Stewart left the programme after 16 years, but as the fieldwork for the present study was carried out during 2013 and 2014 (before the announcement of Stewart's retirement), he will be treated as the host. The changes that have come with the new host, South African comedian Trevor Noah, will therefore not be accounted for here.

The present study's audience members would access *The Daily Show* through multiple ways. Those who had watched the programme for years had either used streaming services via the programme's official American website (which later on used geo-blocking to stop that), or illegal streaming sites; or they had watched it on the cable channel CNN International, which showed the programme in Sweden for a few years. An additional few had consumed pirated versions that were downloaded to their computers through bit-torrent technology. In 2009, Comedy Central started national versions of the channel in several European countries[42], including Sweden, and the rights to show the programme changed. The channel presents itself as the 'only Swedish channel that shows the best comedy, animation for adults, classic and stand-up comedy […] for your daily dose of comedy' (Comedy Central Sweden 2014). Swedish Comedy Central shares its channel slot with the children's channel Nickelodeon, starting off the broadcast with day-old episodes of *The Daily Show* at 4 p.m. (excluding advertisements, the programme is about 21 minutes long) and then showing it again at 7 p.m. Since the start of Swedish Comedy Central, the programme has also been available for free streaming on its website.

During 2013 and 2014, *The Daily Show* got 25,000 to 30,000 viewers every evening on the cable channel Swedish Comedy Central (MMS 2014), which is quite high for that channel, among their top ten programmes, and beat the other comedy specialised cable channel in Sweden, TV4 Komedi (which is aimed at an older audience) in that time slot. Comedy Central's ratings are slightly lower compared to other types of Swedish, specialised cable channels, like the documentary profiled TV4 Fakta, which has around 30,000-50,000 viewers in that time slot. The time slot (seven p.m.) is generally dominated by news programming on the three biggest channels in Sweden (public service channels SVT 1 and 2, as well as the commercial non-cable channel TV4), with around a million viewers per programme (MMS 2014).

But, as mentioned, the programme is also available for streaming on Swedish Comedy Central's webpage, and this is the way most of the interviewees and focus groups participants claimed to access it during the time of the interviews and focus groups. At the time of writing, information on ratings of

[42] Broadcasting and offices are based in Amsterdam.

streamed television is expanding in Sweden, although it does not include Comedy Central. Just as podcasts have grown exponentially during the time it has taken to carry out the present study, so has streaming services and the use of them. In 2012, Swedes watched circa 94 million hours of streamed television; in 2014, that number had grown to almost 163 million hours (MMS 2015).

Amber Day describes *The Daily Show* as: 'relaying and evaluating the day's news stories, debating the issues with politicians and pundits, and, oh, telling a fart joke or two' (2009:85). According to her, the programme challenges genre expectations, 'resembling other examples of late-night comedy in form but involving a far more complicated and slippery relationship with the real political world' (2009:85). Painter & Hodges describes the programmes' structure using some of the research done during the past years:

> A typical episode of Stewart's program is divided into three segments. The first segment 'mimics the anchor-centred style of television news reporting, where Stewart narrates the day's top stories accompanied by video evidence' (Jones, 2007, p. 133). The second segment features Stewart 'interviewing reporters 'on location' with Stewart talking to his faux 'senior correspondents,' who pretend to be reporting live via satellite' (Jones 2007, p 133). The final segment shifts to a traditional talk-show-style interview that regularly features political, legislative, or journalistic guests (Baym 2005)(Painter & Hodges 2010:266).

The programme also often deals with how media, especially American 24-hour news networks, conduct their reporting; and is, perhaps because of this focus, popular among scholars as a subject of research, based on the vast number of studies that have been published during the last decade. According to several scholars, Stewart has gained journalistic credibility even though he rejects that title himself and 'does not fit easily in existing categories' of journalism (Carlson & Peifer 2013:336). When Stewart ended his tenure on the programme this gained a massive amount of coverage in other media, domestic and international. In Sweden, at least 20 news pieces in the beginning of August 2015 centred on Stewart leaving the show, and his impact on both American and Swedish culture.

Both *Tankesmedjan* and *The Daily Show* use websites and social media like Facebook and Twitter actively, to spread clips and communicate with their audiences, and both programmes' websites offer ways of accessing one's favourite comedian's clips specifically, as well as full back-catalogues. Both programmes are broadcast four days a week, and focus mostly on domestic news. The programmes represent different national contexts, they differ in medium, and they represent both commercial and public service broadcasting. Most

audience members were aware of both programmes, although few followed both. This divide among the audience members has several explanations, such as varying interest in foreign and domestic news, the fact that some preferred radio to television, and, it seemed, chance: some had just not gotten to see or hear the 'other' programme, illustrating the vastness of the selection available to young adult audiences.

Before moving on to the genre work of the audience, the fact that the present study deals with one television programme and one radio programme begs the question of how the differences between radio and television are accounted for. The short answer is that they are not, as the design of the study doesn't include such a comparative element. Of relevance are the facts that radio provides an audience with less cues than television does, especially facial cues, a factor which has impact on such an audiences' understanding of intent. For instance, Jon Stewart can express irony with his face in his television programme, while Liv Strömquist cannot do the same in the radio or podcast medium. But that does not mean that audiences struggle more with such questions when they listen to the radio. In the data of the present study, there were no clear indications that the audience of *Tankesmedjan* had greater difficulties in this area than those who followed *The Daily Show*.

For the reader of this book, however, the connection between medium (radio or television) and financing (public service or advertising) might be relevant, as it must be remembered that the relatively small size of the Swedish media market allows for less domestic television production. As it is more costly than radio production, this might be part of the reason why there is a relative lack of experimental or niche televised political comedy in Sweden, but a relative upsurge of such forms in radio and podcasts. This explains, in part, why Swedish audiences turn to American television, where the production value is higher. The ability of Comedy Central to provide a steady flow of high quality programmes, and, importantly, keep Jon Stewart as the host for so many years has ensured a steadier engagement from its audience. In other words, they know what to expect. For Swedish political comedy, the conditions are quite different, as it has to survive on much less. The inability of Swedish public service radio to keep its talent makes for a less loyal audience and, in some cases, a view of its programming as wavering in quality, which means that audiences are less sure of what to expect in the future. On the other hand, it potentially keeps some of the engagement through its open and comprehensive archives were audiences can seek out their favourite comedians and listen to old segments, sometimes over and over.

Summary

Through a theoretically based discussion of hybrid forms of political comedy, and a more concretely based discussion of contemporary forms of the genre in Sweden and internationally, this chapter has situated political comedy in the contemporary media landscape. More specifically, it has made the point that hybrid forms such as political comedy and, in a wider perspective, political entertainment, challenge the construction of entertainment as separate from information. In this, a number of concepts have been proposed by various scholars. The labelling of political comedy as such is important not only in scholarly discourse, but since its content is scrutinised and can quite easily be misunderstood. Interestingly, satire holds different meanings depending on what context it is being labelled in, either as humour with serious intent (in relation to other forms of comedy) or as purely comedic – not to be taken too seriously (in relation to factual and news programming). By using the illustrative example of the controversy sparked by comedian Unge's mockery of the lobbying of diabetics in *Tankesmedjan*, and the reactions that followed, as well as by providing insights into the extensive research on political comedy programmes like *The Daily Show*, it is made clear that the perception and construction of comedic and satirical intent is paramount, both in concrete legal cases and in the wider context of media culture. The chapter ends with the results of the study's mapping of various forms of political comedy, its history in the context of Swedish broadcasting, and descriptions of the two programmes used for recruitment of participants, so that the reader can situate the genre within the media landscape, and become familiar with its various forms and examples.

5. Audience genre work

This chapter turns the focus to the understanding of how political comedy audience members define and engage with the hybrid genre of political comedy. Beginning with a description of their general media habits, the chapter then discusses the conceptual framework of genre work, and presents the analysis of audience members' constructions of political comedy. This will provide insights into political comedy's status among its already existing young adult audience, especially because it, as a hybrid form, is characterised by uncertainty (Hill 2007) – which is illustrated in the previous chapter. Humour and satire, as forms, require a special type of audience engagement, as the construction of *intent* is significant. Gray et al. (2009) comment on this in their writing on satirical television: satire is 'rarely a form of discourse with clear-cut or easily digestible meanings,' which, they say, demands a lot from its audience: it 'can be "work," and therefore it tends to require a level of sophistication' (2009:15).

The point of this is to understand how the political comedy audience define and engage with the hybrid genre of political comedy. Whether or not the audience members in the present study had ever thought about political comedy as a genre varied greatly, and this impacted their constructions of it. For some it was a genre in its own right, which carried certain specific qualities that they linked to their own engagement, and for others, it was considered to be just another type of comedy, which they engaged in for pure pleasure. To understand those variations better, participants were prompted to engage in what Hill (cf. 2007) calls genre work, but with a focus on their ideas, distinctions and knowledge about political comedy. Taste hierarchies, wherein satire is valued over other forms of political comedy, are visible in the constructions, but most prevalent is the fact that political comedy is admired for its ingenuity and intelligence, aiding audiences in understanding institutions of power, and the rhetoric and performance that surround such institutions.

Participants and their media habits

The audience members of this study were recruited though a call which asked for anyone between the age of 18 and 35 who 'liked' either or both *The Daily Show* and *Tankesmedjan*, or where 'brought along' after being identified as such by a friend. The sampling excluded those who were not regular watchers or listeners, as the thesis' main objective concerns those who follow political comedy regularly, i.e. those who already belonged to this audience.

In general, participants had some form of higher education, or were students, some of whom had part-time or full-time jobs alongside their studies. Most of them lived in medium-sized cities (about fifty thousand to a quarter million inhabitants) or bigger cities (about a quarter million to a million inhabitants); but some individuals from rural areas and small towns are represented in the material as well. Most were born and raised in Sweden by Swedish parents, though six of them had at least one parent from another country.

Although the sample as a whole is equal with regards to gender (16 of the 31 were female), it is somewhat skewed when it comes to distribution across interviews and focus groups. Males who answered the call for participants tended to prefer in-depth interviews, when given the choice between that and participating in a focus group, and they also tended to prefer *The Daily Show* over *Tankesmedjan*. This does not mean that there were no male audience members of *Tankesmedjan* represented in the study, but it does mean that *The Daily Show* audience was represented in the in-depth interviews almost exclusively, and discussed less in the focus groups. According to American ratings, the programme attracts more male viewers (Comedy Central 2013), but this may not be true in the Swedish context. There doesn't seem to be a clear explanation as to why the male participants preferred interviews – when asked most simply said they were more comfortable in that setting. Further, it was more common that male participants cancelled their planned participation in focus groups, than females, resulting in less male representation in the focus groups than originally planned. It should also be added that the second focus group was recruited during a live broadcast of *Tankesmedjan*, making that group more focussed on that programme, even if other programmes and comedians were mentioned here and there. (To see a full list of participants and which programmes they follow, see Appendix C.)

In line with having a contextualising approach to the audience of political comedy, the broader media consumption of the audience members needs to be addressed. Understanding how young adults who are drawn to political comedy engage with other types of media, the present study argues, is significant in

this type of research. In most of the research conducted on such audiences, the direct effects or impact of political comedy are in focus (cf. Jones 2013a; Day 2013). This is problematic because it misses the broader nature of media engagement, and further, political identity and citizenship. It isolates engagement, creating an overly narrow understanding of the audience, their engagement, and their construction of meaning (Jones 2013a). The present study aims to counter this by focussing on political comedy engagement in a contextualised manner. Moreover, it is in line with avoiding the perspective of audiences as passive receivers of media (cf. Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998).

In a quantitative study of media habits of Swedish young adults (there defined as aged 20-39), Andersson (2007) concludes that several factors determine what such habits are, among them what media is available, as well as the social situation of such young adults. The current media landscape is characterised as in flux, with new forms of content, channels of distribution, and models of financing the media, impacting how young adults value different media.

Further, according to Andersson and apparent in the data of the present study, contemporary young Swedes do not step into adulthood until their thirties, which is later than previous generations (2007:63). Among the media habits impacted by this are those related to news consumption. Dailies in paper form are generally speaking abandoned for shorter articles online or in ad-financed free papers (such as *Metro*), and commercial television channels are increasingly favoured over public service, since deregulation in the beginning of the 1990s. At the same time, Andersson points out, the concept of life phases may be more important than age, as media habits change depending on perceived stability and everyday life (2007). Children, careers and other similar factors determine how a person's everyday routine is structured, more than how many years someone has been alive. Among the present study's participants there were quite a few differences in levels of disposable time and income, and how 'established' they were as adults. Common to most or all of them, though, was that they didn't have children[43].

Another important point to make here is that Swedish young adults seem less prone to separate different media forms from each other (Sternvik 2010). For instance, watching television isn't associated with a television set in the same manner as it used to be. In line with this Sternvik makes the point that while media habits are changing, they are to be considered as diversified or

[43] Participants weren't explicitly asked about children, but as everyday routines were discussed, children did not come up more than once (mentioned by Jenny who had a baby at the time). Of course, participants may have had children even though they didn't mention them.

fragmented, rather than shifting wholly from one media form or distribution channel to another. Furthermore, the question of what can or cannot be counted as news media is increasingly difficult to answer, which makes quantitative survey studies, such as the one she and the above-quoted Andersson base their studies on, increasingly difficult to carry out (ibid.).

For this reason, and to provide readers of the present study with a better view of the participants, a holistic approach is of especial importance. Some of the participants would describe themselves as engaged with a media flow. For them, this term comes from social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, where news articles are mixed with others things, such as updates from friends and whatever else is integrated due to the choices of users, and algorithms of the particular social media platform. Based on the questionnaires participants filled out about media habits, as well as what was said about this during interviews and focus groups, it can be concluded that a portion of them were quite heavy media users. All of them claimed to engage with either online or broadcast media, or papers and magazines, on a daily basis, and most used more than one of those types of media daily (a summary of the filled-out questionnaires may be found in Appendix D).

When it comes to news media, most participants reported daily news consumption, via radio, television, or the press (on- and offline). This is significant as it shows that while the present study includes issues like disengagement, disinterest, and the affective deficit, most of the participants are *not* news avoiders. It's logical that those who enjoy political comedy, especially the type that satirises news, would enjoy it because they also follow the regular news. The way these young adults found their news may differ from how previous generations have done so, but the actual news they engage with is conventional and mainstream for the most part.

Those who called themselves political or news 'junkies' spent several hours a day engaging with politically related media, in all possible channels. They would get the news on the adult-directed public service radio channel P1, but also scanned the national, regional and sometimes local dailies, and in some cases, followed political profiles and journalists on Twitter or other social media platforms. They would search actively for news, were tuned in and online daily. Some seemed embarrassed to reveal this about themselves, writing comments such as 'way too much' (Rebecka) in the questionnaire. Some also engaged in television news, but if there was one type of media in which they didn't seem to engage as much with news and political programming, it would be television. As some of the participants preferred streamed television – both commercial and public service – the logic of selection changed, and most of

them wouldn't actively seek out television news in such a context. If they did, they would go to other sources as well, such as the BBC World News site.

The group who didn't engage as much with news was made up by a few who seemed to avoid it categorically, and a few who drifted in and out of engagement, depending on mood, as well as on the time and energy available. For instance, Tess and Thelma didn't seek out news but listened to P3 daily, which has short newscasts once or twice every hour, and they also saw articles shared in their Facebook and Twitter feeds. In this manner, news seeped into their media consumption whether they intended it to or not. Oliver, who didn't listen to the radio (he preferred humorous podcasts), and who didn't use Facebook or Twitter much, seemed to be able to be more selective, because he avoided media wherein news is 'pushed' onto the audience. His media consumption was characterised more by the 'pull' type of media, like streamed television, podcasts, and newspapers online. In this way he had more control over his news intake than those who used more traditional media and social media. Freja, who similarly focussed her media consumption on entertainment and humour, listened to broadcast radio, but chose a commercial music channel, thereby avoiding the hourly newscast of public service radio (both P1 and P3 have such broadcasts). She never read any newspapers, which she was the only one to claim, and her audio-visual media consumption was similarly focussed on commercial entertainment channels and YouTube. Among participants, she was unusual in this regard, as most claimed to engage with some form of news sources on a regular basis.

In the next section, genre work as a concept will be explained and applied on the studied audience members, showing how they defined political comedy and how they constructed the values and enjoyment associated with it.

Genre work and cultural citizenship

Hermes (2005) and Hill (2007) both refer to John Ellis (2000) and his concept of 'working through,' to define what it is that popular culture audiences' genre work can shed a light on. Hermes describes how Ellis suggests that television aids us in the process of 'working through' contemporary uncertainty and anxiety, as a kind of therapist. Even though Ellis uses psycho-therapeutical concepts, Hermes considers the concept of 'working through' as capturing what she calls 'the doing of cultural citizenship' (2005:12). It is, she writes, about 'the very nature of coming to terms with oneself as a member of a community, situated in a wider world,' based upon an 'always continuing activity of building such community memberships and reflection on them' (ibid:13). In Ellis'

original conception, television news is used as the example of media that helps us 'work through' uncertainty; and this is fitting for political comedy, since it invites and makes explicit uncertainty, through its mode of address. When prompted to speak about political comedy as a genre, the participants engaged in articulating their experiences of it, and the reflection of such experiences. Thus, they exposed the kind of double mode of engagement that political comedy's mode of address requires from them, as they are driven to wonder about the potential serious intent of the comedy.

This connects to wider processes of 'doing' cultural citizenship, which is a continuous project of community and identity construction. Humour can in itself be considered a tool for inclusion and exclusion (Billig 2005b) or boundary maintenance (Smith 2009; Malmqvist 2015), and with its focus on political issues, it explicitly addresses events that define contemporary society. As established in a previous chapter, Hill sees genre work as 'involv[ing] multiple modes of engagement' and as 'the work of being both immersed in watching a genre, and reflecting on this experience' (2007:84). Genre work is thus, in this case connected to humour, cultural citizenship and engagement.

Through the discussion of how and if the study's participants considered political comedy to be its 'own' genre, including issues such as how it compares to other genres, and what types of pleasures they gained from it, were central. The analysis of these discussions is presented in the remaining sections, and reflect the genre work of audience members.

The clever comedian

Common to the studied audience members is that they first and foremost expressed how they admired certain comedians, i.e. specific performers, when asked what they enjoyed about the programmes. This is an observation made by quite a few producers and comedians themselves[44]. One could say, in this context, that they could all be counted as fans. In line with how Abercrombie and Longhurst argue, the present study presupposes that:

[44] For instance, creator, director and producer of *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 1975-), Lorne Michaels, spoke in an interview podcast (WTF with Marc Maron, 2015-11-09) about how he thinks that quality in comedy doesn't always matter, as audiences will 'follow' their favourite comedian and enjoy whatever they do, demonstrating loyalty and a desire to laugh.

> 'ordinary' audience members are more like fans and enthusiasts than might initially be thought and that, given the increased contemporary salience of media fan-like and enthusiast-like qualities, sociation patterns are increasingly likely to resemble some of the relationships identified by the fan literature […] it is important to identify the nature of the skill mobilized by fans and enthusiasts. […] these skills lead fans and enthusiasts to be productive in two general senses: materially of things and meanings; and of identities (1998:122).

To illustrate the 'skill mobilized' and how that leads them to be 'productive' of 'things,' meanings and identities, we can begin by considering Benjamin, a 31-year-old shop assistant, who was a fan of Jon Stewart and the *Daily Show*:

> I am very often impressed, if you look at Jon Stewart – Jon Stewart especially: he can take on any politician. […] he can bring in an expert on a certain subject and then debate them, and he can almost … outdo them. He's so unbelievably well-read and I don't think we have anyone like that in Sweden. I know he has great writers as well (Benjamin, 31).

He speaks of 'Jon Stewart especially,' as a performer or personality that is an embodiment of the programme itself.

A recurring theme is that various intellectual abilities are highly valued among the study's audience members. Freja, a 22-year-old part-time toy shop assistant and social work student, also speaks of Stewart in a similar way:

> I mean Jon Stewart always jokes about the Republicans, that they're like stupid, so that's fantastic! Fantastically funny, and it makes you so happy! […] that clip [on *The Daily Show* about the then newly elected pope] is so fucking funny, I laughed so hard I thought 'I'm going to die' – amazing! (Freja, 22).

Morgan, a 29-year-old administrator and filmmaker, quickly focusses on Stewart as a performer when asked about what he enjoys in political comedy:

> I'm very happy about things like *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. [It's an] hysterically funny show! […] that whole programme or especially Jon Stewart as the host, is a bit of a phenomenon. […] I think that's what it's about; you don't just like the programme, you really like the person hosting it. You don't know him, but somehow it still feels like you do: you know you like the person because of what he does on the programme, and even when you see them in more serious contexts, like this debate we spoke about earlier [between Fox News' Bill O'Reilly and Stewart] where they actually show us how freaking good they are, especially as rhetoricians! (Morgan, 29)

He explicitly underlines the fact that Stewart and the programme are a 'phenomenon,' that Stewart's personality is likable and funny; as well as someone

he sees as skilled in various ways. The ability of Stewart to be funny is mentioned before Morgan moves on to mention the host's skills and intelligence.

This type of admiration was found in the *Tankesmedjan* audience as well:

> JD: What kind of things do you like about *Tankesmedjan*; do you like any of the recurring segments?
>
> H: Yes, the debates [faked debates on real political issues] are very funny, but especially – she's not there anymore – but I usually go back and listen to the best ones: Liv Strömquist, she was so, or she *is* so damn good, because she pinpoints something, and succeeds in … she delivers her own suggestions, which actually sound sensible, while at the same time parodying others' opinions, and herself a little … (Harald, 18)

Harald, an 18-year-old upper secondary school student, says Strömquist is 'so damn good' because of her intelligence. Even though this part of the conversation was directed more at recurring segments in the programme, he veers into speaking about her, mentioning how she 'sound sensible' and simultaneously manages to parody others and herself. Harald goes to the back-catalogue, available on the programme's website, to be able to listen to her specifically as she at the time of the interview had left *Tankesmedjan*. The admiration for her has to do with several aspects of her performance, including her self-deprecation and being constructive when facing a problem. Among those who liked *Tankesmedjan*, Strömquist was often described in a similar manner as Jon Stewart.

As mentioned earlier, Critchley writes about humour's 'alien perspective': that it is an 'expression of an abstract relation to the world' (2002:62). Gray et al. develop this argument in the context of American satirical television like *The Daily Show*: 'humor always, at least potentially, offers the possibility of *defamiliarization*, allowing us to see the social and scientific order anew' (2009:9, italics in original). They use Bakhtin to underline the seriousness of humour, and write specifically about humour's ability to elicit laughter, as it lets us 'approach any object from a healthy distance' (2009:9f). Referring to Bakhtin, they point to the constant 'reflection, analysis, and ridicule of social norms as enacted by humour' which makes it into a 'device warding off the entrenchment of any norm into becoming wholly acceptable and beyond rebuke (Gray et al. 2009:9f). It might then be assumed that political comedy audiences are more attracted to this type of 'healthy distance' or 'alien perspective' than others. The studied audience members did express opinions on how they wanted to be addressed; they were critical towards programmes they felt were misleading or 'talking down' to the audience. Throughout the data, it was apparent that they weren't only looking for technically skilled comedians but

also for skilled *thinkers*. In the following exchange, Karolina constructs herself as a fan of Liv Strömquist:

> JD: Do you follow [Strömquist] especially, like do you look up what she's doing in different contexts?
>
> K: Yes, yes, absolutely.
>
> JD: What do you like about her?
>
> K: I don't know, well, she's so funny! […] and she's like smart, I feel like there's a lot of substance! I started listening to *Tankesmedjan* and I thought she was the funniest, because it was so well thought out. Good feminist analysis (Karolina, 22, political science major).

Karolina concludes with pointing to Strömquist's 'good feminist analysis,' which other audience members did too. This shows how the pleasure taken in political comedy isn't only about the performers themselves, but also about what they embody (such as feminism), in relation to this critical thinking.

In connection to this, it may be relevant to bring up the idea of the knowledge class again (Hermes 2005; Hartley 1996; 1999) since, as Hutcheon writes, the use of irony has been associated with 'the manner of "superior" address of the educated and upper classes' (1994:41); and as Bolin reminds us, certain forms of satire and comedy often are associated to the knowledge class. When discussing 'the meta-television show' *Skäggen* as well as *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, Bolin makes the point that 'the academic connection' between satire and comedy, and the academic institutions in Sweden and Britain respectively, is common (2013:268). The comedians that perform and produce both *Tankesmedjan* and *The Daily Show* are often – though not exclusively – highly educated, and begin their entertainment careers in student radio, theatre, revue and television, which in part may explain the relatively high educational levels of the recruited participants of the present study.

The political in political comedy

The greatest differences between audience members with respect to genre work was, in short, reflected in whether or not they had thoughts about political comedy as a genre or phenomenon. Some had thought about political comedy as genre and/or form before: about its functions and status in relation to other genres, while others had answered the call for participants simply because they followed *The Daily Show* or *Tankesmedjan* on a regular basis. This didn't mean

that they weren't interested in the political content of political comedy, but that they framed their engagement as primarily related to humour, as well as specific performers. This, importantly, shows how they didn't consider themselves as focussed on political programming, yet still came into contact with such content. A common thread for such audience members was their sole focus on comedy. Morgan said this of *The Daily Show*:

> It's hard to say, to define why [I like it], but it's … the humour in itself … good sketches, they're daring, they dare to … make fun of specific, existing news programmes and anchors, and somehow it feels like they connect to you, with the actual news (Morgan, 29).

He stresses the quality of the humour before he moves on to mention news.

Freja, who constructed the programme similarly, said this when asked if she followed anything else that she categorised as similar to *The Daily Show*:

> Jon Stewart talks about [politics] a lot. And since I watch Comedy Central a great deal, in general, that kind of stuff comes up. And the same with *Saturday Night Live*, they bring up quite a bit like political … sometimes they have that guy, Seth Meyers on *News Update*[45] […] He usually does really funny stuff. And they often do satire on the elections, at the top of the show, and there's this guy who looks just like Obama, who's funny as hell! There was this thing […] something about Obama falling asleep, or dropping something, or something like that (Freja, 22).

She begins by explaining that she sees the programmes because she watches Comedy Central, and focusses her enjoyment on specific comedians' abilities, such as their impressions, rather than underscoring the satirical intent or political message.

Similarly focussing on personae and physicality, a focus group participant spoke about her favourite comedians on *Tankesmedjan*, saying that:

> I like Ola [Söderholm] and Liv [Strömquist]. Ola mostly because he has a super fantastic accent, he sounds so … [trails off] (Tamara, 20, law student).

Tamara highlights comedian Ola Söderholm's (northern Swedish) accent as part of his performer persona. While all participants focussed on performers, those previously less engaged in genre work didn't go much further beyond this. As they hadn't thought about *The Daily Show* or *Tankesmedjan* as part of a specific genre before, aspects having to do with their laughter responses and personalities were easy to express in the focus group or interview situation.

[45] A recurring segment of *Saturday Night Live* where current news stories are jokes about.

Some of the audience members were ambivalent towards being perceived as even interested in political issues. For such individuals, political comedy seemed to lure them into the political:

> JD: Do you follow opinion journalism as well as *Tankesmedjan*, would you say it's the same or different?
>
> T: I think it works like this: you become engaged because [*Tankesmedjan*] is so polarised. Even if you're not thinking about politics, you're like, 'Oh my God! He's right …,' or 'Haha, that's so funny!' and I think it boosts your political interest […]. You're kind of forced to have an opinion (Tina, 23, student of history of ideas and sciences).

In this exchange on opinion journalism, Tina describes how polarised political arguments on *Tankesmedjan* draw her in; she 'becomes engaged' and is 'forced to have an opinion,' and this is associated with the emotional and cognitive reactions she has. *Tankesmedjan* fills a clear function here: it allows for Tina to engage with political issues in a way that she enjoys, which has an explicit emotional component. Her description of this can be connected to Dahlgren's argument on how experience is linked to emotion and engagement. Experiences are emotionally based, further arguing the point that 'affective involvement with political goals and values' that are 'compatible with democracy […] contributes to democracy's vibrancy – and to people's sense of their political selves' (2009:119). So Tina experiences affective involvement, and sees political comedy as 'boosting' her 'political interest'.

Freja spoke about the appeal of the Swedish stand-up comedian Magnus Betnér, who is often characterised as political:

> I have a really hard time describing myself as interested in politics. Well, I'm not, like I have a problem seeing myself that way. As if I were to go and [see] Magnus Betnér [it's] not because I think his opinions are so great – it's because he's funny. That's why I'd like to go, for the humour. Yes. Because he's *funny*. Then if they have a political focus, I hadn't really thought about that until I saw your ad on Facebook (Freja, 23).

As is argued throughout this thesis, apolitical stances can be linked to an affective deficit of contemporary democracy (Coleman 2013a), which in turn depends on several aspects of how modern democracy has been conceptualised. According to scholars like Coleman and van Zoonen (2005), contemporary citizenship is characterised by a lack of focus on and allowance for affective processes and subjective emotions, and because of that, some citizens react by rejecting anything that can be labelled as political. This will be developed fur-

ther in the coming chapter on political identity and citizenship, but is still relevant in contrasting audience members' constructions of what political comedy is, and how it works. Those who seemingly ignore the serious satirical intent, have a need to disassociate themselves from such seriousness, creating a situation where they are engaged with it, but do not fully recognise it.

Political content was more or less in focus and brought up throughout the discussions. Benjamin, the 31-year-old shop assistant, mostly followed *The Daily Show* and other American political comedy programmes, and spoke about what he saw as a lack of Swedish political comedy. The interview took place not long after the cancellation of Magnus Betnér's political comedy talk show *Betnér Direkt*[46] (Kanal 5, 2012), which Benjamin was unhappy about. This led him to think about how to assure the success of that type of format:

> JD: Do you think the media has any responsibility towards the audience, is that something you've thought about?
>
> B: Yes, I have, I actually thought about that with respect to Betnér … I understand that [commercial television channels] need to make money, but I still think … somehow there's a certain responsibility, I think, to actually contribute to public debate. But I guess, if a child gets to choose between carrots and candy … it'll always choose the candy. But that doesn't mean that candy is better, really. That's kind of how I feel. Sure, there's always the risk that you come off all moralist and preachy […] but I mean, it's too bad because those programmes are great entertainment as well, I think people need to get used to it to understand what it's about (Benjamin, 31).

Benjamin compares political comedy with carrots, something that a person consumes for a healthy (political) lifestyle, but avoids when other more attractive types of programmes ('candy') compete for his or her time – as if it's an acquired taste. He speaks of the importance of political comedy for public debate, and the fact that such programmes are 'great entertainment as well' is secondary: it's the political content that he values.

In an era when most things are politicised, where the boundaries of the private and public are blurred, and the personal lives of elites are discussed in the media, one can stretch the definition of what the 'political' in political

[46] The programme was broadcast on Swedish Kanal 5 in 2012, and was according to Betnér himself modelled after the American HBO programme *Real Time With Bill Maher* (Betnér 2012); which includes a politically focussed monologue at the beginning, followed by an expert interview. After that comes a panel with politicians, celebrities, opinion makers and/or journalists, who debate current issues. The programme finishes with another monologue by the host, this time with a slightly more serious tone and political point.

comedy is. For the audience members of the study, media institutions were seen as power institutions, making them into important objects of scrutiny.

Criticising media

The study's participants spoke of political comedy functioning as journalism, as well as being entertaining: the contribution to 'public debate' as Benjamin says, and the ability to say things that 'haven't been said anywhere else,' as Harald puts it. These functions are associated with political comedy's contribution as a source of media critique. In a study of the functions of *The Daily Show*, Painter and Hodges (2010) summarise research on the programme:

> *The Daily Show* routinely 'interrogates the content of the news media, the "real" news that is arguably failing its democratic function' (Baym 2005:268) and 'highlights … the inadequacy of the usual fare' (Ross & York 2007:353f). Stewart often provides a counterbalance to the staid traditional news reporter through his use of jokes and exaggerated faces, the counterbalance is needed 'in a public culture where one has to wonder if real news is fake, and where one often wished it were so' (Hariman 2007:275). While *The Daily Show* does provide news and context, its 'greater purposes … may be to mock the genre of television news itself' (Baym 2005:269) (Painter & Hodges 2010:259).

Their point is that such a function may encourage a critical engagement with 'real' journalism. In line with, for instance, Marchi's results from 2012, young adults and teenagers question traditional news sources, with the help of alternative sources such as political comedy.

It's important to remember that a portion of the audience aspired to, or at least saw the possibility of, a career in journalism. Alexander, Dennis and Jenny, for instance, had some experience of journalistic work, and had studied journalism. But at the same time, the strong media criticism found amongst interviewees and focus group participants was common among those not at all interested in such careers, as well. The fact that media and journalism are seen as institutions of power is noteworthy, and audience members' ideals concerning good journalism followed this perspective. Alexander said:

> A lot of the political humour feels like it's about [the media], and I think that's how it should be. Because it's the media's job to, like, secure the access to political information. And the media in Sweden and the United States and in other places is often silly, they're just silly all the time (Alexander, 27).

His view of news media being silly was rooted in the idea that contemporary journalism fails in its main function of providing citizens with information on

politics. Such failure is important to criticise, and here Alexander saw a 'serious' function of political comedy. Others went further, and constructed political comedy as 'almost news':

> You can see that it's very, very … well-researched. And that's why I think that you can … you can actually see it as news reports as well. I don't think it's less nuanced, I mean I don't think it's less nuanced than if you, for instance, look at the regular news channels. So it's a very good source of information, I really think so (Benjamin, 31).

In Benjamin's construction of political comedy, it is not only a source of enjoyment, but information. There are no significant differences between news journalism and, in this case *The Daily Show*, because the latter is well-researched. Dennis, one of the audience members considering a career in journalism, reflected on the differences and similarities between *The Daily Show* and *Dagens Nyheter* (DN), one of the biggest daily newspapers in Sweden:

> I sometimes feel that there's an additional need for a critical awareness [among audiences] of sources in [political comedy] contexts. But not that much greater, because I think that regular news demands so much of that type of critical awareness from the get-go … so like if I were to compare … like yeah, 'you know I saw this thing on Jon Stewart' compared to 'I read this thing in *Dagens Nyheter*,' I feel it's almost the same. And you know, that sort of critical awareness is a lot of hard work. And it is that way with most things, I feel. I'm not that nervous about using [political comedy] as a source either. Although it depends a bit on what you're watching as well (Dennis, 24).

Dennis started out saying he saw a greater need of awareness when it comes to political comedy, but then, as he spoke further about the issue, he realised he almost considered *The Daily Show* to be as trustworthy as *Dagens Nyheter*. Karolina similarly compared *Tankesmedjan* to *Dagens Nyheter*, and went even further, saying that:

> I think it's dangerous to think [too much about generic labels], just because something is in DN doesn't mean that it's not bullshit. I mean it can really be bullshit, really! It comes down to people and who has … […] journalists are still people. And they can be just as full of it, as [comedians] (Karolina, 22).

These quotes, as well as the previous one from Benjamin, are possible to interpret in two main ways: either as a criticism of conventional news media, as not being as trustworthy and well-researched as it should be, and/or as a positive evaluation of political comedy. In any case, they were critically aware of the

potential shortcomings of news programming, and didn't have an idealised view of journalism as such.

Transgressing boundaries of news and comedy

Audience members shared a common interest in, and enjoyment of, critical and ambiguous issues. As Eva put it in the following exchange on the main functions of political comedy, for her, it challenged her to be a critical thinker:

> JD: What's the value of political comedy if you compare it to 'regular' comedy?
>
> E: Well, I think that for me, it's about the intelligence.
>
> JD: That it's …
>
> E: That it's intellectually stimulating. And that they can put, I mean a really good comedian can pinpoint something which otherwise is just like hard and tough or sad … or even unanswerable (Eva, 30).

The fact that comedians can say things that haven't previously been said, or are tough to articulate, is vital. Comedy's mode of discourse is what allows for that, and fills a void. One conclusion to draw from this is that there is a need for hybridity in relation to factuality, news and entertainment. Not only do audiences enjoy thinking about what political comedy is or isn't – for instance, how trustworthy it is, what the intent may be, or how to compare it to other forms of media; they enjoy that political comedy inhabits a hybrid space which allows it to do more, or something different than other, less hybridised media.

Political comedy works by blurring the boundaries of what might be expected, by mixing jokes with well-researched and well-thought out and serious political arguments, and its audience is invited to engage in a more aware and critical manner. They are prompted to ask what is to be taken seriously, and what isn't, and since this is experienced as enjoyable, and often even as something relaxing, it differs from other types of political media.

Linus, a 26-year-old student who had begun a career in politics, saw the ambiguity as related to honesty:

> *The Daily Show* is … they problematise politics in an almost unique way. And that … yeah, they have a way of showing news from a certain angle, they do an honest type of news reporting that is humorous, and despite how absurd that is, they always have an issue that they show, and that's so terribly funny to see what they'll do with it … and then that they're like a news outlet with great reputation even though they're on Comedy Channel [sic] […]. They definitely have an extremely honest approach to politics. And they do an analysis of politics that you wouldn't find anywhere else. Especially if you're interested in American politics (Linus, 26).

For Linus, what should be contradictions between honest and serious political analysis, and humour, or news on a comedy channel, was the unique quality of *The Daily Show*. For him, honesty is linked to ambiguity, and absurdism. Again, we see a construction of political comedy that references the unique standpoint of the humorous mode of discourse: that it can say the unsaid, that it can provide a unique and 'honest approach'. By transgressing the boundaries of factuality and, in many cases, civility, it is experienced as able to say something that other kinds of political media cannot – or should not – be able to.

The idea that political comedy can contribute a type of analysis not found in other places was brought up quite a few times by different audience members, either as an observation when comparing their favourite political comedy to other types of factual and news genres, or on a more theoretical level, comparing the limitations of journalism as a practice which has to follow certain rules and conventions to the relative freedom that comedians have. For instance, Ivar said that:

> I think that's what [comedians on *Tankesmedjan*] can do, that they don't have to … be as correct, or whatever. […] regular news can't be aware of everything either and it's not as if they are (Ivar, 23).

A journalist cannot say 'I was just joking' if criticised, while that answer is quite common among comedians in similar situations. In the Swedish context, the satirical label has exactly such a function, as explained previously. Ivar and the others have ideals of what journalism should be, and realised that such ideals can be hard to live up to, while comedians have less of such ideals, creating more room for alternative political analysis.

Interviewees and focus group participants showed signs of being highly critical in this area, and this critical stance was directed both towards traditional news media, comedy itself, and the political analysis found in political comedy. Gabriel, a 24-year-old webmaster from a midsized town in southern Sweden, spoke about what he *doesn't* enjoy about *Tankesmedjan*:

> Well, when it stoops to a personal level I often think it's … not funny at all. I mean it's hard, when it comes to politicians, where to draw that line between public and private. Like the new minister of labour, I think that's who it was, who was in Livets Ord[47] … I mean, that's private, but it's still a big part of her life, so you should still be able to … criticise it. […] It's when it gets too personal, or when it's based on looks or gender [that I don't like it] (Gabriel, 24).

He has an example ready, showing that he has thought about this before: it's 'not funny' when political comedy focusses on a politician's personal life. But what Gabriel and others like him mean when they say 'funny,' is complex, again in relation to humour as a form: it has to do with their broader enjoyment, including instances when they think programmes or comedians are less smart, successful, or when they joke about someone in an unfair way.

As stated, some audience members had already engaged in genre work more explicitly, which was often indicated in how quick the responses were, and in some cases, in statements such as 'I've thought about this'. For them, it wasn't difficult to remember an instance or two where they had been less happy with their favoured political comedy programme, viewing it with the same critical eye as they applied to regular news programming. Political comedy was judged according to some type of ethical critical stance, tied to such audience members' interest in serious political analysis:

> Like one thing I've started to notice more recently … I analyse things more in detail nowadays, I feel more aware of what's being said. Like it annoys me when … *The Daily Show* often edits sequences, when they run many different people's statements in a row. Like when they skip between dates, and don't edit it chronologically, that annoys me (Linus, 26).

> I'm thinking … it's been a while since I saw it but like, *Parlamentet* … I don't think that's very good, as political satire. It can be kind of funny sometimes, but in other ways … it's more like improv, than having an actual political dimension. It's called 'the Parliament' but it could be a lot more interesting from a satirical aspect, or like, politically (Dennis, 29, part-time worker and journalism student).

> The most annoying aspect I can think of is when it gets too silly and too … just attacks: it becomes vulgar or something, and then it's no fun because the whole point of it is that you want that little finesse, that little afterthought … as well as some kind of acidity (Harald, 18).

Linus is irritated by the editing techniques of *The Daily Show*, and Harald and Dennis focussed on how serious the political analysis is, or if there even is one.

[47] A Swedish evangelical church.

Were comedians just making fun and being silly, or were they actually trying to make a serious political point; and did that point have merit? Harald is clear about the difference of good and bad political comedy. For him, it needs to take things seriously, have finesse and provide thought-provoking content. Dennis rejects *Parlamentet* because of its lack of a 'political dimension,' and he doesn't see improv (a staple of that programme) as political or satirical.

Hariman points out that political comedy is not exempt from scholarly or journalistic discourses on cultural distinction, nor, the present study would add, from audience discourses. For instance, Hariman writes, 'satire on behalf of social justice is better than humor used to enforce hierarchies of domination' (2008:247). But a priori value judgements should be avoided by researchers, because, 'it's a package deal. To take humor seriously, one has to be prepared to step outside the forms of deliberation, civility, and good taste' (Hariman 2008:247). Scholars need to be aware of this in relation to their own work, when conducting audience research, because comedy distinction, as with any cultural genre, is used in processes of inclusion and exclusion already in progress[48]. Those will be explored further in the coming chapters, but for now it is important to explain how such distinctions, as part of genre work, were applied on political comedy, because it shows the variety and intensity of political comedy engagement. Eva, a 30-year-old doctoral student, explained what she *doesn't* enjoy in the political comedy radio programme on P1, *Public Service*[49] (as opposed to *Tankesmedjan*):

> that's what's so clear in *Public Service*, that it's making fun of the people in power, regardless of their politics. And there, you may be of the school that's less … biased. But then, *Public Service* is an insanely dull form of satire [laughing]. It's so incredibly predictable! (Eva, 30)

Eva is critical of political comedy making fun of politicians in power regardless of their political ideas. Again, we see the mixing of what is funny with what is 'good,' or 'better' in the words of Hariman. For Eva and some of the others, making fun of the powerful isn't enough: a specific point must be communicated when making fun of the powerful.

The less biased type of political comedy Eva refers to is comparable to the earlier-mentioned *Parlamentet*, and is characterised by what Corner et al. (2013) dub as parody, mockery or spoof, rather than satire. And while *The*

[48] For a field theory study of comedy audiences in the British context, see Friedman (2014).
[49] As mentioned, the programme is directed at adults, and has aired since 2001 on public service radio station P1 (Swedish Radio 2006). It is mostly known for its comical impressions of politicians.

Daily Show and *Tankesmedjan* make use of all those forms, it is clear that both programmes' audience members often place the satiric form ahead of the others. Of course, one could argue that they are inseparable: for instance, a political joke can be made up of raillery, to make a satirical point: but again, the issue at hand is how audiences use these concepts in their genre work. Eva wanted a serious analysis of political ideas or perspectives from political comedy, comparable to Dennis' need for 'political dimension'. In a similar manner, Benjamin and Harald explicitly called for biased or self-critical political comedy, seeing this as one of the strengths of their favourite comedians:

> It's the same if you look at Magnus Betnér: to really dare to have an opinion, to say that, 'okay, now I'm going to interview you, but I have an opinion as well, and I'm not going to pretend that I don't, and everyone knows this ahead of the interview' (Benjamin, 31).

> At the same time, [comedian Unge] mocks his own opinions as well, and then there's this kind of self-deprecation … rather than saying that 'I'm right, there is nothing more to be said about it'. Instead you get to see both sides, that both sides can be silly and most often politics are silly because everyone is just sitting there in their fixed chairs, never moving (Harald, 18).

They echo parts of Eva's reasoning, saying that it's better to have an explicit perspective, than 'pretending' one doesn't.

Audience members seemed to question the very ability of individuals to be objective, or even the relevance of total objectivity in political media, and held up more biased perspectives as useful to them. Political issues are by nature related to conflict and conflicting perspectives (Dahlgren 2009). In one of the focus groups, this discussion spurred participants to explain how they distinguish between news and political comedy, and connected that to enjoyment:

> Thelma, 20: News is mostly very neutral. They don't have any thoughts on the news, it's just news. But they do in *Tankesmedjan*, they agree, or disagree with someone, always. That's the thing, and then they make fun of that. […] And I guess that's what's fun about it. It's boring with people who try to be neutral all the time. Like, you have to have a position. That's what's funny.

> Tess, 22: Otherwise it feels like they're passive and don't want to have a position. It almost doesn't matter what they believe in *Tankesmedjan*, it's the fact that they believe in something, to 100 %. Like when we were [at the live broadcast], they debated the death penalty. And pro death penalty won[50], because it was more fun, because he was the best at arguing his point.
>
> Tim, 28: In the case of *Tankesmedjan*, they have a clear left-wing profile. So there's a lot that, if you're coming from that perspective yourself, you have a common ground. All of the fancy [ideals] that you have in other news, where you have to be neutral for the sake of being neutral. You can ignore a lot of that in political satire. So in certain cases, you can cut to the chase. […] Like, for example, 'this politician, he's an idiot'. And there, we've dealt with that, and everyone agrees, and we can move on. That can be pretty refreshing.

The exchange between these audience members reveals how they associate news with neutrality, which was considered less enjoyable. It should be mentioned, though, that this didn't mean that they didn't engage with news as well. For political comedy to work, there needs to be a straight, serious kind of political media to play off. The often outspoken bias in *Tankesmedjan* is enjoyed in itself: it is one of the main sources of enjoyment for these audience members. With the issue of the death penalty, it is worth mentioning that it is rarely discussed in Swedish 'serious' contexts, as the death penalty was banned in 1921 and isn't favoured by any mainstream political actors. In the U.S., for example, the satirical debate described above would not be as absurd, as it plays with a contextually specific common reference that Swedes hold, in which the idea of the death penalty is obscure. With very few serious proponents of it being exposed in Swedish media, it might be considered a 'safe' issue for a humorous mock debate, wherein the audience can feel sure that the actual stance of being pro death penalty isn't to be taken seriously; so that they can focus directly on the arguments as such. This exchange clearly illustrates how political comedy can be seen as inviting play (Jones 2013b): the debate is like a fun roleplaying experiment.

For Tim, there is an added dimension in the issue of bias. Going a bit further than Thelma and Tess, he sees *Tankesmedjan* as leftist, which makes it possible for the programme to bypass the neutral, to 'cut to the chase'. While *Tankesmedjan* as a part of public service cannot have an explicitly biased perspective, some of the audience members in the present study, as well as several critics (cf. Arpi 2015) have made the same point about the programme over the years. The issue connects to a greater debate about perceived left-wing political

[50] During this live broadcast, the studio audience got to decide on the winner of the debate by applauding more or less loudly.

bias among Swedish comedians and satirists (Lind 2015), and more generally, among Swedish journalists, especially in public service media. In 2006, Swedish media and communication scholar Kent Asp published a report on the topic, after measuring party sympathies among Swedish journalists. He concluded that while the green party (Miljöpartiet) and the left-wing party (Vänsterpartiet) are 'heavily overrepresented' among Swedish journalists' party sympathies compared to the general public, the two biggest parties, the social democrats (Socialdemokraterna) and moderates (Moderaterna) are underrepresented (2006:21), which indicates that it's not only about a left-wing bias, but about a tendency to sympathise with smaller parties.

Also, as Asp points out, it is hard to say whether or not such sympathies are reflected in their reporting on political news. Among those journalists who can be said to have influence over political reporting, i.e. those with editorial responsibilities, as well as those Asp deems to have 'leading roles in national news media,' this overrepresentation was not found. Interestingly, the representation of left-leaning sympathies was found mainly among such journalists he considered to have less 'leading roles,' i.e. freelance journalists and young, female journalists (ibid.). In a later report based on the same longitudinal study, Asp argues that the differences found between journalists and citizens in general can be attributed to the changing sympathies of citizens, who have moved more towards the centre and right-wing, though journalists have not followed this general trend to the same extent (2012). What is relevant is what this perceived bias *does*, in the view of Tim and other audience members. Tim enjoys the bias in itself, as it in his words is 'refreshing,' and it allows for the circumventing of certain aspects that accompany journalistic neutrality or objectivity.

Whatever the subjective reasoning for enjoying opinions is, the present study argues that it has specific relevance for a young adult audience, because it aids such individuals in their own thinking about political issues. By comparing different perspectives, as in the case with the mock debate about the death penalty, or by lifting a particular perspective to the forefront, political comedy can spell out or expose political issues more clearly. This gives it an educational dimension. Remy, a 29-year-old journalism student, explains that he didn't 'grow up in a political family' and that political comedy has compensated for that and made him aware of politics and political issues:

> JD: Would you say that you learn things when you listen to or watch political comedy?
>
> R: I do, but I don't think I would have if I had grown up in a political family. Simply put: it clearly marks what the left-wing perspective stands for, and what the right-wing perspective stands for. If I read the newspaper that may be a bit tougher to understand, what distinctive groups there are, when it's just the news. It becomes very clear: there's this visibility, in the humour context, that's very funny. It makes it easier, and funny (Remy, 29).

Remy wants to be a political journalist one day, and clearly sees the value of political comedy for him. He considers himself in need of contextual knowledge, and political comedy makes things *visible* to him in a manner that he prefers – it helps him understand what is at stake and for whom. How are political issues debated and contextualised? The function is comparable to that of role-playing in educational settings.

These findings are congruent with previous research on changing news and factual programming habits among teenagers and young adults (cf. Bennett 2008; Hill 2007). Marchi (2012) concludes that American teenagers enjoyed 'the ideological clashes found in social networking sites, blogs, fake news, and opinionated talk shows,' and saw it as 'more objective and informative forms of news gathering' (2012:258). According to Marchi, this means that news producers need to reconnect to what she calls the 'original intention of the concept of journalistic objectivity' (2012:258) so that news can be considered independent of public relations and propaganda, and provide information that allows young audiences to engage critically with the news (ibid.). The audience members in the present study clearly enjoy the process of being able to feel like they understand something critically, in a deeper way, rather than 'just' gaining knowledge about specific issues; and the current forms of news and current affair programming they engage with seems to be lacking in this respect. Political comedy uses biased representation, however implicit or explicit in the eyes of the audience, to create humorous effects, and through that, educates its audience on various political issues and contexts. It is the comedy that draws them in and keeps them engaged – keeps them from feeling bored – but that doesn't mean that the political content isn't important as well, as the quotes show. Hence, political comedy balances the news, and acts like a counterweight. The studied audience is not replacing conventional news with political comedy or social media, rather, they engage with the political through both kinds of media, to gain that fuller, deeper understanding.

The data of the present study shows that audience members would characterise news as a sometimes overwhelming 'flow'. It was overwhelming because

it pressured them to make a lot of choices, continually, of what to engage with and not, but more importantly, because the news stories they came into contact with were 'negative,' creating a kind of compassion fatigue. Political comedy, rather than adding to such fatigue, which some critics of political comedy and satire have theorised on (Hart & Hartelius 2007; Baumgartner & Morris 2006), seemed to counter this. Susanna, a 28-year-old landscaping architect, expressed this succinctly:

> Another thing, I think, is that the news flow is so big and it can be tough to take it all in, you get kind of jaded. But some of the satire and humour can actually make you regain some empathy. Because you come to that position where [political comedy] can be very brutal, and you come back to this thing of 'Oh my God, that's *so* terrible!' If it were just in the news flow it would flow past you like the rest of it does (Susanna, 28 years old).

In Raymond Williams' writing on broadcasting, he used 'flow' as a way of characterising the seemingly chaotic and disordered output of scheduled radio and television (1974). Susanna similarly uses it to refer to something overwhelming, but for her it refers to news specifically. When she says she can 'come back to this thing of "Oh my God",' she's pointing to the emotionally engaging character of humour as interrupting the news flow. In its 'brutality,' it abruptly pulls her back into engaging with an issue she would otherwise disregard as depressing, as something indistinguishable from 'the rest of it'. Conventional news and current affairs programmes are in no way devoid of emotional appeal, but for the audience, the level of seriousness and sobriety that they require, can be tiring in the long run. The emotional outburst and humorous mode of discourses in political comedy allows its audience to take a moment to 'feel' the negativity. In doing so, they feel re-connected to some of the issues that they may have disengaged from previously, which makes them remember, on a deeper emotional level, why it was important in the first place. Rather than distancing them from these issues, as some critics would have it, political comedy pulls them back to them.

Comedians as levelling teachers

As mentioned, one of the points of approaching political comedy through the concept of engagement is to understand and capture the variety of the subjective positions within its audience. With this in mind, there were a few audience members who in different ways constructed themselves as more intensely engaged than the others. They had all explicitly thought about political comedy

as a genre or at least a phenomenon prior to the interview, and incorporated it in their general perspective on political issues. This will be explained and made concrete in the following subsection.

Karolina, a 22-year-old political science student who wanted a career in politics, was as mentioned an intense fan of Liv Strömquist:

> I have great trust in her! Since I've read all her books: she's often done very solid research, she actually uses … […] footnotes, where she tells you exactly what pages of the scientific journals or books that she's read, so I'd say that she really does more scientific work than many journalists who write the news do (Karolina, 22).

Karolina here contrasts Strömquist with journalists, as Strömquist does what Karolina calls 'scientific work' and 'solid research'. She goes on to describe how she keeps the books of Strömquist on a special shelf in her kitchen:

> they become conversation pieces. They have their own shelf … right by the kitchen table, so it's like, you sit there and have coffee, and it's pretty easy to take one of them out and browse through it … […] it kind of becomes a statement, as well (Karolina, 22).

The physical presence of the books is important: they make a 'statement'. As Strömquist is quite well known, at least within the younger segments of the Swedish population, allying oneself with her becomes a declaration of a certain type of feminist perspective – an identity 'prop,' to use the perspective of Goffman (1959). Karolina's admiration shows in other ways as well. Here, she is asked if she ever repeats jokes she's heard on *Tankesmedjan*:

> Well yes, I often retell the jokes! I love that one when [Nanna Johansson on *Tankesmedjan*] is talking about Annie Lööf[51] and her view of Margret Thatcher: 'Why do you say that she's a role model?,' and she's like [exaggerating Lööf's rural dialect] 'Well, I like strong women' [laughing] and then like, 'but ok, is it her leadership style that you admire?' and then, 'no, I want to be an empathetic and democratic leader,' like, 'okay, is it her politics?' and then, 'no, we're not as neoliberal as her,' 'no, okay, but what is it about her?,' and then she's like, 'well she was the first woman to lead such a big party' … like, wait a minute, Annie Lööf! I don't know if I'd be able to capture the absurdity of that, you know? (Karolina, 22).

The referenced joke from *Tankesmedjan* is based on a serious news segment from Swedish Radio P1, in which the Swedish Centre party leader Annie Lööf

[51] Annie Lööf is the leader of the Center party of Sweden; at the time she was also vice prime minister.

was asked to comment on the admiration she had expressed for Margaret Thatcher[52]. In the quote, there aren't really any specific jokes. While such jokes may have been a part of the *Tankesmedjan* segment, what Karolina actually remembers, is the absurd logic – or lack thereof – in Lööf's statement. The display of how Lööf's admiration doesn't seem to be based on either ideology, or leadership style, but rather on the fact that she was 'the first woman to lead such a big party,' creating a humorous effect for Karolina, while at the same time being serious, too. For Karolina, the exchange between the journalist and Lööf, as well as the commentary made by comedian Nanna Johansson on top of that, exposes 'absurdity'. The fact that she doesn't actually tell any explicit jokes in the quote shows the messiness of the genre of political comedy. In exposing absurdity in political speech, it fills a journalistic function, while at the same time it is perceived as funny. As a result, Karolina has remembered the segment for more than two years (the time of the interview was November of 2013), which again stresses its educational function.

For Hariman, such parody is educational:

> where might one acquire knowledge of the formal conventions and social assumptions of public speech? It is readily available to those few who apprentice within subcultures of democratic participation such as interscholastic debate, electoral campaigning, and legislative service. […]. When most citizens are spectators all of or almost all of the time, there is a need for civic performances that can provide the requisite rhetorical education via spectatorship. For many people, that education is provided by parody and other forms of political humor. […] in the modern public address system, citizenship requires recognizing the limits of a wide range of discourses […] parody and other forms of political humor provide an education in the conventions, intended effects, and limits of persuasion (Hariman 2008:264).

In this sense, education is power. Being able to critically scrutinise political speech and performance, either directly with the help of a comedian, or indirectly by a type of parodic or ironic perspective aided by comedians, citizens in general and young adult citizens in particular, can regain some of the power that is absent in ordinary citizenship, which is what Hariman dubs the 'symbolic levelling' function of parody and political comedy.

This perspective on political comedy is connected to the idea of the carnivalesque, originally conceptualised by Bakhtin (1968), and a common reference in theories of humour and satire (cf. Hariman 2008; Critchley 2002; Billig 2005b; Gray et al. 2009). It refers to the carnival, a time when official-

[52] The reason for Thatcher being referenced at this time (September 2011) is that the movie *The Iron Lady* had just come out, sparking journalists to ask about her political legacy.

dom and rituals are subverted through mocking and parody, when meaning is turned 'upside down,' to emancipate and at least temporarily empower the people (Bakhtin 1968). While most audience members didn't speak of this aspect of political comedy explicitly, those who were more intensely engaged would touch upon it. Niklas connected humour to power, saying that:

> Power corrupts – I really believe in that basic theory – and I think [those with power] need to be joked about, pretty roughly actually, so that they don't get too presumptuous … I think it's good for them, that they can see that the people see what they're up to (Niklas, 35, nurse).

Niklas description the corrupting force of power is in line with the idea of political comedy as a 'symbolic leveller' (Hariman 2008), where humour becomes a resource for political scrutiny. The present study argues that such levelling works though the roles comedians take on. In expressing bias and showcasing ambiguity and absurdity, the comedian becomes a voice for and of people in general: the one who looks through the performance of professional politics, and breaks the 'fourth wall' of political culture. While the abovementioned quotes are different in focus, they expose how some of the audience members felt enjoyment in, as well as constructed a serious function of, political comedy, in relation to political power and culture. Meddaugh uses the term 'carnival laughter' to theorise the audience connects through political comedy, positioning them 'as insiders, in contrast to their traditional roles as outsiders of official discourse and authorized modes of communication' (2010:379).

The more intensely engaged audience members had a strong interest in their favourite comedians. They followed them closely, and demonstrated expert knowledge about them. They researched their favourites by engaging with back-catalogues (in some cases over and over), searching for clips on YouTube and by reading interviews and articles about them. The result was a wider knowledge of, and variety in, what political comedy they said they enjoyed:

> I guess this isn't unique at all, but *The Daily Show* is definitely a central [part of my political comedy intake], I watch every episode of that, and of course, sometimes I watch *The Colbert Report* as well, in connection to that. Then I have a huge amount of podcasts, that I follow, *The Bugle*[53] is a fantastic thing to listen to … there's also a lot of … like *Slate's Political Gabfest*[54], although that's not … that's more entertainment, not so much humour really (Linus, 26, political science student).

[53] 2012-, a British satirical podcast by comedians John Oliver and Andy Zaltzman.
[54] 2005-, an American talk show-styled podcast hosted by David Plots of *Slate Magazine*.

These interviewees and focus group participants identified more explicitly with the comedians they enjoyed, which was exemplified in the following exchange on optimism and pessimism in political comedy:

> JD: In the political comedy you guys follow, is there optimism? Like 'this can be changed!' We spoke a bit about pessimism, but do feel the opposite as well?
>
> S: I feel that I identify with this generation [who are] writing comedy [on *Tankesmedjan*], or graphic novels[55]. And in that way … they're women, they're smart. And there's no victimisation. And both women and men read it. That feels very fresh (Stefanie, 31).

Stefanie enjoyed feminist political comedy that didn't victimise women. She mentioned her common audience members as being mixed gender, which is significant because it shows that she has an awareness of the audience itself, as well as a normative idea of it. These comedians, and their diverse audience, represented her perspective in a way that others didn't.

Niklas continued to explain how specific comedians guided his view of the nature of political culture and debate:

> There's a risk: that you don't just say that 'I think you're wrong,' but that you also say that 'you're a bad person because you believe this'. That's kind of dangerous. […] I think the most effective way to laugh comes from Mel Brooks! He said that the most effective way of stopping racism from coming back is to laugh at it. And that's what he does, he shows us [racists], albeit in a bit of a stereotypical manner, but not too much! […] And then we can see how ridiculous they are. And that's a good thing, that they get to show themselves, it's a good thing that we don't force them back into their caves, no, rather, out with them! (Niklas, 35)

The method of bringing ideas from political comedy into one's reasoning about political debate or political issues, was not only connected to the admiration of certain comedians, but also an important analytical tool, which is exemplified by Jenny in the following quote:

[55] As already commented on, there is a loose knit collective of comedians and graphic novelists, mostly living in Malmö, who have produced a number of comedic radio programmes and podcasts during the 2000s. It includes comedians like Strömquist, Svensson, Johansson, Granér, Unge, Söderholm etc.; and programmes like *Pang Prego* (P3), *Tankesmedjan* (P3) and *Lilla Drevet* (podcast hosted by *Aftonbladet*).

> Well, I like that [*Tankesmedjan*] is deconstructive somehow, it goes all the way, to the point of absurdity, that's something that all four of those [comedians on *Tankesmedjan*] I mentioned before are really good at. To decide that this is not necessarily something bad, we can see it from this perspective instead, and what happens then? This makes for very interesting results (Jenny, 25, journalist).

Tankesmedjan helps her 'go all the way' and deconstruct issues so she understands them better, empowering her intellectually, in the manner that Hariman writes about, by providing her with symbolic levelling.

Again, Jones' idea of play is relevant. In the following quote, he explains this, using the example of when comedian Tina Fey parodied a now infamous interview that the vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin gave during the 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign:

> A traditional journalistic frame for assessing Palin's performance did little to provide resources for 'making sense' of the encounter (given the encounter's perplexing nature). The parodic performance as speech act, however, resituated the interview in a comedic frame, this leading viewers away from the text's preferred patterns of interpretation (rational and deliberative) towards other patterns of thought and meaning – those invited by play. By shifting the interpretative frame, the ridiculousness of the original becomes much clearer (2013b:401).

Jones points to the fact that the 'traditional journalist frame' wasn't enough in trying to make sense of Palin's performance: parody was needed for the audience to be able to avoid 'the text's preferred patterns of interpretation'. Using the term *play*, we can describe this other type of interpretation, and give it credit as it makes 'the ridiculousness of the original' clear (similar to what Karolina described previously, on the absurdity of Lööf expressing admiration for Thatcher). Jones writes that '[t]he satirist demands communal evaluation and rebuke' (2010:143), and one could assume that this is one of the reasons for these audience members' admiration. Politically focussed comedians work as levelling guides and thus become intellectual leaders or teachers, who help audiences to reach their own conclusions, beyond factual knowledge, into a deeper, contextualised understanding of a specific debate or political culture more generally. Hariman's argues that citizens use satire to engage in 'articulating, comparing, judging, brokering, and synthesizing the varied discourses of their society' making them 'equipped to negotiate plural interests based on realistic accounts of self, other, and a world of change' (2008:259).

A similar point is made by Meddaugh (2010), in the discussion of the carnivalesque element of political comedy. As the carnivalesque is considered to be

'confined' to the 'temporal borders of the carnival' (2010:382), Meddaugh uses Gray to make the point that the type of critical discourse that comes with the carnivalesque elements of political comedy can stay with the audience, and help them 'act to reinforce, further disseminate, or even amplify [satirical] texts' disruptive force' (Gray 2006:46). As visible in the quotes above, the type of critical thinking aided by the carnivalesque can potentially stay with audiences, and contribute to a broader critical understanding in general. According to Meddaugh, who has studied *The Colbert Report*, such programmes work by 'acknowledging news as representation rather than reality' (2010:386).

Recalling Hartley's and others' questioning of the division between 'serious' and 'entertaining,' the ideas of play and the carnivalesque illustrate the value of such open-ended activities where there isn't always a serious aim. As Shifman reminds us, play indicates 'alternative engagement with the real and consequential' (2007:469), a mode in which the ambiguity of intent is treasured and pleasure is taken in the potential of transgression. While journalists necessarily have a set of rules and ideals, comedians are free to ignore them. The very potential of that happening is seen as one of the strengths of political comedy, from the perspective of both the audience and scholars.

Beyond this, it is important to reiterate that political comedy manages to attract and sustain actual engagement. Not only does its form allow for symbolic levelling, but it seems to be able to keep a certain level of engagement. In Corner's argument about the connection between form and engagement, he makes the point that disengagement is equally important to study. Disengagement from particular media is often due to 'boredom with its progress or some other perception of its deficits' (2011:77), which, importantly, has to do with the audiences' 'conscious recognition of form, and then a heightened recognition of genre, as part of the self-consciousness of "not liking it" and of identifying the reasons for this' (ibid.). This kind of development could also be considered a form of genre work, in that audiences reflect and make various value judgements in relation to the media they engage with.

In the case of hybrid media, forms, genre and what Corner calls audience 'apprehension' all impact engagement, which illustrates how the understanding of media cannot rest on the genre label itself, but needs to be based on a contextualised analysis of specific instances. In line with Jones' argument (cf. 2007; 2013b), the late modern political comedy audience is in search of other forms of news and current affairs than those traditionally accounted for, 'reinventing what it is they want from political communication' (Jones 2007:145). This is not so much about avoiding the news, as it is about finding alternative forms and sources for news (cf. Bennett 2008; Marchi 2012; Gray 2008).

The following chapter carries this argument into the analysis of the studied audiences' construction of citizenship and political identity, discussing the importance of play, emotion and ambiguity in contemporary political communication and in wider terms, democracy. According to Jones (2013b), the concept of play is important to the communication of the political, and needs to be included in what is considered of value for citizenship. Additionally, the work of Coleman (2013a) on the feelings of voters and the 'affective deficit' of contemporary democracy is central to this section, as well as that of Dahlgren (2009), who writes of uncertainty as associated with political identity and citizenship. These perspectives are significant as they point to the problems of modern ideals, where the subjective and emotional aspects of what it means to be a citizen have been ignored or overlooked.

Summary

This chapter began by contextualising the media use among the study's participants, so that the context of their political comedy engagement is clearer. Through this, the variation in what might otherwise seem to be quite a homogenous group of Swedish young adults becomes visible. Most of them are heavily engaged in news on a daily basis, while a few seem to work harder to avoid news. Comedians are constructed as intelligent and well-read. For some, the political or 'serious' intent of specific examples of political comedy is seen as a marker of quality, while others do not make that distinction as clearly; and some audience members express how they enjoy the media critique that has become a staple of certain forms of contemporary political comedy. The chapter also shows how comedians take on the roles that journalists within traditional news media forms, per definition, cannot take on: they can play with political perspectives, be ambiguous, make poignant statements and in other ways treat political issues and political culture in a manner that the rules and ideals of contemporary journalism do not permit. This makes political comedy into a symbolic leveller, as proposed by Hariman, aiding audiences in their implicit or explicit will to understand political performance and power, in a deeper way. The studied audience members keep a strict separation between political comedy and other forms of 'straight' political media – although this doesn't mean that they do not take the comedy seriously, or do not criticise news and current affairs media. As shown throughout the chapter, audiences' genre work exposes the constantly ongoing complex reasoning that is part of political comedy engagement; where audience develop skills and feel a deeper engagement with, and understanding of, political issues and culture.

6. Political identity and citizenship

Scholars struggle to understand political comedy's status and function in relation to citizenship and political engagement, in part due to its hybrid character (cf. Jones 2013a). The link between media, citizenship and political engagement is complex and can be connected to the 'participation paradigm' that defines parts of contemporary audience research (Livingstone 2013). In an earlier article, Livingstone describes this complexity succinctly, stating that:

> [t]he resources, the competences, the motivations which lead people to participate in public draw – in a manner little understood – on the lived experiences and activities, the conditions and constraints, the identities and relationships of people in their status as private individuals. […] we should ask, what does it take for people to participate in public, what does the public require, what are its preconditions? (2005:28f)

Political comedy and political identity are connected, which is why this chapter probes and contextualises the political comedy audiences' subjective constructions of political identity, citizenship and political culture. This provides an understanding of how and why this connection works, and to some extent, with what consequences.

Engagement, both in political issues and cultural phenomena, is complex and can be seen as a process in which individuals are in constant flux, or at least potentially so. As Dahlgren noted in 2015, engagement has mainly come up in studies of citizenship, and of popular culture; the two areas of research, both relevant to the study of political comedy engagement, are linked through the concept. In a sense, engagement is what comes before participation. It allows for a discussion on the 'preconditions' mentioned by Livingstone; not to argue that all citizens should participate more than they already do, but rather, that they should be able to do so if they want to. That they, in fact, can identify as citizens. Of course, as Livingstone and others (cf. Corner 2011) point out, this is not merely a result of media engagement, or, in this case, engagement in

political comedy. Rather, we must consider the multifaceted connections of different kinds of engagement, and contextualise them, from the standpoint of the subjective. In a paper presented by Hill (2015), engagement is explored in relation to entertainment:

> When engagement happens it is a powerful thing. By accident or design you are pulled into the here and now of a cultural artefact or event. The notion of engagement as an energy force is suggestive of the varying degrees of intensity that are integral to audience engagement. Engagement occupies a space that is more than watching or listening but not quite full participation. It's the space in-between (2015).

Again, here is a reference to the space 'in-between,' comparable to Dahlgren's idea of a prerequisite and Livingstone's precondition, illustrating how the concepts allows for different intensities and modes.

In his 2015 paper, Dahlgren describes engagement as used in 'constructionist models of culture' which help us understand 'notions of identity, culture and power'. Engagement allows for a holistic understanding that includes mechanisms of the cognitive as well as the affective, on the objective/collective level; or the rational as well as the emotional, on the subjective level. We cannot ignore one or the other. As Dahlgren points out, rational and emotional mechanisms 'feed off each other' (ibid.), even though the emotions of citizens have been largely ignored until quite recently. One of the exceptions has been the contribution of van Zoonen, when she argued for scholarly focus on affective investment in the study of media and citizenship. According to her, the enthusiasm and anxiety that people experience in relation to politics creates affective investment, which is crucial to sustaining engagement – much in the same way as fans' 'emotional input' is crucial the formation and sustaining of fan communities (2005:66).

The issue of what draws individuals 'into' something, what makes them invested, is at the core of the study of engagement, be it in the civic, the political, entertainment or anything else. Due to changes in the media landscape and in researchers' understanding of the role of the affective, Coleman differentiates the 'informed citizen' from the 'self-informing citizen, for whom the value of knowledge is enhanced by its distance from the custody of official gatekeepers' (2013b:384). He uses Richard Rorty (1989) to explain this in detail:

> civic expression online is often characterised by what Rorty calls an ironic disposition: one that regards the reality, truth, and finality of big concepts such as citizenship or democracy to be elusive and even illusory. For ironists, epistemological foundationalism and the pursuit of closure are abandoned in favor of a pragmatic approach to the contingency of history. […] Irony of this sort is not about the endless pursuit of paradox […] but a democratic distaste for fundamentalist certainty (2013b:383).

This clarification of irony and its connection to newer models of citizenship is a key part of the argument of this chapter, and the study as a whole. As irony often seems to connote that 'endless pursuit of paradox,' it becomes associated with an 'unhealthy' distance and detachment. Dahlgren considers whether irony 'may be the foundation for the indifference circulating within some of today's more urbane disengaged citizens' (2009:82f). But according to Hutcheon it is more complicated than that, as the attitude conveyed by irony 'can range from minimal to maximal in terms of emotional involvement, from cool detachment to engaged hostility' (1994:40). As will be shown, the data of the present study confirms a view of irony as more complex. Mainly, audience members displayed the 'democratic distaste for fundamentalist certainty' mentioned by Coleman.

The following chapter deals with how the study's audience members construct political identity and citizenship in the context of Swedish politics and political culture. The first part reveals how political engagement can be understood in the context of young adult citizenship, which is characterised by an uneasiness expressed through, among other things, a reluctance to join collectivities and subscribe to so-called package deals, as well as a critical awareness that can be understood as an aspect of the late modern notions of citizenship mentioned earlier, wherein citizens can be seen as more autonomous and self-informing (Coleman 2013b). By exploring this in relation to audience members' constructions of politics and political issues, it becomes clear that these characteristics of young adult citizenship can be linked to a broad and in some cases serious criticism of contemporary democracy. Theorising this further, it is understood through the concept of political efficacy (Coleman 2013a; Campbell et al. 1954). The chapter argues that young adult citizens are caught in the conflict between modern and late modern ideals of citizenship. The subjective sense of ambiguity that comes with this conflict seems to create a form of 'stage fright' – audiences are hyper-aware and critical of their inabilities to live up to the modern era ideals. The final part of the chapter relates these findings to the notion of comedy and laughter as potentially transgressive and empowering, as well as to the larger issue of engagement in both the political and the cultural.

Young adult citizenship

Experiences of political engagement varied among the audience members. One of the most basic of practices of political citizenship, the act of voting, was used as a point of departure in the discussions with interviewees and focus group participants. None of them claimed to have avoided voting; rather, their varied experiences had to do with age: a few of the younger participants hadn't yet had the opportunity to vote, while the oldest participant, Niklas (35 years old), had done it several times[56]. This is expected, but it is important to remember that the term 'young adult citizen' includes a variety of subjective experiences. One must be aware of how limited these experiences may be, in the pursuit of conducting contextualised research. Political identity is not fixed for anyone, of course, but arguably citizen identities are even less fixed during those first years of being able to vote. This is important, because, as Dahlgren writes, it is common that theories on citizenship 'assume a fully formed civic subject who enters the political scene,' and has 'little to say about the socio-cultural factors that can impact on this development' (2009:57).

As the act of voting in public elections doesn't happen often, it takes time to build that particular type of experience[57]. Becoming a citizen, in this sense, takes several years, but this experiential dimension is not sufficiently accounted for in research, which is one of Coleman's points in his study of the feelings of voters. According to Coleman, political science hasn't paid enough attention 'to whether the experience of democracy is joyful or sombre, satisfying or frustrating, dignifying or shaming, or simply emotionally numbing' (2013a:4). Referring to Laclau (1996), he further considers voting to be performative, and problematises this in relation to experience, saying that:

> The social performance of voting is inextricably linked to experiences of being represented, misrepresented, acknowledged, ignored, spoken for and spoken to. Insofar as representation is an act of ventriloquism in which 'the representative contributes to the identity of what is represented' (Laclau, 1996:87), voting is a culturally creative act, both defining and reflecting the subject of democracy in a single manoeuvre (2013a:233).

[56] It should be noted that the interviews were carried out in the autumn of 2013 and spring of 2014, a period characterised as the 'super election year' ('supervalåret'), because of the coinciding of two national elections in the same year (the European Parliament election and the Swedish national, regional and local elections).

[57] Swedish national, regional and local elections are held every four years; the European Parliament elections are held every five years.

So not only is there a need to consider the various experiences of voting and other citizens' practices represented among the audience, but to understand such experiences as associated with the experience of being represented by others, such as politicians, experts and journalists, in a wider media landscape. Coleman argues for special attention to the emotions of young citizens, as research has indicated that since young citizens have less experience, their 'orientation towards civic life are as much, if not more, shaped by how they feel than by what they know' (2013a:197f).

This was quite easily identified in the data of the present study. The experiences mentioned by audience members were quite varied and included such practices as voting in general elections, donating money regularly or sporadically to organisations associated with political issues, such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International; being an active member of a political party, mainly but not exclusively its youth section, being student representatives in educational programme boards[58] and members of student organisations with various political foci; as well as engaging more communicatively, by going to seminars, discussing political issues on- and offline, and engaging to a greater or lesser degree with political news. To be clear, these are the practices they reported, but they did not always construct them as related to citizenship, which, this chapter argues, is part of the problem in relation to young people and political engagement. For instance, Freja, age 22, would debate immigration issues with her family quite often, but didn't consider that to be political engagement; similarly, Ivar, 23, was a student representative, but didn't construct that as political engagement. Rather, audience members would scrutinise themselves and speak quite openly about feelings of guilt or inadequacy, in connection with what they saw as a lack of political engagement. For those who didn't see political engagement as very important, there would still be an awareness of the discourses surrounding young people's presumed lack of engagement, whether they agreed with it or not.

For the interviewees and focus group participants who saw themselves as lacking in political engagement, the discussion was steered towards discussing motivation. Here, interviewees and focus group participants mentioned specific moments when they had felt compelled to intensify their engagement in different ways. Alexander, a 28-year-old journalist, explained how he had thought about it when the new, anti-immigration party, the Sweden Democrats, first gained seats in the Swedish parliament, in the national election of 2010:

[58] Swedish higher education requires student representatives in all bodies in which official decisions are made.

> Then I felt like, dammit, I should join like the Social Democrats just to make a point. But then I was like, 'there's no point, no one will know if I join the Social Democrats or not' … the effect would be just the same as if I just told people I had joined them (Alexander, 28).

He identifies a significant barrier to engagement when recapitulating his thinking around this specific moment in time: he wonders if anyone would react or notice him. Signing up for a party membership would, in Alexander's mind, not 'mean' more than it would just to *tell* people he had joined. Here, Alexander is more concerned with whether others would notice that he joined a party than what it would mean for him personally, or for the actual cause of changing anti-immigration policy; he sees such engagement as more of a symbolic or performative act than anything else. Quite like the way the act of voting is characterised in Coleman's study, joining a political party becomes 'an affective social performance which links action to meaning by investing personal feeling in social consequence' (2013a:15). In this case, Alexander decided that being a member wouldn't have the effect he desired. Coleman goes on to write that, '*Being* counted is only a small part of the experience of casting a vote. Far more important is the sense of feeling counted (ibid.:19, italics in original). What is it, then, that makes Alexander sceptical of the meaning of his engagement? One part of the answer lies in his lack of experience – he didn't know what it would feel like or mean to join a party, so he had to imagine it. Coleman writes: 'When a social performance has not been enacted before, it first has to be imagined, then shared as an ideal and then realised performatively in ways that maintain its credibility' (2013a:170). In this case, Alexander's imagination didn't work in the favour of realisation. Another part of the answer can be found in his further reflections:

> I've thought about getting involved, personally, I've thought 'well, be a politician, I could do that, perhaps it'd be fun to get to be there and make an impact somehow'. But I feel like it would be very strange to come in and compete with nine billion SSU[59] members, who all know each other […]. It's this very closed world (Alexander, 28).

Here, the problem is associated with the construction of political parties as social groups: compared to those who have been 'brought up' in the party, he sees himself as an outsider who wouldn't be welcome; it is 'closed'. This type of construction was mentioned by other audience members as well; creating a strong barrier for those who are interested in working in political groups.

[59] 'Sveriges socialdemokratiska ungdomsförbund,' the Social Democratic Youth League.

Deeming oneself too old or 'late' is problematic, as the logic of that argument means that a person is too old early in life. This could be interpreted as 'just' an excuse, but we must keep in mind the social-emotional aspect. Feeling like an outsider of something – denied entry before you even try to get in - is a circular argument. It fills the purpose of excusing people from engagement, but also indicates a form of anxiety and hyper-awareness of the boundaries of a social group that they don't belong to. Political parties or activist groups become primarily social communities, as well as communities built around common political goals. This is an aspect of the social performance brought up by Coleman, and the fact that, as he puts it, '[t]he rules of the political game seem too much like imposed rules and someone else's game' (2013a:5).

Freja had a similar story to Alexander:

> I was thinking about [joining a political party] at one point, when this whole thing with Utøya happened[60]. I was like, 'wow, it's a camp for young people, like teenagers' […] and I was like, 'shit!' Because I felt like, well maybe it'd feel better to be part of something … but I can't! Like, I just can't (Freja, 22).

Like Alexander, Freja has a memory of considering joining a youth party, associated with a strong emotional reaction, here towards the terrorist acts that took place in Norway in 2011; she explicitly speaks about feeling the need to 'be part' of something, indicating a need for community. Both she and Alexander describe some type of emotion linked to a political event; Alexander was affected by the fact that the Sweden Democrats were popular enough to gain seats in the Swedish parliament[61] – something that gained enormous attention in the Swedish press at the time, as well as public outcry and debate in social media. Freja brings up the mass shooting in Norway in 2011, and clearly identifies with the victims: their age and their proximity in both political and national profile[62] was an important part of that. The events were in some manner emotionally taxing for Alexander and Freja, making them consider joining in, to feel better about it as well as to show support. Interestingly, they do not speak of actual political action, but about being parts of groups. In this sense, they envision engagement in the same manner, as inherently collective in nature, which is important – as Dahlgren puts it, 'the political realm requires collectivities; the engagement and participation of the citizen are predicated on

[60] The mass shooting at the island Utøya, a camp site of the Norwegian labour party, which took place in Norway 2011 and was massively reported on in Sweden.
[61] Which requires 4 percent of the vote.
[62] Norway and Sweden have similar labour parties, which share intertwined histories, and their youth parties cooperate and have exchanges regularly.

him/her being connected to others, by civic bonds' (2009:81). So these audience members are aware of this, but those bonds themselves create a barrier to engagement and participation, as audience members see themselves as 'outside' of such collectivities. You had to fit the imagined standards of the imagined collectivities, to be able to imagine yourself as part of them.

By speaking of themselves as lazy, lacking energy, or not knowledgeable enough, other participants constructed political collectivities as exclusively for the energetic and knowledgeable. Important to note is that they would construct more than one reason for lacking motivation, and speak of themselves as in development, as potentially engaging further in the future. The following quote from Dennis illustrates this mix of different factors:

> I think it's a process in which I become more and more engaged. […] But it's also that I'm lazy. And also, somehow, it has to do with what opportunities there are, I think when I move to Stockholm this autumn I'm going to have lots of friends up there who are all pretty politically engaged, and then, with a new environment and a new group of friends, I think the chances will grow. While here, there are fewer opportunities and if I were to … I may lack the entryways to it here, because if I were to go get involved […] I just can't go [to activists] and be like 'Hi, I'm here!' (Dennis, 24, old journalism student).

Dennis is self-critical but also says political engagement is a process; and then, again, we see the same type of reasoning as with Alexander and Freja, where the act of joining seems impossible. Entering a community in which others already know and identify with each other becomes a huge obstacle in the process of becoming more engaged. At the time of the interview Dennis was living in a city of about 350,000 inhabitants, but still claimed to have few 'entryways' to engagement, especially in comparison to his imagined future, in Stockholm (1,4 million inhabitants). The social awkwardness and uncertainty apparent in the quote shows how his construction of opportunities is closely linked to the construction of social communities more generally. It's not that there aren't opportunities for engagement in his current city; rather, there aren't opportunities in which he thinks he would feel socially comfortable.

What seems to be lacking, according to these audience members' constructions of citizenship, is an invitation. They needed to feel that they could fit in and contribute. It is in this context that political comedy is significant. For Jones, the current success of satire and parody can be seen as 'a reinvigorated form of popularized political speech' (2013b:397) where 'new actors and new voices' are allowed onto the 'public stage' (ibid.). This, he argues, is in part due to a 'change in mediated citizenship':

> Satiric and parodic programming found root within the broader dissatisfactions of civic culture. Whether we call it 'civic malaise' or 'postmodern' political conditions, the routine practices constituting citizenship were often found lacking by citizens (2013b:397).

The problem is, though, that these audience members wouldn't consider engagement in political comedy to be a legitimate part of political engagement. Engaging communicatively, which, among others, Dahlgren sees as important to political engagement, was not considered to be 'enough'. Associated with this was a widespread fear of labelling themselves incorrectly as politically engaged. This fear might be exaggerated by the interview and focus group context: in conversation with others, people are aware of the importance of impression management. If people are to present themselves as even remotely politically engaged, they need to be sure of what that means to those listening. Several scholars have brought up this aspect of identity as especially important in the context of younger individuals, and particularly important in an age of 'networked identity' in which the online environment forces us 'to explicitly construct and present aspects of ourselves in order to engage in communication' (Schmidt 2013:365). This explicitness, together with a quite rigid perspective on what it means to be politically engaged, creates unnecessary restrictions for these audience members. Even if political comedy can help open up the construction of the political, and in fact does invite audiences to discuss political issues, it needs to become more broadly legitimised as 'serious' in some manner, for young adult citizens to recognise it as such.

The uneasy citizen

As illustrated, the labelling of oneself in relation to political engagement was tricky, especially among those who had no previous experiences that they considered to be examples of political engagement. Words like 'political' and 'citizenship' would hold quite different meanings, for different individuals; and some would speak of engagement as something they didn't do, even if could be claimed that they, at least according to newer models of citizenship (Dahlgren 2009; Jones 2013a) or wider definitions of the political (cf. Mouffe 1999), *were* engaged. During the past decades, several fields of research concerned with these issues have dealt with changing the norms and definitions of such concepts. Using the term 'civic cultures' Dahlgren in his own words attempts to 'carr[y] over some traditional elements from political science/political communication along with the more culturalist components' (2009:104), to shine a light on 'those features of the socio-cultural world that serve as preconditions

for people's actual participation in the public sphere and political society' (ibid.:104f). Most important in this context is political talk, which Dahlgren, using a number of scholars focussed on this, sees as the area in which the definition of what is or isn't political becomes especially important:

> Politics, then, is the institutionalized arena where organized conflict takes place, be it party politics or extra-parliamentarian. If we connect this with the theme of different modes of civic discussion, it would seem that Habermas, Schudson, Warren, and others who hold a similar position about formal deliberation basically have in mind talk about *politics*, as Mouffe uses the term, and especially in its decision-making phases. Barber (1984), Walzer, and others who underscore the importance of free-wheeling conversation are referring, at least implicitly, to the potential of *the political*. They accentuate the processes by which the conversation can turn into civic talk, an ever-present potential (2009:100).

Certainly, the previously quoted interviewees and focus group participants of the study define political engagement as more associated with 'politics' than 'the political' and if they did use the latter, they wouldn't be as apprehensive towards labelling their own engagement as at least potentially political. Dahlgren goes on to underscore that talk should be considered a 'civic practice' and is valuable because it 'can take unforeseen twists and turns, activating different subjective dimensions – including civic ones' (ibid.), implicating that scholars 'should always remain open to the possibilities of the political emerging – and anticipate how they might be translated into politics' (ibid.:101).

This potential, found in the 'in-between' space of engagement, links such talk to actual political participation, but this was not commented on by the audience members of the study. At different stages of the interviews, participants like Freja, Alexander and Dennis reported on discussing political issues with friends and family, yet hesitated to label this as political engagement. This type of contradiction illustrates the need to study and understand the subjective, and its role in the wider context of media and communication. Corner expresses this as:

> the often stealthy but profound interplay of media and subjectivity is that of civic consciousness, its constituent factors of political cognition and sentiment and its consequences in shaping modes of engagement which, in turn, then work back formatively upon consciousness (2011:108).

Subjectivity has been 'investigated by the use of rather narrow ideas,' Corner argues (ibid.), which means that it has been ignored or downplayed in the study of media and democracy. Rather, scholars should take 'cognition and

sentiment' into account, to better understand how they impact engagement and also consciousness. This back-and-forth relationship between engagement and consciousness described by Corner is complex, but paramount to the understanding of media's role in the political engagement of citizens – not only to gain more accurate insights, but to recognise their engagement as such.

Interviewees and focus group participants expressed themselves quite candidly regarding the issue of what is or isn't to be seen as political engagement. Again, a fear of overstating one's political engagement can be identified:

> I don't think I'd describe myself as political at all, but at the same time I'm pretty engaged in things, and am somehow defined by that (Ivar, 23, engineering student, as well as student representative on his departments' board).

> I'm very inactive. I mean physically. Because I … I don't know, I feel I have so many other things to do. And I'm that type of person, I need to be home, have some tea, and feel like I have nothing to do – watch a movie, watch television, like that type of thing. So I often feel like I don't have the time. […] But I do donate a little money and I write stuff. Yes, I like spending time on that, I try to … post things on Facebook and try to get a debate going … I'm not engaged politically, but I'm a member of Amnesty and regularly give them money, and I believe in their organisation and that sort of thing (Harald, 18, upper secondary school student).

For Ivar, it was important to avoid the word 'political,' even though he was a student representative, which entails working on behalf of other students in the educational board at his department. This is a context in which formal decisions are made which impact Ivar and his peers, but because of the local nature of such work, and a lack of explicit connections to political ideologies or parties, or, in other words, what can be seen as 'politics' (Mouffe 1999), Ivar doesn't consider it to be political engagement. It is important to point out, though, that he does express some ambivalence, in his 'but at the same time I'm pretty engaged in things anyway'. His identity as 'non-political' is, as commented on earlier, in flux, potentially changing, and expressed though a cautious reflexivity. This type of reflexivity is found in Harald's quote as well. He similarly seems to link political engagement to practices related to formal politics, while at the same time wanting 'to get a debate going' and supporting well-established Amnesty International. Cautious reflexivity involves uneasiness, but simultaneously indicates openness for other possibilities: they may be more engaged than they think they are. By weighing different stances against each other they allow themselves to not be definite, to be careful, while at the same time not avoiding the issue entirely, or shying away from self-critique.

Corner and others wonder if our understanding of active citizenship is part of the problem, rather than the actual practices of citizens:

> whether the implicit norms of active citizenship, as indicated mainly in specialist texts but with a shaping influence on a much wider range of assumptions, are not unrealistically demanding. They have assessed this role in terms of the allocation of time and effort needed to 'perform citizenship' in everyday life, particularly given the uncertainty about just what degree of difference such a performance is likely to bring to the immediate terms of living. The range of other things to do, both out of necessity and out of enthusiasm, combined with a certain cynicism about the final outcomes of taking the civic role more seriously, can be seen to encourage a justified minimalism in the formation and sustaining of the political self. This is with the exception of a minority of 'activists' who have developed the capability, related perhaps to their stronger sense of goals and of the possibilities of change, to get satisfaction and fulfilment from higher levels of participation (2011:109).

According to Corner, 'unrealistically demanding' constructions of what is to be counted as 'active' may affect actual activity in a destructive manner. It is not only about narrowly considering all political engagement to be associated with political parties or formal politics; it is about how to construct 'the political self' in a more democratic manner, so that citizens can believe that the performance of citizenship fits into their lives and could actually create meaningful change. For example, Harald links activity to physical activity in some manner, which doesn't fit with his idea of what type of person he is, what he 'needs,' like having time alone, feeling like he has 'nothing to do'. He has done precisely what Corner describes as 'assessed this role in terms of the allocation of time and effort needed to "perform citizenship" in everyday life,' strikingly expressing it as having 'other things to do' in the exact same words as Corner. But he is not inactive either, as mentioned above: rather, he illustrates the common tendency of undervaluing and perhaps mislabelling their political engagement.

In contrast, for the audience members who were more like the type of 'activists' mentioned by Corner, it was important to make the point that many types of activities are political. Eva stressed how political comedy could aid in broadening the understanding of what is and isn't political:

> I don't think it's that important to vote, but I think it's very important to be politically engaged. […] To be politically engaged, like whether it's in specific issues or in broader groups, it's important because the political sphere is … really anything public, for me. There's an equivalency there. It's extremely important to people's freedom, because it's about issues that impact your everyday and limit your everyday. That's how it is. It's about money, it's about having space for life, about education, schools, health and care […] it's about how everything impacts your life. And to not engage, or not be organised or not take a stand and keep up, then you're living this alienated life, somehow. If [your engagement] means you vote, that's fine, it's almost enough. But it's more important to engage with things that impact your everyday. […] In your union, local association, your neighbourhood association, or your church or your … student councils (Eva, 30).

Eva's construction is in line with a wider definition of the political (Mouffe 1999), and her quote stands out in comparison to other audience members. For her, citizenship is not 'unrealistically demanding,' because she doesn't define it narrowly. Her understanding of engagement is situated in an everyday context: it is connected to activities that are 'doable' (Dahlgren 2009:80), which are then rooted, as expressed by Corner, in the 'capability' of gaining 'satisfaction and fulfilment from higher levels of participation' (2011:09). Such capability may not be expected of all, of course, but as illustrated by audience members like Harald or Ivar, the imagined boundary between 'activists' and citizens more generally seems unnecessarily hard to break through.

Another example of such 'activists' was Jenny, who had a similar, problematising perspective, as illustrated in the following exchange:

> JD: Do people have a responsibility, to engage, what do you think?
>
> J: I think that's a tough question, because … people can do what they want, and I know that I use myself as the standard for everything [as someone who votes] […]. And like, I think that this whole idea of 'oh, if you haven't voted you can't complain,' that's bullshit because you don't necessarily have an impact when you vote, I think.
>
> JD: No. What is voting, then?
>
> J: Well … it's an interesting issue … it's not like you can solve everything by *not* voting. But saying that people who don't vote don't have the right to complain is to really oversimplify. Because there are so many other ways you can make choices and you can … like represent ideology and that type of thing (Jenny, 25, journalist).

For Eva and Jenny, the issue of labelling themselves political was less anxiety ridden, as they saw political engagement as encompassing other types of prac-

tices than those associated with established politics. This is in part due to their personal experiences. Both of them had been members of political parties or activist groups, and were interested in specific issues, such as identity politics and human rights issues. For them, talking about political issues counted as political engagement – because they saw the links between such talk and political change, as Dahlgren puts it, 'the schematic progression' from 'nonpolitical conversation' to 'entering the public sphere' (2009:100).

Communication and impression management

When charting audience members' constructions of citizenship, it became clear that they did engage in political talk. Dahlgren links communicative skills to the 'concrete, recurring practices' that are needed for citizens to be able to 'generate personal and social meaning to the ideal of democracy' (2009:116). Such communicative skills, like reading, writing, speaking, using a computer and navigating the internet are important, as they are 'closely linked with the knowledge dimension of civic cultures' and engagement in such practices 'contributes to experience, which can in turn serve to empower citizens' (ibid.:117).

In the interviews and focus group sessions, participants were asked if they enjoyed discussing political issues with others. Harald explicitly said he enjoyed discussions on various topics:

> That's what's so great about social media: you can just go google, read up … and form new opinions. […] In real life, I can have a debate with someone at a café, and perhaps they're just lying their heads off, and you don't really have that reality check. So it's easier with social media because you can have constant access to the internet (Harald, 18, upper secondary student).

The link between communicative competencies and knowledge is clear. Harald explains how social media enables him to discuss topics that he doesn't already know about. This in turn enables him to 'form new opinions'. Here, Harald expresses confidence, but he doesn't translate that into political engagement. Political talk is still placed outside of engagement.

But other participants felt differently. In various accounts, they would claim to enjoy political discussions only on topics in which they felt knowledgeable. Such individuals didn't see new information as readily available: their knowledge levels were seen as static to a greater extent, less easy to update. For Niklas, Jenny and Gabriel, for instance, their personal knowledge and ability to contribute were important prerequisites for enjoying political discussion:

> I dedicate a lot of time to the Swedish defense, actually. I spend a lot of time discussing and reading up on what's happening with defense issues. I grew up with compulsory military service and now that's gone […]. I think we're going in the wrong direction, I'm engaged in trying to change the perception (Niklas, 35, nurse).

> Environmental issues! There I really feel like I can, I really can add something there … a perspective that hasn't […] been represented so far and that I can represent well. I wouldn't just say anything to anyone, but I would with friends, and I do! (Jenny, 25, journalist)

> If it's an opinion that I'm not sure of, I don't want to share it, because … I wouldn't be able to defend my position. So then I'd rather have that discussion in private. And […] if I'm not even sure of my own opinion I don't know how […], it's easier to just stay out of that discussion (Gabriel, 24, webmaster).

These quotes illustrate the careful navigation and unease connected to what audience members saw themselves as capable of discussing, as well as with whom and where. While others, such as Harald, considered knowledge as constantly accessible, and thus, his own opinions as potentially changing, these audience members saw themselves as more fixed. Niklas emphasised that he had read a lot about defence issues; Jenny had a background in environmental science, which made her confident; and Gabriel made similar points. For him, the risk of someone exposing him somehow was a reason to avoiding discussions entirely. These types of stances create a hypothetically impossible barrier for some, as there will always be potential others who are more knowledgeable. That is not to say that knowledge isn't an important part of political discussions, but that among these audience members, the assessment of how much knowledge you have to have to participate in a discussion created a barrier. The possibility of using political discussion to gain knowledge was absent from these perspectives, which creates a position in which one has to educate oneself through other means. Again, as commented on throughout this section, there is a fear of overstepping by overrating oneself in relation to others.

In this context, Ivar was interesting, and illustrative of how political engagement is a process in which people change, as he claimed previously to have felt uneasy in a manner close to Gabriel's, until a friend had pointed out another way of looking at it:

> I've felt [apprehensive towards discussion] before, like whoops, that I've been wrong and it's been embarrassing. But then I had a friend who said something smart: that it's even more embarrassing not to be able to admit when you're wrong, that it shows strength to show that sure, I can rethink this and I've reached a different conclusion (Ivar, 23).

Even though Ivar has overcome his fear, he is still concerned with impression management: 'it shows strength,' he says. This fear of embarrassing oneself varied among the interviewees and focus group participants, but was among the most common constructions concerning communicative engagement, especially counting those who had gotten over such fear, as Ivar.

There are two important points to make here. First, the fact that the contemporary online environment – which is the main arena for communicative engagement, especially among young adults – encourages this thinking. Senft explains how social media prompts people 'to monitor the activities of others' (2013:347) which means that 'one must always behave on the Internet as one would if placed on a public stage, because, in a very real sense, one is' (ibid.).

Second, this tells a story about the deeper constructions that lie behind the audience members' conceptualisation of themselves. They showed similarities to Coleman's studied British voters, among which he observed that '[t]he very act of enunciating statements about the world around them became a struggle fraught with embarrassment and fear' (2013a:203f).

Here, Dahlgren is critical of scholarly definitions of 'political knowledge,' as they have been too narrow, and understood as 'simple, factual awareness' (2009:77). Such a construction of knowledge confined to experts and other types of elites, makes both researchers and citizens unaware of other forms of knowledge that may be relevant to political engagement. As with Gabriel, gaining knowledge becomes a solitary endeavour. Instead, Dahlgren calls for a view in which knowledge and opinion formation is intertwined, as we form opinions through formal learning as well as through interacting with each other (2009). He also makes the point that 'as we move ever further into a technologically advanced and highly specialised society, the disparities between expert knowledge and that of the layperson continues to grow' (2009:77.). Faced with this, it is reasonable that young adults, however educated, feel uneasy about their own levels of knowledge. They become hyper-aware of the fact that there are experts in every field. This problem is for Coleman related to inadequate civic education, in which formal knowledge of the political system is in focus and 'the training of the voice as a political instrument' (2013a:204) is left out.

Among those who explicitly stated that they avoided discussions about political issues, was Morgan, who explained this as follows:

JD: Would you say that you're politically engaged in any way …

M: No.

JD: … do you 'like' political stuff on Facebook or participate in debates or anything else?

M: No.

JD: Is there any specific reason, or you just don't enjoy it?

M: It's a combination, I don't think it's any fun and … I notice more and more, I mean I have a quite wide circle of friends and there are a lot of people who believe in different things and of course they should, and I'm not the one to say this is right or wrong, I do think it's important that you actually believe something. But then, since people can believe so differently, to different degrees, it easily creates unnecessary confusions and fuss. And I don't think Facebook is a good forum for that. And it's not just that, there are a lot of other things, like I get stressed. Since Facebook came along, tiny things become humongous. So … politics and religion are things I've chosen to … not comment on so much. […] It's another thing if you're in a situation with people, and you're sitting down and having a discussion. Although even there I feel it's difficult … but at least you're there, face to face, with the possibility of reading one another better, you can have a different type of dialogue. Text is so easy to misunderstand (Morgan, 29).

As this exchange illustrates, Morgan didn't have much to say about political engagement in general, until he was prompted with specific questions. The quote exposes the differences between the audience members, in their enjoyment found in discussions and the disagreements they uncover. Morgan didn't like the lack of nonverbal cues in online communication, and focussed on the social awkwardness that he ascribed to debates more generally. There is a fundamental difference between those who enjoy the element of conflict, and those who don't. And context plays a big part in this, as Morgan was less apprehensive in relation to a face-to-face discussion. Again, online, the aspect of impression management becomes more important (Senft 2013).

Coleman quotes Baxter (2000), who has studied speech between pupils in school, saying that a lot of them see speaking in public as 'intimidating and nerve-wracking' (2000:26). For some students, speech performance in class is avoided as much as possible, which allows those that are more confident to 'take over'. This can then become a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' throughout such individual's years in school, since the more they opt out, the more they 'reinforce their position as a non-speaker' (ibid.). Therefore, Coleman calls for an effort towards 'level[ing] the affective resources that people bring to democratic

engagement' with the goal of focussing more on forming 'democratically socialized citizens, capable of speaking confidently in public' (2013a:205f).

Freja described how she debated immigration issues with her father at home, but she felt uneasy when it came to the online environment:

> Like some who post like things that I'd call 'debate-starters' on Facebook, where you can feel like, 'okay, you have those opinions, I didn't know that about you,' or like 'okay, now I'm actually less interested in talking to you because my view of you has changed. And again, like if people felt that way about me, that's why I don't post … (Freja, 22).

Freja's use of the term 'debate-starters' shows that she is sceptical about debating issues online. From her own experience of finding out things about others' opinions, she decides that she doesn't want to be exposed in that way. The quote illustrates an unwillingness or aversion to having to take in this information about others, which, in a wider perspective, can be understood as a part of the problem of information overload. Facebook and social media more generally becomes a space where people feel forced to take into account the political opinions of others, whether or not that is desired. The unease of these young adult citizens is expressed through the hyper-awareness of knowledge, the fear of exposing and embarrassing oneself, and the aversion to the conflictual nature of political discussion. As stated in the previous section, Coleman associated such problems of low self-confidence in relation to citizenship with a lack of focus on developing 'democratically socialized citizens' in civic education. Such education would ideally provide experiences where young people are allowed to develop and gain experience.

Additional to this type of unease, there is another type apparent in the data, relating to the choices citizens are faced with: how do one's political opinions fit into the existing venues for political engagement?

The 'package deal'

As apparent in previous sections, audience members constructed voting in elections or joining political groups as some of the main ways of being politically engaged, and were in some cases self-critical and apprehensive in relation to that. Coupled with this was a widespread criticism of the 'package deal' ascribed to political parties and groups. This finding is in line with a growing body of research in which the shifting nature of political engagement is studied, both in western and Swedish contexts. Dahlgren writes that 'various signs suggest that many people have not abandoned engagement with the political,

but have rather refocussed their political attention outside the parliamentary system' (2009:31) and that now, '[p]olitics becomes not only an instrumental activity for achieving concrete goals, but also an expressive and performative activity' (ibid.). In line with Coleman's arguing (2013a), young adult citizens might feel a greater need to impress others and show ability, creating an emotional pressure, if they on some level see political activity as performative.

Dahlgren uses Norris (2002) to describe such 'alternative politics' as 'typified by personalized rather than collective engagement, and a stronger emphasis on single issues than on overarching platforms or ideologies' (2009:33). When participants described what it is like to choose whom to vote for, as well as when they discussed the potential of becoming more politically engaged in the future, the issue of the so-called package deal was something that came up over and over, as creating frustration and blocking engagement:

> It's an entire package, and I just can't support a whole package, I would like to pick and choose and put together my own … (Freja, 22, social work student).

For Freja, single issues are preferable to the platforms or ideologies mentioned by Dahlgren, wherein several issues are 'packaged'. She doesn't identify with such packages, reiterating the issue of labelling: It is not only about labelling oneself as political or not, it is about doing it in accordance to a specific platform or ideology, which creates a second level of unease for some of the audience members. This is further illustrated by the following quote from Susanna:

> If you want to engage further, you have to choose the package. And there you often get into that bickering thing, because you get branded: 'I'm a Sweden Democrat' or 'I'm a Social Democrat'. And that adds to the bickering, because it makes it clear who you are. Instead of being more neutral and discussing the issue at hand. The brand becomes more important (Susanna, 28, landscaping architect, focus group 1).

If a lot of the unease relates to self-confidence, this is directed outwards. When impression management of the self is at the forefront, labelling is key, and if the possible spaces for political engagement are constructed as inherently linked to political parties or activist groups, the 'brands' of those collectivities need to match the identity that has been constructed. For Susanna, such collective labels got in the way of what she considered to be a productive way of discussing political issues, which were 'more neutral' and focussed on specific issues.

Benjamin, who said he was interested in political issues and characterised himself as 'liberal,' said:

> if you join some type of group, you need to believe in the whole package, somehow. […] and I know this is really terrible, but it feels like as if you go to, for instance, a demonstration against racism, it feels like … a lot of the people who tend to go there are probably going to be way more left-leaning and extreme leftist, and then I'd perhaps feel like, I don't want to mix with them, because they may support other things as well … (Benjamin, 29).

Again we see the issue of labelling oneself in relation to ideology creating frustration. This is somewhat separate from the fear of awkwardness or embarrassment referred to above, but it does relate to the same type of social components at play. Benjamin even created a form of paradox, when saying that if he were to engage even temporarily, by going to a demonstration (as opposed to joining a political party or activist group), the issue of being associated with potential others with opposing opinions (in other political issues) would be challenging for him. He indicated that he knew that this stance was problematic, but nonetheless he touched upon something that other audience members complained about on different levels: wanting to engage in issues, but feeling an aversion towards political groups, even temporary ones.

The exceptions to the idea of a package deal were, again, found among those who had actually been members of political parties or organisations. Linus had been a member of party-affiliated student organisations as well as an established political party, and described himself as a libertarian. Even though libertarian ideology could be characterised as quite uncommon in Sweden, he mentioned none of the above listed problems; rather he characterised the parties he had been part of as full of spirited debates and disagreements:

> Politics are often absurd, often stupid. But … it still has consequences for people, so of course you have to be politically interested. Every decision has consequences. Sometimes it's like yes, it's good if we lower taxes, I think so. But … it's not going to affect whether people live or die. So for instance – some of my friends become really, really upset when I say that it'd be good with a Social Democrat government so that we can get some new ideas into politics[63]. I'm like, yes, but it's not going to affect us so terribly. And they're like, 'Think about the taxes!' (Linus, 26).

Linus notes that his friends are more rigid than he is: even if he is libertarian, and joined parties that are associated with liberal or libertarian ideals, he considers the benefits of change. Not all of the audience members would be as relaxed as Linus, when it comes to potentially upsetting others or being associated with an ideology that doesn't match his identity construction.

[63] At the time of the interview, in the autumn of 2013, the Swedish government consisted of a coalition between centre and right-wing parties.

To understand the frustrations with the package deal, two aspects need to be considered. First, the issue of individualisation, which Dahlgren links to 'the fundamental character of modernity' (2009:28), which 'has profound psycho-ideological roots that can lead to different directions' (ibid.). He identifies two main levels: The first is more superficial and includes 'elements of simple egoism' or reflects 'the erosion of a sense of social belonging,' which can be linked to 'consumer culture and identities; encouraging life strategies, large and small, [that] for the most part [are] individual rather than collective' (ibid.). The quoted individuals show elements of this: the most important concern is the correct representation of ones' opinions and identity, rather than the creation of change in society.

Rarely did other audience members seem to consider the possibilities of impacting parties or political groups 'from within'. You have to subscribe to whatever a group has already decided on, as if it were a product or a brand, and the act of picking one instead of the other is performative. Dahlgren writes of alternative politics that they may be seen as 'a move away from politics based on production to one focused on consumption' (2009:33), and the common use of the metaphor of a package deal certainly indicates such a shift. A few of the interviewees and focus group participants also spoke about 'buying' such a package (or not). But such 'consumption' is then not to be equated with passivity, as it is still performative and expressive in character. The risk of choosing the 'wrong' group, though, is problematic from such a standpoint.

This connects to the second level, which according to Dahlgren signals an increased 'sense (and value) of personal autonomy' and 'lack of enthusiasm for authority figures,' as well as a reluctance to join large organisations or groups, as they do not seem to offer chances of influence (2009:28). This level is represented in the data when audience members question political groups as such, and hesitate to identify with them. As mentioned, Coleman also picks up on this, seeing the emergence of the self-informed citizen as a result of the growing scepticism towards the modern era 'epistemological foundationalism and the pursuit of closure' among mainly younger generations with an ironic disposition (2013b:384). Hence, the late modern ironic disposition is a result or furthering of the modern era focus on individualisation and personal autonomy. As mentioned, this creates a conflict: between the modern era ideals of epistemological foundationalism and collectivism, and the late modern ironic disposition and personal autonomy.

The other aspect which is relevant to the construction of the 'package deal' is that of political efficacy. Individualisation is part of this, in a sense, as it has to do with the subjective position of citizens. Coleman uses the definition put

forth by Campbell et al. where political efficacy refers to 'the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change' (1954:187). According to Coleman, '[u]nlike most other variables measured by political scientists, efficacy is wholly subjective' (2013a:227). Young adult citizens cannot step out of these subject positions; they can only criticise them in varying degree. As, among others, Couldry et al. (2007) have shown, sensing powerlessness is common among citizens. The fact that audience members constructed 'little chance of influence,' as Dahlgren puts it (ibid.), connects individualisation and efficacy to the emotions of citizenship. Added individual autonomy translates into added individual responsibility, and, together with the growing understanding of political action as performative, adds emotional pressure on the individual. Coleman attempts to understand this lack of efficacy and argues that it partly has to do with the fact that citizens often feel misunderstood: due to politicans' misrepresentation of voters, focussing on 'median voters' rather than 'the most publically favoured policy position'; the dominance of opinion polls as representation of such opinions, rather than more nuanced representations of ideology; and the fact that 'many of the policy decisions that governments need to make are neither discussed nor contested during election campaigns' (2013a:226).

Misrepresentation and individualisation become parts of a vicious circle of pressure in which the citizen gets caught. There is a clear anxiety about potentially being bundled into a group or with a perspective that you don't fully identify with, that you cannot motivate with specific political knowledge, as seen in previous sections, and further, the issue of whether or not you would be able to have an impact on such bundling also matters. These subjective states can be likened to a form of 'stage fright' where the task of acting within and in front of a potential collective, exposing one's knowledge and opinions without being sure of how they might be understood or represented by others, is constraining, or even threatening. To avoid embarrassment, and manage impressions, Goffman reminds us, it is safer to avoid exposing oneself to a collective of people; 'the fewer the members, the less possibility of mistakes, "difficulties," and treacheries' (1959:140). Ekström reaches similar conclusions in his study of young people's everyday political talk, saying that they 'share an experience of the home as a particularly safe context for the expression of opinions' (2015:5) which is contrasted to other social contexts:

> political self-identities can be more or less fragile and sensitive to social context. While some young people seem to carry a strong and confident political persona with them into the discussions in different context (also involving social media), others are more mutable and their political talk is restricted to the meetings within a specific peer group (2015:16).

Those who are less confident are characterised by Ekström as fearful of 'the risks of not being valued and confirmed' and 'face-threatening or even humiliating responses' (ibid.). Political comedy is arguably a space in which this fear, as well as the other aspects of the unease towards labelling constructed by the studied audience members, is somehow recognised. While other types of political media may be constructed as part of the problem of misrecognition and fundamentalist certainty, mentioned by Coleman (2013a; b), political comedy represents a safer space wherein unease is recognised, addressed and, to a certain extent, relieved. To develop this argument further, the chapter now turns to the audiences' constructions of politicians and political culture in the context of Swedish politics, and how such constructions connect to political comedy more specifically.

Representations of politicians and political culture

Political comedy has been accused of representing politicians and political culture generally in a cynical manner, which some believe is transferred to its audience (Hart & Hartelius 2007). This fear may currently be more common among journalists and politicians (cf. Carlson & Peifer 2013), as effects studies conducted in the American context have shown more positive than negative results for this issue (cf. Day 2011; Baum & Jamison 2011). While the potential of direct transmission of such cynicism onto the audience is questionable, the need remains to understand audiences' constructions of the representations of politicians and a wider political context. With a few exceptions, the audience has limited personal experiences of politicians and political culture, which means that media representations of such phenomena gain in importance: as Corner expressed it in a previous quote, there is a 'stealthy but profound interplay of media and subjectivity' that relates to civic consciousness (2011:108). Therefore, this part of the chapter is focussed on understanding the role political comedy plays in audience members' construction of politicians, political culture and, in the coming section, democracy, and how such constructions connect back to their constructions of themselves as Swedish citizens.

When asked about their preferred political comedy programmes' representations of politicians and political culture, some of the interviewees and focus

group participants would laugh, to show that they didn't take such representations too seriously. Niklas, who watched *The Daily Show* regularly, said this in the following exchange about the representation of politicians:

> JD: What kind of image of politics or politicians do you think you get in these kinds of contexts, if we use Jon Stewart as an example … do you think there's a more general image or does it vary more?
>
> N: They always bring up their mistakes [laughter], so it's hard not to have this image of them constantly making mistakes [laughter]. There is something weird about people who want to lead us! […] I feel like, it's a healthy suspicion that we should have towards these people (Niklas, 35).

For Niklas, even though he indicated that he didn't take the political comedy representation of politicians entirely seriously, there was sort of a double-take on the issue, as he was 'suspicious' towards politicans. He defended this with a general view in which he considered it to be 'healthy' to feel a certain amount of scepticism towards those who want to lead others.

This double perspective is significant because the debate on political comedy and cynicism concerns how the lines between criticism, scepticism and cynicism are drawn, both in scholarly debates, and among audiences themselves. What seems cynical to some may be seen as a 'healthy' scepticism to others, or vice versa. Depending on the construction of the political, wherein some considered themselves to be optimists and others pessimists, the representations of politicians and political culture are seen as more or less authentic. For Paul it was important to distinguish between different comedians:

> In the case of Jon Stewart, he has almost nothing positive to say about … I don't know if I've ever heard him do this report: 'Here's something good!' But Bill Maher has more stressed the fact that, okay, politicians are corrupt and the Republicans are stupid, but it's the people who vote for them. So people are the problem, or at least just as much so. One thing he's done a lot in his stand-up is about how [switching to English]: 'Politicians always say: If we only had a government as good as the people… Well, the big problem is that we do!' He makes the situation look bad, rather than politicians themselves (Paul, 22, chemistry student).

According to Paul, Stewart's political comedy has 'nothing positive to say,' which is contrasted to Bill Maher's analysis, in which the citizens of a democracy bear as much responsibility as politicans do. This is in line with the idea of an autonomous, self-informing citizen, and to Paul, it is a more positive message than Stewart's, which he sees as putting the blame solely on politicians.

While the construction of representations of course varied among audience members, there was a consensus about the comedic image of politicians:

> Swedish politicans never do anything good in *Tankesmedjan*, regardless … (Jenny, 25).

> [They show] that [politicans] only bicker over the small stuff. […] That nothing really gets done (Gabriel, 24).

Jenny and Gabriel both find a specific, negative, image of politicans in *Tankesmedjan*, but they do differentiate between those images, and their own. Harald explained how he interpreted the negative images of politicians:

> If we, I mean you and I, were pressured like that, and scrutinised so thoroughly, like those politicans, they'd probably dig up a lot of dirt on us as well (Harald, 18, upper secondary school student).

Harald has a more sympathetic attitude where the negative image found in *Tankesmedjan* was constructed as a result of scrutiny. For him, this was a part of becoming an adult:

> I guess I had more faith in politics before, but now that feels naïve to think like that, it's more … like, get real, [politicians] aren't better that me, they're just people who sit there and whine about different things (Harald, 18).

This quote is striking as it at first glance confirms the potential problems of engaging with political comedy, where the risk of 'losing faith' can be seen as problematic. But a close reading and contextualisation of it reveals a more complex dynamic at play. Harald, who is one of the least experienced and the youngest participant of the study, is being reflexive about his own development as politically engaged. His referred naïveté relates to having seen politicians as superior to him. Now, after being engaged in, among other things, *Tankesmedjan*, he questions that assumption. He refers to news images he has seen of parliamentary members who seem unengaged in what is going on while in parliament, 'they're on Twitter,' he says, and to illustrate what he means, he uses an example from *Tankesmedjan*. In the referred segment, the premise is that the liberal party Folkpartiet has proposed legislation in which sanctions for pupils with low attendance should be tougher. The segment makes a joke out of the fact that attendance in parliament is strikingly low and that there is no mandatory attendance for its members, which is a point made in 'serious' news media as well (cf. Hellsén 2013; Tiberg 2009). Harald says:

> And there's this irony [on *Tankesmedjan*], that's so brilliant! And it's like, they bring things out into the light, which, like … yes, this and this they haven't said anywhere else, but it's a great point! 'You have to practise what you preach,' and that kind of makes you question your trust in those we elect (Harald, 18).

So even though critics might mourn the loss of Harald's trust, for him it's about the process of understanding how politics work, and that politicians aren't superior to anyone. The example of attendance is highly relevant for him, as the proposed legislation was directed at pupils like him (in upper secondary school), and the realisation that those who have the power to impact his life in this quite concrete manner do not always live up to such demands themselves, is remarkable to him. According to his own perspective, he has gained knowledge about politicians: not as inherently 'bad' but as 'human,' and even though this knowledge is accessible in other types of media, Harald sees it as something that hasn't been 'said anywhere else'.

Linus, again one of the audience members who had more personal experience of political participation than the others, said he thought *The Daily Show*:

> definitely shows up politics as something impossible, that you're always fighting with idiots (Linus, 26).

But he didn't believe this was a problem, as he felt confident that the audience can understand the difference between political media genres:

> I think it's a very tiny part [of political comedy's audience] who see these programmes who don't vote, for instance. I certainly think they contribute to activating people, I do! And interested, participating somehow (Linus, 26).

In this analysis, it doesn't matter if political work seemed 'impossible,' because audiences will understand that it is exaggerated for the sake of comedic effect.

The function of this double perspective, where audiences are aware of the humorous intention of political comedy but still find information about political issues in some cases, is not, as some argue, about creating distance for those who want an excuse to disengage. Rather, it is related to the self-informed citizen, and the greater shifts at play in late modern society and among younger news consumers, where authenticity is highly valued, and journalistic objectivity is questioned (Coleman 2013b; Marchi 2012). Referencing Mindich (2005), Feldman writes that 'young people have consistently expressed disdain for the artifice and aloofness that accompany so-called objective reporting' (2007:422) and goes on to say that Jon Stewart, who is 'unhampered by journalistic con-

ventions' is 'able to engage with news content, and this with his audience, in a way that that the traditional journalist cannot' (ibid.). When comparing political comedy to traditional news genres, Feldman, like many who have written on the function of political comedy (cf. Jones 2013b), arrives at the conclusion that audiences most likely enjoy not only the humorous representations of political culture, but its form:

> However, *The Daily Show*'s use of irony and satire does more than inject emotion and subjectivity into the news. The effective application of these techniques implies a shared understanding between communicator and receiver […]. In this way, *The Daily Show* is also able to convey to its viewers that they are on equal par with those reporting the news – that they, too, can be active participants in the news process (Feldman 2007:422).

It is the idea of the audience being invited as 'active participants' which is important, and can be compared to the idea of a self-informed autonomous citizen. Negative imagery of political culture is found in traditional news genres as well, but the ability to engage audiences and make them feel, as Linus put it, 'active,' 'interested,' and 'participating somehow,' is what makes political comedy interesting and relevant to study. Comedians are able to build some type of trust, based on the fact that they are 'on equal par' with the audience – which is different from the trust built upon claims of superior knowledge and journalistic objectivity. Baym and Jones, in their study of news parody programmes in different countries, write that most of programmes in their special issue 'sit in necessary relation with – both as reaction to and creation of – shifting parameters of trust toward representational institutions' (2012:12). If this trust was previously taken for granted, it is now being questioned, and this is in line with the audiences' constructions of what it means to be a politically engaged citizen. To develop this argument further, the upcoming section deals with the underlying constructions of such loss of trust; in other words, the audience members' criticism of such 'representational institutions'.

Democracy and efficacy

While the study's participants would make a point of explaining that they saw the image of politicians in political comedy as overly comedic, their image of how contemporary democracy works, for instance in relation to representation, was more serious in tone. This is congruent with many large-scale studies, as Dahlgren points out, which show that citizens in industrialised countries 'reject hierarchical authority, but not democracy' (2009:83). Some of the audience

members contrasted democratic ideals and values against what they saw as undemocratic in contemporary politics and political media. For instance, Linus and Jenny, who had been members of political parties, constructed contemporary democracy in a critical manner. Jenny said:

> But then I have this awareness that … the electoral system is kind of like, rigged for the big parties […][64]. Like what the hell, I don't get it, but I know it is. So I know that my vote for the Green Party may not mean that much, so I could just as well have voted for FI [Feminist Initiative] […]; but like my main realisation is that polarisation is extremely harmful, and to then have to choose one side to vote for, feels really bad. But at the same time, if I have to choose between two evils, I choose a Social Democratic government, if nothing else to get some change (Jenny, 25, journalist).

She had knowledge of technical aspects of the electoral system, expressing irritation and confusion about what she sees as problematic. Without getting into a technical discussion on the Swedish electoral system, it can be clarified that her criticism has to do with the proportionality of the system. She doubts the value of her vote and shows what might be considered cynicism when she says that choosing a party to vote for is like choosing between two evils, but her construction of the Swedish electoral system is factually correct, and her criticism is a fairly common one in contemporary Swedish political debate (cf. Sundström 2014; Wallner 2015). Her way of expressing herself, in an ironic, hyperbolic manner, may cloud the fact that her criticism is serious.

Linus echoes the point made by previously quoted audience members, where human character, as such, is questioned, rather than democracy:

> I think democracy is pretty good, but I think politicians are pretty bad. […] What I take from almost all [political media including political comedy] and politics in general is that … people are pretty bad [laughter] (Linus, 26, political science student and part-time politician).

Linus' laughter after this comment signals that he wants to remove some of the negative tone of this statement, to show that this view of people is more 'matter of fact' than pessimist. The quotes demonstrates how the use of irony, again in a conversational context, is used to express serious criticism, but at the same time takes the edge off such seriousness. The fact that 'people are pretty bad'

[64] Jenny here refers to 'jämkade uddatalsmetoden' which is a method for calculating parties' seats after an election, in English referred to as the modified Sainte-Laguë method (also similar to the American Webster method). It is used in Nepal, Norway and Sweden and gives bigger parties a slight preference, hence making it tougher for small parties to gain seats.

doesn't stop Linus from participating in politics, and doesn't mean he doesn't believe in democracy.

It is important to highlight the ambiguity reflected in the quotes, as this is highly significant in the discussion on the engagement of the self-informed citizen. Some of the interviewees and focus group participants made a point of not being 'set' in their construction of politics, political issues or democracy. As has been shown, they would see themselves as 'becoming' and 'in process'. For instance, Jenny described herself as once having been quite idealistic: she had studied environmental science and worked with such issues politically in Miljöpartiet (Sweden's Green Party). Then she characterised herself as becoming disillusioned:

> Like, hopelessness, I've already gone through it. Like my first round of higher education was in environmental science, I've been an environmental activist, so like, I avoid news that has to do with the environment. Especially when it has to do with climate issues because that debate is so stupid (Jenny, 25).

Importantly, the frustration Jenny and others like her feel is not related to herself, but the perceived lack of political change. The frustration indicates quite a strong engagement: for her and others like her, becoming 'less naïve' or 'disillusioned' presupposes a level of engagement to begin with. To deal with her frustrations, Jenny adjusted what political issues she engaged with:

> I think feminism and like criticising normativity and things like that, in general, I see a … greater optimism because it's like … I'm coming from environmentalism, which is an issue where you have to bang your head against a wall a billion times while … feminism feels like there are constantly small wins and you can see, it feels measurable, it feels worthwhile … (Jenny, 25).

Jenny needed to believe that she could actually make a difference. She yearned for agency, and needed to believe in the fact that change can happen. While this is a problem from the perspective of certain political issues, where optimism seems hard to come by, it is understandable from the subjective point of view of the citizen. Identity politics provide 'small wins' for Jenny, which she can detect, while environmental issues don't. When she decides what to spend her time and energy on, and, more importantly in this context, become emotionally invested in, she needs to feel that there is a potential for progress.

For Jenny and others like her, who are developing as young adult citizens, frustration is part of this development. What might be seen as cynical is rather about dealing with disappointment, which, again, presupposes engagement. People can only be disappointed if they care in the first place. She illustrates

the importance of having hope, as emphasised by, among others, Coleman (2013a). In his writing on lacking political efficacy, briefly commented on above in the section on the 'package deal,' he goes on to refer to Niemi et al. (1991), who distinguish between two dimensions of efficacy: Internal efficacy, which is 'a belief in one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics' (Niemi et al. 1991:1407) and external efficacy, which is about 'beliefs about the responsiveness of government authorities and institutions to citizen demands' (1991:1407f). This distinction is not always easy to make, as the two types of efficacy are entangled in the subjective constructions of citizenship; but this section and the previous one focus more on external efficacy, while the beginning of the chapter focussed on internal efficacy.

Karolina, one of the two political science students (Linus was the other), here also focusses on external efficacy. She was disappointed in politicians' use of social media, saying that they didn't prioritise the participation of citizens:

> I think social media is taking over from social movements … Especially when it's this top-down, that they're sitting at their party headquarters and are like, 'yes, now we need to come up with something, let's invent a hashtag, and spread it' … it becomes very much from above, rather than like a grassroots movement from below (Karolina, 22 years old).

Notable is the use of irony in Karolina's characterisation, when she says 'let's invent a hashtag'.

Harald also spoke about external efficacy when he outlined a deeper, philosophical problem with the way democracy is structured in modern society:

> JD: You said something before along the lines of, you've been a pessimist but you still feel optimistic since you know that others feel the same. Do you believe there are real possibilities to create change, through the political system?
>
> H: I believe in politics as such. But I think the democracy we have is a bit undemocratic. Because the ones who … like immigration policy, which I'm pretty interested in, and like human rights aspects … those who are turned away […] can't participate […]. The Arab countries cannot participate in American elections but they are the ones being bombed. And those who aren't yet born can't participate in contemporary environmental policy-making. […] Yes, so I believe in democracy, that everyone should be allowed to participate and speak their mind, if there could be like an ethical committee for the future or what […]. I don't know how to solve it but it could be solved (Harald, 18).

This exchange illustrates how Harald separates his pessimism and optimism, where the former is directed at contemporary democracy, and the latter at politics as a way of changing society. By connecting the single issues that interest

him, to the issue of representation on a wider scale, Harald makes a well-argued point concerning democracy and representation, similar to Jenny's.

This type of questioning of the representativeness of democracy was quite common in the studied audience. While a lot of the focus has been on the unease they constructed in relation to themselves as political citizens, it is important to show that they also constructed arguments about politicians, political culture and democracy which had little to do with their own abilities, i. e. lacking external efficacy. For Jones (2010), this type of thinking may be aided by political comedy, as its contemporary forms tend to deal more with such issues than traditional news journalism does. Political comedy provides a way of speaking about the political in a more familiar language, which 'sits outside discourses of power,' which might inspire 'a language through which younger generations can express their own civic hopes for a democratic future more inspiring than the one they've recently endured' (2010:251).

So far it has been established that the constructions of citizenship vary among audience members, but are connected to both unease towards the self, and a criticism of or in some cases, frustration about certain aspects of contemporary politics and democracy. This distribution between internally and externally focussed factors related to efficacy varied quite a bit, and therefore the coming sections will develop this subject, by further theorising the connection between such lacking efficacy, the ironic disposition, and political comedy.

The affective deficit and irony

While the audience members would vary in their constructions of political efficacy, the focus would often be on lacking such efficacy. Some emphasised internal factors and others the external. In most cases, both types came up. For Coleman, efficacy is connected to an 'affective deficit' in relation to the act of voting (2013a:229). The present study argues that this deficit is apparent in young adult citizenship as a whole. As Coleman writes:

> [t]he acknowledgement of an affective deficit in contemporary democracy is based on an assumption that the way in which politics in general, and voting in particular, are conducted is incongruent with the sensibilities of citizens as rational and emotional makers of meaning (2013a:5).

Young adults' interest in and use of irony, which scholars fear is connection to disengagement (Dahlgren 2009; Hart & Hartelius 2007), needs to be understood in the context of the affective deficit. Political engagement is dependent on adequate levels of efficacy, because citizens need to feel they can have an

impact in order to be interested. In other words, scholars need to consider seriously the complaints about what it means to be a citizen. According to Coleman it is 'reasonable to conclude that these subjective feelings are rooted in objective conditions of structural inequality' (2013a:228). The present study argues that for the young adult political comedy audience, the ironic stance works as a method for dealing with such inequality, and the affective deficit, while remaining politically engaged to various degrees.

As Bakhtin writes, irony is a type of 'double-voiced discourse' that allows for a double perspective (1987:324), which means there is a potential for understanding an issue from at least two perspectives. In doing that, it also has a mirroring effect, as it 'actively call[s] upon audiences' shared assumptions and predilections in an attempt to make members of existing discursive communities present to one another' (Day 2011:145; see also Hutcheon 1994). Through this, it aids reflexivity, and herein lays its function as a complement to other forms of political media, where the young adult audience can understand and contextualise knowledge better, as well as feel like they are part of abovementioned discursive communities.

The therapeutic quality of humour is something often put forth as one of its main functions (Critchley 2002; Day 2011). In the present study, this quality manifests as feelings of enjoyment associated with political comedy: answering directly to the affective deficit. Interviewees and focus group participants would refer explicitly to this; speaking of it as answering to the feeling of 'hopelessness' they felt in relation to politics and democracy. In one of the focus groups, while discussing what political comedy provides that traditional news journalism cannot, Stefan expressed it as follows:

> I guess [political comedy] is about laughing at the misery as well. If you feel hopeless about something, you can at least laugh at it. […] And you know someone feels the same as you do (Stefan, 30 years old).

It is clear that feelings of hopelessness are 'medicated' with laughter, and that in this, there is a component of wanting to connect to others – reminding us of the expression 'misery loves company'. Such desire to connect to others links the therapeutic function to the issue of protecting pride, as it is discussed by Eliasoph (1998) and Coleman (2013a). As they both stress, citizens who sense the abovementioned 'objective conditions of structural inequality' use performed cynicism to protect their integrity. It is important to note that this is performed in certain circumstances, and is not something that defines a person's political engagement as such. Eliasoph calls it a 'cynical chic solidarity'

(1998:203) where disenfranchised or disengaged individuals distance themselves from official discourses to show that they don't care, 'that they have not been fooled into wasting their time on something they cannot influence and cannot be held responsible for whatever happens' (ibid.). In many ways the audience members of the present study are privileged in relation to 'structural inequality': they are for the most part well-educated and economically stable. But in other respects, they are not. Few had long-term contracts of employment, and several were students with part-time jobs or student loans, feeling insecure about the future. Compared to the participants of Coleman's study on the feelings of voters (2013a), or Eliasoph's study on the production of apolitical identities (1998), which were based on samples quite different from those in the present study, the present interviewees and focus group participants would display less of the 'cynical chic solidarity'. But in essence, the constructions of lacking efficacy, communicated through an ironic mode of discourse in interviews and focus groups settings, indicate the same need for some kind of protection of pride that comes with sensing inequality.

Additionally, while the present study doesn't specifically analyse such conditions in each individual case, there are several ways in which previous research has established the type of inequality that all citizens of representational democracy, but particularly young adult citizens, find themselves in (cf. Coleman 2013a; Barnhurst 1998). Especially interesting here is the media as it represents and reproduces potential inequalities. In Corner's discussion on power and the media, the media 'has important consequences for what is being claimed as the existing situation and put forward as the way or ways in which this situation might be changed' (2011:24). It is inherently dominated by elites of different types, creating problems with diversity and control. While Coleman speaks of the affective deficit, Corner brings up the discursive deficit, which captures 'components' not structural, but discursive. Of specific relevance here is Corner's point about the media as 'supportive of elite interests and elite frameworks of interpretation,' thereby promoting 'dominant political viewpoints and […] the larger power system' (2011:41). This, in turn, excludes or disregards accounts that do not fit the dominant perspective 'by presenting dominant views as "natural" and by employing a range of tactics of deception in order to secure for these dominant views the widest possible acceptance' (ibid.). The processes of inclusion and exclusion at work here create rigid boundaries that are 'felt' by citizens. For instance, Coleman writes about what he calls 'the formidable search tasks' (2007:50) that are placed upon citizens by contemporary political media, where the demands on their ability to understand and keep up with news are quite daunting. It 'involves more than simply

being aware of present events,' it also 'entails a deep encounter with history […]. Simply following the accounts of political journalism calls for prodigious feats of memory' (ibid.). During the interviews and focus group sessions, some of the participants would recall specific sections or quotes from their favourite political comedy when discussing political issues, indicating that engagement in political comedy might work as an aid: to focus more intensely, as well as remember better. With its pedagogical qualities, political comedy may to some degree help mitigate the discursive deficit.

This can be compared to the previous quote from Feldman, where he points to *The Daily Show's* ability to 'convey to its viewers that they are on equal par with those reporting the news' (2007:422). Gray similarly concludes that the difference between satirists and 'newscasters' is that the latter speak 'to the people' while 'satirists labour to speak *of* and *for* the people' (2008:148, italics in original). He goes on to conclude that a lot of satirists criticise political power, organisation and practices in an 'everyday manner, not with the elevated poise and diction of the news or of politicians: they curse, they rant, they fume, and so forth,' which is what makes them 'welcoming' (ibid.). Not only are they then seen as more inviting, they are seen as peers, as *equally frustrated*; someone who 'feels the same as you do,' as Stefan put it. Political comedy audiences are reminded that beyond the satirist, there are others 'out there' who share the same frustrations.

Here we find the strength of popular culture – in its ability to invite, and allow for emotional investment, and through that, offer a sense of community:

> Popular culture extends an open invitation to belong; it tends to be inclusive; the possibility is offered of utopian and dystopian fantasies; and the distinction between the public and private is blurred, which opens up a wider range of appropriate behaviors and styles of discussion and observation for public and semi-public debate. While it allows political issues to be raised, the very strength of popular culture is that it is not a manifesto. Popular culture suggests, it implies, it ironizes. It functions much like the chorus in classical Greek drama. It makes the presence known of those who are not in positions of direct political or economic power. This suggests that popular culture is above all a counterforce, but it is more than that. It provides, within limits, an alternative sense of community, one not provided by social institutions such as political parties, trade unions, sports clubs, or the family (Hermes 2005:11).

Even though political comedy is more explicitly political than most popular culture, it is still popular culture in that it focusses on entertainment, and thus works by inviting the audience. They are invited to speak about political issues in an alternative way, and by doing so, be reminded of each other, providing

an alternative 'sense of community' to the one offered through traditional political journalism, or other types of political communication – because as Hermes puts it, it isn't 'a manifesto'. The alternative community made up of the political comedy audience is less defined and constricting than the types of community provided by political parties or activist groups, allowing those individuals who hesitate to 'join in' or subscribe to the 'package deal' to feel some sense of belonging. The reference to the chorus of classical Greek drama is important here, as it underscores the ever-present function of culture to link people together. Even though some audience members in the present study do not feel that they fit in – or need to fit in – with political groups of different kinds, they still have a need to identify with others who might share their thoughts and frustrations about politics or society. For a portion of the less experienced audience members, the present study argues, this type of space, in-between political and apolitical, is especially important.

Self-informed citizens, play and laughter

Returning to Coleman, the use and appreciation of irony has to do with 'changes in the ways of enacting citizenship that correspond to ways of behaving online' (2013b:383). This is where Rorty's ironic disposition (1989) comes in, in which 'epistemological foundationalism' is rejected and new forms of citizenship travel 'beyond the traditional notion of the informed citizen, dutifully absorbing appropriate forms of professionally produced knowledge' (Coleman 2013b:383f). Political comedy invites modes of engagement characterised by the ironic disposition. In fact, as Jones points out, contemporary forms of political comedy 'offers a means of re-establishing common sense truths to counter the spectacle, ritual, pageantry, artifice, and verbosity that often cloak the powerful' (2010:182). Political comedy, then, appeals to those who – at least from time to time – reject epistemological foundationalism but still want to engage. This stance is also found in an article by Combe, in which he asserts that 'satire problematises notions of certainty, stable reality, and absolute truth' (2015:298). Combe is especially focussed on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, and this notion could probably be problematised if applied to certain other examples. But the main point of his article bears resemblance to the conclusions made through the audience analysis in the present thesis:

> Colbert engages instead (as does Jon Stewart) in Epistemology Wars with his opponents. His purpose is not to replace a false Truth with a true Truth. Through the exercise of situationally accurate circumstances, Colbert aims to identify, dismantle, and replace a Worse (meaning ill-constructed) point of view with a Better (meaning well-constructed) point of view (2015:306).

In varying degrees, young adult audiences reject traditional notions of being the 'informed citizen' through regularly following news programmes and reading daily newspapers, in favour of something else. This shift is part of a larger one observed in scholarly debates, and is accounted for in the late modern models of citizenship. For instance, Bennett (2008) distinguishes between the modern era Dutiful Citizen and the late modern Self-Actualizing Citizen (2008). In his model, the Dutiful Citizen is characterised by the view of 'voting [as] the core democratic act,' and by obligation 'to participate in government centred activities,' to be 'informed about issues and government by following mass media,' and to 'join civil society organizations and/or express interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilize supporters' (2008:14).

In contrast, the Self-Actualizing Citizen has a 'diminished sense of government obligation' in favour for a 'individual purpose,' seeing voting as 'less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism' (ibid.). More importantly, the Self-Actualizing Citizen has a 'mistrust of media and politicans' which Bennett says is 'reinforced by [a] negative mass media environment' (ibid.). Interestingly, this last point coincides with the worry surrounding political comedy. While some critics claim that political comedy is part such a negative environment (Hart & Hartelius 2007), the present and other studies argue for a view in which political comedy is attractive to audiences, especially younger ones, *because of* such larger shifts.

The issue of a shifting citizenship is connected to the changes mentioned earlier in this chapter, related to individualisation (Dahlgren 2009), misrepresentation and efficacy (Coleman 2013a). While the young adult citizens of the present study would construct ideal citizenship as more in accordance to the Dutiful Citizen model – for instance by speaking of political parties as the main way of engaging politically, or by hardly ever questioning the act of voting – they are still part of the more general shift towards the newer model, as they question media elites, or display a 'higher sense of individual purpose' in the words of Bennett. This creates a form of conflict between the two models, where, the present study argues, the less experienced young adult citizens are aware of the ideals of the Dutiful Citizen, but do not see themselves as living

up to them. Bennett acknowledges this potential clash, saying that 'moral conflict may erupt' (2008:14), although he doesn't account for the emotionality associated with such conflict; further, it may occur not just between citizens or institutions, but within individual citizens. Based on the data of the present study, the conflict creates an array of emotions, directed towards the self, one's social context, and citizenship more generally, wherein some of these audience members do not recognise their political engagement as dutiful 'enough'.

Jones, commenting on the shifting notions of citizenship, specifically points to the concepts of play and performance to explain further what political comedy offers audiences (2013b). Part of what makes it attractive is its lack of goal-orientation. As Morreall remind us, humour is 'engaged in for its own sake rather than to reach a goal' (2005:68). It is therefore a type of play, which means that it's 'different from most human activities' (ibid.). More concretely, this means that '[w]hen we are being funny, the usual intentions, presuppositions and consequences of what we say are not in force' (ibid.). This is one of the strengths of political comedy, because the playfulness might make citizenship more attractive. Play shouldn't be dismissed because of its 'supposed lack of instrumentality' or be considered the antitheses to seriousness (ibid.). Rather, Jones continues:

> while satirists and parodists are often charged with being cynics whose work pushes people away from a commitment to politics and public life […], the concept of play suggests just the opposite – that citizens are invited into the speech act and asked to participate as more than simple consumers of pre-established meanings, positions and opinions (ibid.:402).

Political comedy opens up for different types of audiences, in that it manages to include those who see themselves as highly engaged in politics, as well as those who claim to be disengaged or apolitical.

One of the important issues often raised in this area of inquiry is if the practice of laughter creates a feeling of activity, of 'doing something,' which might potentially replace other types of political practices. Gray et al. develop this, using, among others, Susan Purdie's (1993) writing on comedy:

> In the wake of Bakhtin's theory of carnival especially, comedy theorists have long debated how transgressive and how politically meaningful laughter will be in any given situation. […] Eco, for instance, regards carnival as presenting a zone for critique, but a zone that is separated from social reality, thereby ensuring that the critique and reflection stay vacuum-sealed within the comic realm. Carnivals end, in other words, and while we might laugh when we hear the joke, that is it. Purdie also notes that the carnival's long-term effects may even be constraining, in that the comic 'release' may deflect or dissipate energies that might otherwise be directed toward resolving power differentials or enacting social change outside of the comic realm. A continuing question for any humor—satire, parody, or other—that would engage in critique, then, is, 'What comes after laugh?' Others have pointed out that whether it succeeds in moving out of the comic zone in any given instance, humor is always at least *potentially* transgressive (2009:11).

The comic 'release' or therapeutic function is confirmed in the data, but there are no real indications of this *replacing* action. But it cannot be studied easily, as causality in this context is complex to establish (cf. Jones 2013a; Day 2011). While Eco (1984) is right about the fact that carnivals per definition do end, Sienkiewicz (2012) has shown that in the contemporary media landscape, the carnival is potentially always ongoing somewhere: 'in the world of contemporary media and social networking, news satire is not nearly as "contained" as Eco once presumed it to be' (2013:107). In light of this, we can only focus on the *potentiality* of transgression as expressed by Gray et al. (2009).

As underscored in this chapter, contemporary debates on media and democracy point us in the opposite direction, as scholars question if the decline in political and news engagement in part is due to the fact that political media audiences suffer from lacking emotional investment (van Zoonen 2005) which is linked to the contemporary western democracies' affective deficit (Coleman 2013a) and the 'negative environment' referred to above. Dahlgren writes that democratic theory simultaneously 'postulates and admonishes engaged citizenship' (2009:83), yet it fails to focus on what might motivate such engagement in the first place. This has to do with the fact that such theory has emphasised rationality and formal politics, and ignored or even criticised 'anything that smacks of the affective, the emotional, or the passionate (2009:83; see also Miegel & Olsson 2013; Coleman 2013a).

In the modern era of the informed citizen, laughter was potentially more threatening, as the ideal of dutiful citizens might be at odds with transgression as such. But if citizens are self-informing, there is a greater responsibility placed on them as individuals, forcing each of them to shape political engagement on their own. This, the study argues, further underscores the need of an array of different types of political media.

If we consider the use of humour and laughter to be potentially transgressive practices, it follows that they have potential to empower its audience. In the context of lacking political efficacy and the affective deficit, citizens' laughter can be seen as a recognition and expression of the affective or emotional side of political engagement. These are then linked to the cognitive or rational sides. According to Day, satirical entertainers and activists 'attract affective communities,' and satirical 'texts serve to heighten the feeling of community in oppositions and to fuel the continued circulation of discourse around the issues in question (2011:188). Such affective communities cannot be created solely by traditional news or political communication.

Coleman writes that 'when ventriloquizing on behalf of the public dummy, politicians ascribe the most simplistic and unreflective viewpoints to "most people"' (2013a:229). This creates 'experiences of misrecognition' that are 'bruising' (ibid.), and encourages the 'cynical chic solidarity' as put forth by Eliasoph (1998:154). Coleman goes on to say that citizens can sense lacking efficacy in several different ways:

> the less conspicuous, faintly felt, but oft-repeated experiences of being spoken about by politicians without due acknowledgement; of finding the language and rules and customs of politics confusing and distancing; of feeling ethically compromised between the materiality of immediate needs and the aspiration towards enduring ideals; of encountering the frustrating vacuity of much that passes for political journalism; and of the discrepancies between promise and delivery, even when one has voted for the winning side (2013a:229f).

There are many ways in which a citizen might feel misrecognised. Not only can political comedy somewhat correct this, by recognising citizens differently, but it can work through the levelling function put forth by Hariman (2008). The symbolic mistreatment of citizens for political or economic purposes creates a need for symbolic retaliation. Laughter is a free, widely available, enjoyable and symbolically or discursively effective way of countering the 'casual disrespect' Coleman ascribes to political elites. The inciting of laughter is a way to make audiences feel empowered; 'push back' on political speech and 'spin,' thereby lessening the harm of misrecognition.

Political engagement

The differences in foci of political engagement also need to be considered, as varying concepts appear in the literature. Although most audience members didn't problematise their constructions as scholars do, they didn't all share the

same constructions of what it means to be political or politically engaged. Dahlgren makes a point of separating 'civic' from 'political' engagement, where 'civic' signifies forms of voluntary activities that are focussed on 'solving problems in the community and helping others,' while 'political' is about activities that aim to impact 'government action in some way' (2009:58). These two types of engagement also overlap, and are connected to the definition of what is or isn't political. Both the 'civic' and the 'political,' as Dahlgren describes them, appeared in audience members' constructions, especially in their discussions on voting, even though most were closer to what Dahlgren calls 'political engagement'. As the constructed boundaries of what is or isn't political or civic are part of the analysis, an openness is required, so that the present study does not value one definition over the other.

During interviews and focus group sessions, audience members constructed knowledge, practices and values associated with citizenship (as defined by Dahlgren 2009), exposing discrepancies between and within their constructions of what they saw themselves as doing, with what they saw as the ideal way of being political. For some, these inconsistencies created emotional responses and expressions of self-criticism. In several ways, political comedy engagement can be seen as a way of coping with these issues or problems connected to late modern citizenship and the affective deficit. In analysing their constructions of citizenship, the image of a self-informed and uneasy citizen emerges. Keeping in mind that there are substantial differences among them, they are all forced to relate to shifting models of citizenship and their own subject position in relation to those shifts, whether they are aware of it or not. Being self-informed means taking on greater personal responsibility, and this puts added pressure on each individual. The resulting unease takes on different forms for different individuals – the mix of internal and external efficacy factors vary. But the result is strikingly similar among them, and the pressure amounts to a heightened sense of performance and impression management that can be likened to a form of stage fright. Despite quite high levels of education, communicative skills and interest in political issues – strong public connection, to use the concept of Couldry et al. (2007) – these young adult citizens fear exposing themselves to others, and letting go of control, which creates a situation in which they hesitate to 'enter the stage' of political engagement.

As has been shown, political comedy answers to such problems by providing educational and what we might call face-saving functions, making it potentially empowering. It works like an invitation and a shield: it helps young adults understand political issues in new ways; it protects them from feeling stupid or naïve, or fearful of conflict, which is important in relation to impres-

sion management; and it makes them feel less alone, in knowing that there are others that engage with political comedy.

As van Zoonen writes, politics need to be seen as more inviting than they have been, since modern era citizenship is considered demanding and not at all pleasurable, which is problematic in the competition with 'other kinds of roles and identities that people want to perform' (2005:144). Creating more inclusive avenues for political engagement would help those who do want to engage further to prioritise it. Van Zoonen's suggestion is that some of the keys might be found in the parallels between fans and engaged citizens, such as the fact that they 'emerge as a result of performance, of pop-cultural and political actors respectively,' that they actively 'seek information about their objects, talk and discuss, try to convince others of their preferences and propose alternatives' and, above all, that they invest emotionally and thereby sustain their commitment (ibid.:f). What van Zoonen is describing is at the core of the study of engagement, as it relates to its processual nature: how individuals move in and out of different intensities of engagement, and that it changes over time. When young adults try to structure their everyday, deciding what to spend their time and energy on, they are clearly drawn to objects of engagement where they feel they have a space, where they fit in, and where they imagine they can commit, and contribute, over time.

The question is, though, how to define a committed fan? It is clear that engagement in political comedy – just like political engagement – varies throughout the sample of audience members in the present study; and that their subjective constructions are an important key to understanding such variations. Freja, for instance, considered herself non-political, and that her 'other responsibilities such as work and family' (van Zoonen 2005:144f), as mentioned previously, were more important and appealing than those of a citizens. On the other hand, both in her work and family life, she engaged in practices that have obvious connections to political engagement; she explained how she quite often got into discussions about immigration, after she had changed her opinion, from against it to being more positive:

> I mean, I've sat for hours and hours with my dad and his wife [laughter] and just like, these discussions … I absolutely understand their line of thought. Definitely! But! You can't just see it from that perspective (Freja, 22).

The discrepancy between Freja's constructions of herself, implicitly agreeing with older models of citizenship, and a more objective perspective in which she according to newer models of citizenship has some level of political engage-

ment, shines a light on the need for additional understanding of issues of subject positions, identity and community. How can we deepen the understanding of the uneasy, self-informed citizen who fears the perceived 'front stage' of political engagement? Barnhurst writes this about young citizenship:

> Young people, just starting out as citizens, participate in power by first defining their own identities within immediate groups. The rise of identity politics […] is a core political activity of these young people. They use commercials and magazine ads, fictional TV shows and films, and sports or gaming to give form to their dreams, personal and collective, and then they act as bricoleurs, gathering the detritus of fad and fashion to create their own styles and express themselves as political beings (1998:216).

In line with this, Corner expresses how scholars have begun to recognise how there is a scholarly need to:

> assume less and investigate more, to place the relations between 'media' and 'selfhood' within a denser sense of plurality, of the interactive, of the contradictory and of movement (subjectivity as, essentially, *process*) (2011:86, italics in original).

One of the more recently noted attempts to do so can be found in the concept of 'standby' citizens, proposed as a result of a Swedish political science study, where young citizens' presumed passivity and lack of engagement is probed (Amnå & Ekman 2014; 2015). According to Amnå and Ekman, 'what is sometimes dismissed as "passivity" […] actually consists of distinctly different orientations' (ibid.:261f). Seemingly passive young citizens include the unengaged and what they call the 'disillusioned' citizens' as well as those who 'only appear passive' but 'in reality are prepared for political action, should circumstances warrant' (ibid.). The latter are on 'standby,' which means that they keep themselves informed, and engage in political 'by bringing up political issues in everyday life contexts (ibid.:262).

The concept is fitting for some of the audience members, such as Freja, although excludes those who lack efficacy. Amnå and Ekman 'want to exclude the possibility that young citizens are on standby because of a lack of trust in their political institutions […] or even dissatisfaction with the way politics is run' (2014:270). Within the political comedy audience, we find those who could be characterised as standby, as well as those who lack trust or are dissatisfied: political comedy engages all those different political 'orientations'.

To better understand subject positions in relation to popular culture or entertainment, Hill proposes a spectrum of engagement, 'from positive, to

negative to disengagement' (2015); which audience members move across. Such moves 'can be sudden, a brisque disconnect' or 'can happen gradually' (ibid.). This type of fluctuation, based on the data, is true for political engagement as well; and further comparison of both types of engagement has implications for various kinds of issues in media and communication studies more generally. In the case of the present study, there is a need to further understand how such orientations relate to broader constructions of identity than just the political. Consequently, the next chapter will focus on cultural citizenship (Hermes 2005) in relation to political comedy engagement. Using the findings from this and the previous chapters on the genre of political comedy, audience members' constructions are analysed and conceptualised as being placed along a spectrum of engagement, as suggested by Hill (ibid.): further arguing the point of engagement as a productive way of understanding audiences, and the need for a contextualised approach in doing that. In her 2005 book on popular culture, Hermes concludes that:

> Civic-mindedness would seem to be indelibly written into the jargon of modernism, which perhaps is best defined by its double allergy to all that can be associated with the feminine and all that has to do with postmodern irony and relativism. What a shame. […] I suggest that […] we need to bone up on our listening qualities. That includes respect for what others like. I therefore have to insist that popular culture is re-read, if only because a wide popular culture literacy can be extraordinarily useful in engaging with other people (the civic ideal); but mostly because the success of popular culture is a direct result of what it teaches us about ourselves. And it is a democratic imperative to understand what that is (2005:159).

With this in mind, focus now shifts to identity and community construction in relation to political comedy engagement, as a way of 'boning up on our listening qualities' and understanding what political comedy, as a part of popular culture 'teaches us about ourselves' (ibid.).

Summary

This chapter has probed audience members' constructions of political identity and citizenship, where the themes of uneasiness and reluctance to join political parties or activist groups are noteworthy. Despite a broad variety among such constructions, it is clear that senses of low internal and external political efficacy related to the affective deficit of contemporary democracy connects to an ambiguous and ironic disposition; where the ideals of modern era citizenship models, such as citizens' duty to be informed and join larger collectivities are at

odds with the late modern ideals, where individual autonomy and agency, and a questioning of elite knowledge, are prioritised. The conflict between the two models gives way to a construction of citizenship characterised by a kind of stage fright, which works as a barrier to further political engagement for some. Political comedy is one of the spaces in which such uneasy young adults' emotions and criticisms are recognised, or, in other words, where the affective deficit is acknowledged; which is, the present study argues, paramount. Its ability to be welcoming and playful provides a sense of community, answering directly to the issues facing the young adult citizens of this study. To understand further the engagement in political comedy, the thesis now turns to the concept of cultural citizenship, as suggested by Hermes (2005), as it underscores the importance of identity and community construction.

7. Political comedy and cultural citizenship

Central to the exploration of political comedy engagement is the notion of enjoyment and how this is constructed by the audience. This has been dealt with partially in previous chapters, but is developed further here in relation to the concept of cultural citizenship. More specifically, the chapter asks how political comedy fosters identity and community construction. Cultural citizenship, as conceived by Hermes, reveals itself through how we imagine the world, and which groups we identify with, impacting 'codes of ethics (what can be shown) and aesthetics' (2005:140). This is important as it links the social to the aesthetic, which the present study argues is vital to the understanding of engagement, in the cultural as well as the political. Popular culture, and in this case, political comedy, aims to stimulate various types of enjoyment among its audience, and when we engage with popular culture texts, we 'take up, reflect, and reform identities that are embedded in communities of different kinds' (ibid.). In other word, what we enjoy, or don't enjoy, is connected to constructions of identity and community.

Hermes explains further:

> part of this ongoing activity of purposeful meaning-making in relation to mediated culture is the production of distinctions, norms, and rules. Cultural citizenship is thus bound up with producing the pleasure of popular culture. It offers both the ground rules of interpretation and evaluation and the space to be excited, frightened, enthralled, or subject to any of the huge range of states of mind and feeling that we connect with the use of popular media. […] popular culture needs to be defined in its own right as a social domain that offers a wealth of materials that rewrite and codify human experience for a multitude of user pleasures, including recognition and reflection (2005:10f).

This view of and interest in the 'states of mind and feeling that we connect with the use of popular media' is applied in the present thesis, and the discussions on political comedy held with audience members one-on-one and in focus groups are focussed on this: the producing of pleasure in political come-

dy. It is important to study all aspects of this, since popular culture should be considered productive of pleasure as well as of bonding, 'whether in the form of new alliances and coalitions or in the rewriting of older, existing connections, affinities, and group loyalties' (ibid.:153). This is how, Hermes argues, that popular culture has value; as it aids people to bond and reflect upon such bonding, 'sometimes critically and inventively, sometimes uncritically or by discriminating against those perceived as belonging to other groups' (ibid.). It shines a light on contemporary social processes of inclusion and exclusion. Illustrating this, the data analysed in this chapter is about how audience members identify and disidentify with political comedy.

In Corner's discussion on media and subjectivity, it is intimately connected to issues of form and power (2011). Subjectivity 'collects together an agenda of issues about the formation of selfhood, the construction of identity and the dynamics of consciousness' (2011:2). The growing scholarly interest in such issues, especially 'self-awareness and self-development' is due to, he writes, the development of modern societies 'in which high degrees of individualism are placed, sometimes in relations of tension, alongside changing kinds of commitment to collective organisation and social values' (2011:86). These ideas on identity and subjectivity are vital to the understanding of engagement. Corner goes on to say that '[t]he subjective is centrally implicated in any engagement with the production and circulation of knowledge and, perhaps even more obviously, with any exploration of pleasure' (2011:87). So pleasure and the circulation of knowledge – in this case produced by engagement in political comedy – are inseparable from constructions of identity and community.

Further, this chapter stresses how 'an emotion, like anger or fear, is not an object inside the self, as basic emotions research assumes, but is a relation to others, a response to a situation and to the world' (Wetherell 2012:24). According to Burkitt, reason is 'infused with emotion,' and 'thoughts and feelings about the situations we encounter are part of the same process of engagement and reflection with and upon our social world' (2014:101). Whether we are engaging with political comedy, news, or the people around us in an everyday context, we cannot do so in an 'unemotional' way.

This chapter analyses political comedy audience members' construction of identity and community, by focussing on five themes of categorisation that they produce. These were chosen because they are significant to the construction of identity in relation to engagement in political comedy; they are not all equally important to all audience members – rather, they reflect the complex dynamics of audience members and their political comedy engagement.

The themes were identified through the coding of subjective constructions of self and others, where the commonly referred themes, among all the represented audience members, were distilled and guided by the theoretical focus of the study. Presented in the order of general to specific, the first two themes of categorisation are relevant to most types of comedy and popular culture engagement, while the latter three relate more specifically to political comedy engagement as such. First, focus is on *enjoyment and social context*, since what amuses a person is seen as deeply personal (cf. Friedman & Kupiers 2013) and therefore connected to identity. Burkitt's understanding of emotions and social relations (2014) is used for a further exploration of subject positions and emotion, showing how political comedy engagement can be about confirming the self in ways that people around you might not. The next section deals with the idea that global popular culture is competing with nationality in the construction of community (cf. Hermes 2005) through the theme of *national contexts*, showing how interviewees and focus group participants relate differently to Swedish and foreign political comedy.

The following part deals with *ideology and strong emotions*, since the audience is divided between those who enjoy political comedy almost independently of its implicit ideological stances, and those who were unable to enjoy political comedy that they found to be 'unfair'. By focussing on humour and superiority, and the concept of unlaughter (Billig 2005b), as well as by separating feelings of amusement from emotions (Morreall 1987; 2005), this section highlights how strong emotions about political issues can block amusement. Following this, the production of categorisation based on *knowledge and education* is explored, showing how audience members either stress the knowledge gained from political comedy, or the knowledge needed a priori, for an enjoyable engagement. The final theme of categorisation is *irony and indirection* as modes of address, as irony arguably appeals to specific constructions of identity and through that, specific modes of engagement. Political comedy connects to identity in many different ways, and generates a type of engagement that requires enjoyment of this double-level awareness of indirection. In doing so, audience members feel both connected to others, and sometimes better than them, in a complex and unpredictable manner, reflective of the always ongoing processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Enjoyment and social context

Beginning with those who would underscore their relative lack of engagement, we find those who felt a bit out of place among the other audience members –

who distinguished themselves from the others. They were most common in the focus groups, as those participants would be more aware of each other:

> I listen to *Tankesmedjan*, but I don't know if I would if I didn't listen to P3, because it's like … it's on the radio, kind of. So now I listen to it. And there I liked Liv Strömquist, but maybe she's not on as much now. But she's a graphic novelist as well, and I read graphic novels a lot in general, and I also like Sara Granér and Nanna Johansson (Simon, 29, community planner).

> I don't listen so often, I listen when I work, and then it's sort of when I have the time. I'm afraid I'm not as familiar with this as everyone else [in the focus group] (Therese, 21, grocery shop assistant).

Simon is less apologetic than Therese, but the point is similar: they downplay their interest and engagement in political comedy, thereby producing a kind of disclaimer, signalling to the others and to me as focus group moderator that they might not have as much to say as the others, know as much as they, or care as much. As a consequence, they would be less active during the focus group sessions. The quotes illustrate the various intensities of engagement represented in the data, as well as the fact that media type plays an important role in engagement. The opposing logics associated with pushed and pulled content (cf. Lull 2006) indicate different forms of engagement. Catching something on the radio because it happens to be on doesn't mean that a person isn't engaged and amused, but it is a different type of engagement than if he or she would pick out that programme from a list of programmes, indicating an additional level of activity; what Lull associates with 'the role of the self as an active agent of cultural construction […] who actively seeks increased personalization of cultural experience through individual creativity and choice' (2006:45).

Related to this were those who didn't downplay their own engagement or enjoyment, but that of others close to them. By some this was expressed as something challenging, or awkward, as it created negative feelings about the self in relation to others. Freja and Stella were clear examples of this:

> it would be fun if someone … actually got it […]. On the other hand, it's my thing, you know, I go for it. It's kind of tiresome when people don't understand, like, 'is it OK if I come later because I just have to watch the finish of this' and they're just like 'you watch *that*?' and you're like 'Um, yeah! It's funny! Accept it!' (Freja, 22, social work student)

> I think [*Tankesmedjan*] sustains political engagement. Because for me, I'm working at the local council, and I don't really feel like I share any opinions with anyone. I may be a bit more passionate than my colleagues. […] In those moments [*Tankesmedjan*] can actually work as a little friend. It sustains [political engagement], because you can get really tired of all the political correctness, I'm sick of that sometimes (Stella, 34, architect).

Freja jokes about it, and says that it's 'her thing' and that she can still 'go for it'. But she also admits to feeling misunderstood when her friends question her engagement in American political comedy. Stella similarly doesn't identify politically with her colleagues at the local council offices, calling *Tankesmedjan* 'a little friend,' which can compensate, at least partially, for this perceived lack of 'passionate' colleagues in a work environment where it isn't considered correct to speak about political issues.

Freja felt different from her friends when it came to her political interest:

> I don't want people to judge me on my opinions, because I … I don't have very many friends who feel the same way as me. I even have friends who are studying to become social workers, who don't share my understanding of [racism and how immigrants are treated]. Instead they … they go on emotion more; if you feel threatened by 'them' in relation to 'us'. And again, I get that feeling since I've been that person myself (Freja, 22).

Here, Freja creates a form of superiority when she says that her course mates 'go on emotion,' but on the other hand, she says she's been like them. Freja had earlier explained how her education in social work has made her rethink some previous political opinions, but she observed that it hadn't always had that effect on her course mates, which made her construct a boundary between them and her. The fact that she doesn't identify wholly with her friends, family and course mates when it comes to her engagement in political comedy and American culture, as well as the political issue of racism and anti-immigration, says something important. Freja is not part of an echo chamber, which is often seen as one of the effects of contemporary media fragmentation or identity politics; rather, she sees herself as part of a social community, and then, separate from that, as part of an implicit political comedy audience. It isn't ideal that the two do not overlap more, but it doesn't make her change her group of friends, or give up her engagement in political comedy.

Burkitt uses Bakhtin (1984) to discuss reflective consciousness, 'in which people imagine themselves as reflected in the mirrors of other people's consciousnesses' (2014:111). Following Bakhtin, Burkitt goes on to say that 'the emotional and evaluative tones of others that are spoken about us infuse our own feelings about ourselves and our actions, emotionally shading our self-

feeling' (ibid.:112). This can be understood as a 'reflective dialogue' which 'refract within them the feelings and emotions that are present in our relations to others, or that we imagine or wish were present in them' (ibid.). For Freja and Stella, people's disinterest in political comedy or political issues means that they feel like outsiders. Political comedy becomes a context wherein they can satisfy their interest and engagement, even if it doesn't resonate with their local social context. This implicit community of audience members works as a form of temporary surrogate. According to the few existing studies of audiences of comedy, there is a strong sense of implicit community among those who laugh at the same thing. Friedman and Kupiers argue that audiences' judgment of comedy is directly related to aesthetic, moral, social or other types of judgments, which can be considered 'more personal' than, for instance, those elicited by drama (2013). They call this 'comedy's inextricable relationship with personhood' (2013:193) and conclude that:

> humour acts as a pivotal lubricant in social interaction, an immediate marker of one's ability to communicate with others. While shared humour is this foundational ingredient of friendship, trust and intimacy, its absence often marks an unbridgeable social divide. Considering this centrality in constituting notions of 'us' and 'them' in everyday life, then, it is perhaps not surprising that comedy taste has a similar ability to mark such vehement boundaries in culture (ibid.).

Similarly, Bore (2012) studied audiences of television comedy programmes, showing that those who feel that they do not have the same sense of humour as their friends feel left out, because there is what Bore calls a 'solidarity-building function to "naturally occurring" talk about TV comedy […] both as a way to cement existing relationships and as a way to test potential friends' (2012:9).

Political comedy seems to be essential here, as shared emotions are part of its appeal. When a person feels like an outsider because of their political interest, comedians and their implicit audience provide a sense of belonging, 'a little friend,' someone who feels the same way about something, thereby providing a sense of solidarity around that issue, and the emotion that comes with it. The reflective dialogue and affective investment that is promoted by political comedy's mode of address is what creates a sense of belonging among political comedy audiences, on implicit and explicit levels.

For audience members like Stella and Freja, political comedy is an important space for engagement in political issues, since that may be lacking in their everyday social interactions. Burkitt goes on to note that what others say about us doesn't automatically harm or uplift us, since we 'also take into ac-

count the evaluation of a third person or seek an even more objective opinion in the morality of the social group we identify with' (2014:112). This leads to a further discussion on Bakhtin, where Burkitt underscores that 'the formation of our own voice and relatively stable viewpoint on our own self emerge only slowly and uncertainly' which can be 'fraught with difficulty,' creating a 'divided viewpoint on ourselves' (ibid.:113). This divided viewpoint has been underscored during the past few decades, in studies focussing on subjectivity and identity, and is apparent not only in this part of the data, but in the present study as a whole, as interviewees and focus group participants often had found themselves in a reflective reasoning, weighing alternatives against each other. Freja still identified with her course mates, even though she felt like she didn't share their views on immigration issues any more, and that made her carry a 'divided viewpoint' of herself. Hence, she was part of two communities that in some instances stood in opposition to each other, both an insider and an outsider at the same time. For her and others like her, political comedy becomes something to hold on to in such uncertainty. Corner turns to Calhoun (1994), who poses that 'modernity has made identity distinctively problematic,' not only because we arguably are more focussed on it in our daily lives – which may create a situation in which collectivity is disregarded in problematic ways, as was shown in a previous chapter – but because 'it is much harder for us to establish who we are and maintain this own identity satisfactory in our lives and in the recognition of others' (Calhoun 1994:10). This is where the potential of a sustained engagement in something, like political comedy, is of importance, as it then works as a stabilising force.

In a recent article, Hermes & Müller review the literature on cultural citizenship, and further define it as 'the right to be culturally different within a community and the obligation to engage respectfully with the difference of others' (2014:193). Although most of us are in some way divided and uncertain with regards to identity and community, not all of us find ourselves as split as Freja or others like her did. While it may be beneficial for such individuals to turn to political comedy in this kind of situation, there may be a reason to further analyse in what ways various examples of political comedy promotes such rights to be 'culturally different,' as well as politically different.

National contexts

An important theme of categorisation in relation to identity and community construction is nationality, for a number of reasons. Most importantly is the fact that political issues and humorous styles found in political comedy are

linked to national communities, while popular culture, on a more general level, is becoming increasingly globalised, and is challenging nationality as the main constructor of community (Hermes 2005).

Feelings of belonging manifest through the use of common references and languages – comedy as a form is arguably more dependent on common frames of references than many other genres. Critchley uses Mary Douglas' (1975) discussion on jokes as 'anti-rites,' where the mocking, parodying and deriding ritual practices 'of a given society' (2002:5) are central, which means there needs to be such a 'given society' for jokes to be constructed and understood.

In part, differences in constructions of nationality can be connected to the examples of political comedy that they follow (*Tankesmedjan* being Swedish and *The Daily Show* being American), but other factors play a role as well, such as the fact that a few of them had foreign parents or close friends in other countries, and through that had experience of non-Swedish humour. It is important to note that subjective constructions varied greatly, because it underscores the point that we cannot generalise contemporary young adults when it comes to the identification with national identities. For some audience members, the fact that they are Swedish is important, and for others, it is less so.

Harald, the youngest participant of the study, explicitly avoided American political comedy because of a construction of differences in values, or what he called 'world view':

> Like American stuff I don't follow because they have such a different world view from me. What they see as correct and ethical, it's a lot like that. I have an app called iFunny, where stuff is posted, and sometimes there are political messages there, like 'support our troops,' 'trust in God' and things like that, which makes me say 'No! Please!' (Harald, 18)

He focussed on certain aspects of American culture (military and religion) that can be said to differ quite radically from the Swedish, since two of the most often cited aspects of Swedish late modern culture and national character are pacifism and secularism (cf. sweden.se 2014); makings statements about troops or God remote concepts to Harald. As visible in the quote, he has a strong reaction towards these messages, rather than no reaction at all. It's not just that supporting troops and trusting in God are hard to relate to – they are in clear opposition to values held strongly by him.

But another part of the studied audience would produce a more complex mix of nationality-related constructions, similar to what Hermes describes where 'international media conglomerates' and 'fan cultures' challenge the nation, creating 'new types of collectivities that stretch far beyond national

borders and produce small self-enclosed enclaves within the nation' (Hermes 2005:1). One of the audience members with foreign relatives illustrated this when he spoke about engagement in American political comedy:

> I've followed [American] politics and that type of stuff, just because … yeah, it's the world's biggest super-power, still, or at least for now. So I've followed it a bit more closely … and especially when there's an election, I've sometimes seen debates, for instance. But of course there are things I don't get, that might be a bit more local, that are highlighted on *The Daily Show*, where I've felt like I don't have a clue of what they're talking about, or just know a little … But! That also increases your understanding, a greater view of what's out there … at the same time I learn things through that, and find out more. Of course it's geared towards an American audience, but it's still interesting that it's such a big hit; my understanding is that there are a lot of people who watch it: it's international, I mean I have relatives in Germany who watch it. […] For me, I'm mostly interested in American culture. But I'm not really that politically interested, especially in Swedish politics (Morgan, 29).

Morgan was one of those who stressed that they acquire knowledge through *The Daily Show* – it 'increases your understanding' and provides 'a greater view'. He sees it as 'international,' which seems to add to its value: the popularity of the programme becomes a reason in itself for watching, making it interesting and relevant. It crosses national borders and becomes a common frame of reference for him and his relatives in Germany, even though none of them live in the U.S. In this way, we see what Hermes writes about in action, as Morgan identifies with *The Daily Show*, and shares that with his German relatives. They are part of the audience 'enclaves' within countries, that stretch across borders.

For some of the audience members there was a familiarity with American culture, which they didn't feel for other foreign countries:

> I can understand, because … American culture is primarily what I […] consume. So I feel like I know more about the American legal system than the Swedish one. And it's almost the same with the political system. Because if you've watched enough programmes like *The West Wing* and *House of Cards*, you feel like 'yes, I think I understand how it works'. Almost better than with our system. And that's kind of embarrassing, although I don't think it matters that much, I don't have a big role in that [system] […]. It's all about what those in power do, that's where the funny is. But it's apparent that some of the issues that I am engaged in, like equal rights regardless of sexual orientation or gender or whatever … […] are a bit more polarised in the U.S., and it's more engaging … the funny contradictions … It matters less if it's senators or congress people or whoever, it's more about people in power who are stupid (Dennis, 29).

Dennis describes himself as Americanised with regard to his knowledge of political and judicial systems. The frames of reference, so important for comedy to be understood and enjoyed, vary even when it comes to actual formal institutions of power – in this case the Swedish and American political and judicial systems. Additionally, the quote illustrates the fact that Dennis identifies certain political issues that interest him and constructs them as 'more engaging' in the American context, which adds a dimension to the understanding of how people relate to the political issues they are interested in.

Dennis' quote also touches upon the fact that some of the audience members would engage with American popular culture almost exclusively, with news and current affairs being the only exceptions. Linus was one of the most obvious examples of this:

> Swedes are a bit more boring maybe. And Swedish politics aren't as absurd yet. And I say 'yet' because I think it's going in that direction. You can kind of see the trends. […] But the Swedish humour tradition isn't that political. […] if you look at British humour, there's much more good British stand-up than American stand-up, I think. But the American programmes are better. […] I shun everything Swedish! Generally. That's just how it is. Film … everything. […] I have almost no Swedish music. I have no Swedish programmes that I follow, no Swedish movies that I like. I'm pretty Americanised when it comes to media consumption in general. Except for newspapers. Since I'm politically engaged I kind of have to … (Linus, 26).

By comparing the quotes of this section it becomes clear that audiences may use nationality as a frame of reference but have strong opinions regarding what they prefer. Harald feels no connection to American values and therefore discards American political comedy entirely. Linus makes many categorisations in relation to national context: Sweden's political humour is lacking due to a weak tradition, British stand-up is superior to American, American television programmes are better. This illustrates the audiences' varied frames of references, which impact their community and identity construction, where the only obvious commonality was that they followed Swedish news and current affairs to some extent. The quotes also illustrate how cultural and political issues are mixed-up when speaking about political comedy, as one of the attractions of American political comedy is constructed as dependent on the actual political issues of the American context.

When talking about media critique and news consumption, Paul, a 22-year-old who stated that he avoided Swedish media in favour of American political comedy, said:

JD: How do you feel about media criticism, is that important?

P: In the U.S. it's needed.

JD: Would you say it's needed in Sweden?

P: I don't consume that much Swedish media, so …

JD: Would you say that some of your general news intake comes from political comedy?

P: Some of it […].

JD: But is it easy to follow those American news stories? I mean, since you're in Sweden?

P: I clearly belong to the internet generation, so … […] I think I know more about what's happening in the U.S. than in Sweden. At least when it comes to big events.

JD: Would you say you know more about what's happening in Washington D.C. than in Stockholm?

P: Well, maybe not the biggest stuff, but most of it. […] Sure, I live in Sweden, but I think Swedish news is pretty uninteresting. It's a tiny shit country, I don't necessarily feel more familiar with Swedes than other people who I connect with online. So things that happen in the U.S. are more … it feels a lot more relevant. At the same time, it's far away and all American [news] media is so bad! […] talking about what country I belong to, I've had this thought for a while, that the internet is like its own country. I have more in common with an American or an English person who hangs out at the same sites as I do than the Sweden Democrat who lives two blocks away (Paul, 22).

For Paul, the internet was like its own country, and the common interests shared online were more important than nationality, when it came to his identity, criticising the idea of the nation state.

In short, some of the audience members identified less with Sweden and the Swedish nationality, and were more interested in American and/or international news and culture in general, than others; this interest impacted what political comedy they engaged with, and more importantly, what they *didn't* engage with. As Hermes states, nationality is being challenged as the main point of identification, but these developments are irregular and non-predictable. While some seem to be swept up by a globalised popular culture, others keep within the Swedish context.

Ideology and strong emotions

Audience members spoke about political comedy as providing them with deeper understanding and context, of political issues, which was valued as it gave them a kind of power, in their roles as citizens – the previously mentioned symbolic levelling of political comedy (Hariman 2008). Those audience members would prefer the type of political comedy in which they could detect serious intent, and further, intent they agreed with:

> [Comedians] who claim to be apolitical, but really are [political], they tend to not share my views, and they … make fun of social phenomena that I don't think one should make fun of. Like kicking those who are down […] Yes, I'd say that's definitively a deal breaker. But also, what's seen as problematic, by stand-up comedians especially: they identify something in society that they want to make fun of. And what do they identify as the problem? That's usually how I draw the line. […] The classic example is joking about norms, at the expense of those breaking norms [rather than those following them] (Eva, 30).

In her evaluation of good and bad political comedy, Eva analyses both how explicitly 'political' comedians would see themselves as, and what would be the target of their comedy. She didn't appreciate comedy where the joke would be at the expense of those who in her view do not deserve it. This illustrates how humour aesthetics – what we might call sense of humour – is difficult to separate from its ideological or political message. For Eva and others like her to feel amused by the comedy, it had to be associated with a satisfactory analysis of society and power. Dennis reasoned along the same line:

> Like the difference between what's satire and what's just … kicking someone who's already down. I think that power aspect there is very … interesting, and I don't really know, it's an ongoing thought I have: that it's not funny when political comedy in any way makes fun of those who are defenseless or vulnerable (Dennis, 29).

Dennis had an 'ongoing thought' wherein he engaged reflexively with the genre and its underlying analysis of power structures.

Their ideal of political comedy matches that of Dahlgren's discussion on the ideals of deliberative democracy and discursive power, in which he argues that 'meaningful' political discourse needs to be guided by 'respect, pluralist outlook and reciprocity,' requiring all its participants to be on 'equal footing' (2009:92). According to Dahlgren, the ability to participate in public debate is often associated with 'power and cultural capital,' which means that 'in the context of politically subordinate and/or culturally diverse groups, the implo-

sion of an abstract, universalist ideal of deliberation can in fact be a very power-laden move' (2009:92f). Political comedy's ability to accommodate various groups and provide more equal 'footing' is hence one of its main functions, identified not only by Hariman and other scholars, but by some of the interviewees and focus group participants: the symbolic levelling of political comedy satisfies an intellectual political stance in relation to unequal power distribution, and as such is more enjoyable and more amusing. Importantly, it can then potentially do the opposite as well, by tipping the scale in favour of those in power. This clearly illustrates the point made earlier in this chapter that enjoyment of political comedy is linked to social and emotional disposition, as well as political ideology.

Feeling enjoyment or amusement is not, as some argue, equal to feeling emotions (see a critical overview of such standpoints in Morreall 1987). Philosopher and humour scholar John Morreall argues that amusement is an experience which we enjoy, but that doesn't mean that it's joyful:

> The view that amusement is an emotion […] is a common one. (It is especially prevalent where laughter at humor is not distinguished from other kind of laughter, as in the Superiority Theory and the Relief Theory). And it must be admitted that there are a number of similarities between amusement and standard cases of emotions; the most basic, perhaps, is that both amusement and standard emotions involve physiological disturbances (1987:213).

Laughter can be a response to various types of stimuli which makes it important to distinguish between different types. For instance, cognitive neuroscientists Scott et al. (2014) have shown that laughter is a 'social emotion' which happens most often in social interaction with others, and is used to show 'bonding, agreement, affection, and emotional regulation'. Since it functions in 'flexible ways' (ibid.), we cannot use its occurrence as the sole indicator of enjoyment or amusement.

Hence, if a person feels fatigued or depressed about the inequalities in society (as with Eva or Dennis) he or she might feel better when amused, but does not then automatically keep feeling better after the moment of amusement has passed. On the other hand, for such individuals who enjoy comedy that mocks structural inequalities, the amusement derived from such comedy might be less likely to occur if it weren't for their 'serious' emotional engagement with those issues.

This important difference between amusement and emotions leads Morreall to argue for a view of humour which places incongruity above superiority

and relief (1987; 2005), when it comes to explaining what amuses us. He goes on to develop on how amusement can be coupled with emotion, in some cases:

> although the essence of laughter lies in […] enjoyment of incongruity, it is important to note that in many laughter situations our enjoyment of incongruity is boosted by our simultaneous enjoyment of something else. […] The enjoyment of someone's suffering [superiority], or the expressions of pent-up feelings [relief], however, never constitute humor, as the superiority and the relief theories of laughter might lead us to believe. […] It is the enjoyment of incongruity that is both necessary and sufficient for humor; no other kind of enjoyment is either necessary or sufficient for humor (1987:216).

Political views impact what we might be enjoying 'simultaneously,' as Morreall puts it, which in turn impacts what we understand as incongruent, and further, what might be considered an expression of humorous superiority, or release. Morreal argues that there is a 'relative sophistication in the enjoyment of incongruity' (1987:216) since it is based on an ability to implicitly compare things (ibid.). If the comedy is pointing to incongruities which we don't see as incongruities, the amusement is left out; but if it can play on both incongruity and superiority there is a kind of simultaneous enjoyment.

If we see Eva and Dennis' frustration over inequality as a mix of emotion and reason, and the amusement they gain from political comedy as an experience, we see how the two are connected. In analysing the data of the present study it becomes clear that, depending on a person's political analysis and the intensity of emotions that she or he associates with that, we can begin to understand how the enjoyment of political comedy connects to ideology. Morreall goes on to say that laughter may or may not involve enjoyment of incongruity and of some kind of emotion, and if they coincide, 'the emotion must be relatively weak, or it will involve a practical concern which will block amusement' (1987:221). When an emotion is strong, amusement can be blocked. Among such audience members, on the other hand, there are shared frustrations over, in this case, structural inequality, which leads to shared enjoyment in the levelling effect of political comedy.

For levelling to occur there must be inequality; and some feel stronger about that than others. This means that while some may be amused by incongruity only in political comedy, others might be amused by the mix of incongruity and levelling, since the levelling can be connected to the negative emotions they feel about a certain political issue. In some cases, a person might feel so strongly about a certain issue that it blocks their amusement, and this is where one might say that the comedy has 'gone too far,' or the levelling is left out entirely. If a comedian makes fun of the disenfranchised, it becomes part of

the problem of inequality associated with negative emotions, rather than the opposite; or as Morreall expresses it, humour addresses 'the imagination more than the intellect' (2005:72), meaning it has a 'lack of commitment to truth' (ibid.). This creates a cognitive disengagement, he argues, that might be harmful, as the 'ideas presented to entertain can shape and reinforce harmful beliefs, most notably the beliefs we call stereotypes' (2005:72). The 'cognitive disengagement' is, then, stronger among some than others, and is a part of comedy engagement. For audience members like Dennis and Eva, who seem to engage with political comedy through a kind of filter of ideology associated with strong emotions, that filter acts as a constant reminder to stay cognitively engaged. For others, the opposite is true: for them, part of the enjoyment found in comedy is that they can, or allow themselves, to disengage cognitively. For Dennis and Eva, the amusement comes more exclusively from humour which incorporates strong emotions about issues like inequality or harmful norms: that is the comedy they seek to engage with. For others, such categorisations aren't made at all, due to 'cognitive disengagement' and the fact that they do not feel as strongly about such issues.

When we are unable or unwilling to experience amusement following engagement in comedy, we are saying something about ourselves. The absence of laughter marks dissatisfaction, something Billig has delved deeper into. What he calls unlaughter helps clarify what happens in these types of situations:

> If laughter can be used to communicate appreciation and amusement, then there are ways of conveying disapproval and unamusement. The rhetorical nature of laughter is possible because there is a corresponding rhetoric of unlaughter […] 'Unlaughter' can be used to describe a display of not laughing when laughter might otherwise be expected, hoped for or demanded [as a] significant absence of humorous reactions (2005b:192).

In this way laughter and unlaughter are coupled and dependent on each other, with emotional, social and rhetorical functions. Moira Smith uses the concept and connects it to somewhat malicious comedians engaged in purposeful boundary maintenance and strengthening – comparable to what was expressed by comedian Gärdenfors in a previous chapter: 'Some joke performances are meant to elicit differential responses—laughter from some and unlaughter from salient others' (2009:148). She applies this to an analysis of the Muhammad caricatures, and the responses they sparked in 2006[65]. While that event was intended to elicit both laughter and unlaughter, Smith argues (2009:148),

[65] For additional analysis of these events, cf. Ridanpää 2012; Kuipers 2011; Lewis 2011.

humour in general is based on common frames of reference, which paradoxically refers both to the sameness of people and the differences, creating a risk of othering[66]. It's this risk that some, such as Eva and Dennis, are hyper-aware of. For them, unlaughter is their countering measure, their own symbolic leveller, to use when facing political comedy that reproduces structural inequality, rather than mocks it.

While Morreall criticises superiority theory for not distinguishing between different types of laughter, Billig reminds us that incongruity theory ignores certain 'relational and emotional aspects' (Malmqvist 2015:737) of how humour works. What makes some types of incongruity 'funnier' than others says something about 'hierarchical social relationships and associated feelings of superiority and inferiority, legitimacy and illegitimacy' (ibid.; see also Billig 2005b). In the same way that we consider structural inequality as 'hidden' in language and discourse, it can be 'hidden' in humour. Especially, Billig argues, since we rarely analyse what it is we find funny in that moment when we are amused – doing that could even be said to defeat its purpose, for some (cf. Critchley 2002). According to this perspective, engagement in political comedy can be seen as worrying: those who regularly engage with political comedy regularly enjoy putting themselves above others. But that ignores the doublespeak and self-deprecative aspects of political comedy that audiences enjoy.

Self-deprecation is, from a rhetorical or performative standpoint, about making up for the potential loss of what might be called 'goodwill' or ethos, when a comedian, or, in the context of everyday social interaction, any person, engages in a humorous mode of discourse. As Hübler and Bell write, when someone makes him or herself into 'the butt of the joke' it 'de-emphasizes hierarchy and at the same time subtly incorporates the other primary components of ethos by conveying an intelligent resourcefulness and a modest character' (Hübler & Bell 2003:281). And as Critchley and parts of the studied audience reminds us, not all humour is based on the construction of superiority towards a specific group or person. Rather, as Critchley writes, jokes can play on superiority in two distinct ways, either by emphasising our sense of superiority, as in a lot of ethnic or racist humour, or 'by placing those shared practices in question, showing them in a new light, by taking the comedy of recognition

[66] An illustrative example of this is the prevalence of situational comedy about flying and air travel: because it is such a common and highly standardised experience (physical environment, social behaviour, language, safety procedures etc. are the same in all countries due to international regulations), it is a 'safe bet' for comedians, as they know that most of the audience will have their own, but similar, experiences of flying. Those who haven't been on an airplane will have fewer possibilities to understand these references (but may still have some, since it is referred to in other mediated contexts), and are excluded on a symbolic level.

and turning the whole thing on its head' (2002:87). This is what audience members like Eva or Dennis are noting: that in some types of humour, ridicule is directed at a specific group, but in others it's the normative system that is being ridiculed. In the latter, superiority is still there but becomes part of the object of ridicule, sometimes embodied by a comedian who is playing the role of, for instance, a racist.

This is complex and not always easy to discern in the moment; we may not always agree on what the object of ridicule is. In her autobiography, American comedian Sarah Silverman writes about her fight against racism (2010b). Using a comedic persona, she plays a stereotypical bigot with the aim of ridiculing racism. This entails using politically incorrect racist language, which can be interpreted as reinforcing racist discourse, rather than opposing it. For instance, Silverman writes about how Asian-American groups publicly criticised her after she used a racial slur commonly directed at Asian-Americans: which was the opposite of her intention (ibid.).

In cases like that of Sarah Silverman it could be concluded that there are additional relevant factors, as the risk of audiences interpreting her comedy as racist may rest on their unwillingness or inability to detect irony. This could in turn be connected to the above discussed strong emotions, or structural issues of inequality, such as lacking education. The theme of categorisation of knowledge and education will be analysed further in the next section.

Knowledge and education

Knowledge and education as a source of categorisation was something that often figured in the discussions, indicating a reflexive perspective on the self:

> I think the fun part is getting to feel clever. Like going to see Eddie Izzard … some of it is all about feeling like 'haha, I know about this' and 'I've kind of outsmarted the system' […] It flatters you. You're in a group and that makes it excluding. Because those who don't feel that … for me to feel clever I have to compare myself to someone [who's less clever] (Dennis, 24).

Dennis wasn't the only one to make this observation, although he went further than most in criticising it. Dennis understood that he constructed himself into a community of those who 'get it,' making him identify as 'clever' in comparison to others who implicitly don't 'get it'.

It might be that comedians like Izzard are skilled in creating this type of experience through his mode of address, meaning that he, and others like him, know how to 'discreetly' relay the information needed to understand a joke, or

remind audiences of something they have all come into contact with through experience or basic education, which in itself is enjoyable. While Dennis may be constructing himself as implicitly laughing at someone potentially less educated than he is, there may not be many actual people like that, who would feel excluded if they went to see Izzard or another comedian like him.

Comedians work to find the common frames of reference in all types of contexts, because that is the basis for creating humour. How 'common' such frames are depends on the individual comedian and the genre of humour, but there is most certainly an incentive for a comedian to work with wider frames, at least within popular culture, rather than within niched alternatives that border on the avant-garde. A critical scholar like Billig (2005a; b) might pose that whether or not there are actual people who would be excluded from a specific comedians' performance by 'not getting it' is irrelevant; it is the practice of implicit othering that is excluding, on a symbolic level. But since political comedy can be seen as a symbolic leveller, it could arguably work in that way for various, more or less excluded groups. The feminist political comedy referred to by interviewees and focus group participants is a symbolic leveller against patriarchal structures, for instance. Also, as self-deprecation is an important part of much of contemporary political comedy, there is a constant questioning of authority, which complicates the issue. Such self-deprecation is not only reserved for performers, but is adapted by its audience, in line with Coleman's idea of the ironic disposition and its 'democratic distaste for fundamentalist certainty' (2013b:383).

Benjamin made a similar analysis on the issue of knowledge and education in the political comedy audience:

> not to put down my colleagues. But the ones who haven't studied on a higher level, I don't think they enjoy watching these types of programmes, they more enjoy reading *Aftonbladet*[67], and then you get what you get […]. These comedy programmes can be fairly tough, because they focus on pretty complicated issues, with a funny twist. […] I feel that – especially the American programmes – it's the highly educated of my friends, who are interested in news, who watch [political comedy] as an addition to that (Benjamin, 31).

Benjamin was aware of potential problems in generalising others on the basis of higher education, but he still pondered whether interests and ability to understand could somehow be connected to it, since those he knew that shared his engagement in American political comedy also had higher education. But dur-

[67] One of the main tabloids in Sweden.

ing this part of the discussion, Benjamin softened his construction somewhat when he went on to say that:

> it feels a bit like these programmes are preaching to me, like I'm one of them, I agree with them … (Benjamin, 31).

There is a kind of ambivalence here, as Benjamin arguably places himself, and others who engage with political comedy, outside of the mainstream, but not below it; he constructs political comedy as something alternative and exclusive. One conclusion to draw from this is that while audience members see the appreciation of political comedy as related to knowledge, there is reflexivity that makes them aware of potential problems with such constructions.

The audience members' dilemma in relation to knowledge and categorisation connects with that of the deliberative democracy. Van Zoonen writes that in theories of deliberation, the key issue is 'whether and how "difference," "otherness," "multiplicity," "heterogeneity," "diversity," or "fragmentation" can come and be held together in a democratic entirety' (2005:149), which is manifested in discussions on humour. Eva, who like Dennis recognised the excluding aspects of political comedy, still saw the benefits of it:

> I think that a lot of political satire has a function for people working politically, but outside the system, I mean single issues extra-parliamentary groups. Those interested in asylum seekers' rights, or public health or the environment. Like that. Those who […] don't want to tie themselves to a specific political party. It kind of opens up for a greater political field. And in a way I think [political comedy] is easier to access, and we need that. Because it has this inclusive function (Eva, 30).

She chooses to stress the 'inclusive' function and connects it to the 'greater political field,' which can be associated with the perspective of van Zoonen.

As was shown in a previous chapter, the high levels of news and current affairs engagement found among a substantial part of the audience of the present study was in some cases constructed as a bit over the top. Benjamin illustrates this above by saying that his preferred political comedy is 'preaching' to him rather than to everyone. As the only highly educated person at his workplace Benjamin felt like an outsider, similar to previously mentioned Stella, with regards to her colleagues at the council offices. They had specific interest, emotions and knowledge about things that others didn't care about or value, at least not in their local context. They might be considered powerful, in contemporary Swedish society as a whole as they are highly educated, but their

daily experiences may not reflect that, which then impacts their subjective constructions of themselves and others.

An exchange with 35-year-old nurse Niklas illustrates this insider/outsider dilemma, of what is considered 'clever,' 'educated,' or 'alternative':

> JD: You mean that provokes you, like simpler stuff, like stuff that underestimates your intelligence?
>
> N: Yes, a lot! A lot.
>
> JD: Where they assume that the audience is more stupid than it actually is?
>
> N: So much. There was this period, in the nineties […] there were so many of these stupid shows, especially from the U.S., maybe because of their neoliberalism or whatever they call it, with Ronald Reagan and all that. But then comes Eddie Izzard from England, and his jokes actually presume that you've gone to school, that you know certain things. And I felt, this is what's been missing: this is what I want to see! And there are different takes on this, but he comes out as a 'bitchin' transvestite,' as he calls it. And I enjoyed that! Like really! Seven DVDs later I can say it's still funny. Still! (Niklas, 35, nurse).

The exchange develops from a point where Niklas states how annoyed he was by comedy that underestimated the audience. He clearly identified with Izzard, seeing him as the opposite of the kind of comedy that talks down to its audience. This subjective experience was important to him and cannot be considered purely as an expression of superiority; rather, it is a complex relationship wherein Niklas had felt ignored or belittled by other forms of comedy, and seen Izzard as remedying that problem.

Again, there is a self-deprecative double-speak among audience members, wherein they seem to negotiate their identity and community construction in the cautiously reflexive manner described earlier. In such identity work, comedians become the heroes. Izzard, Strömquist and Stewart, among others mentioned, act as ideal thinkers or teachers. Their skills as funny and entertaining, as well as knowledgeable and trustworthy, are admired greatly.

Further, comedians seemed to embody both the qualities associated with highly skilled journalists, providing information, and the qualities associated with performance and popularity, more in line with the concept of cultural citizenship as explained by Hermes (2005) and Jones (2013b). This duality is characteristic of the political comedy audience, with one foot in modern era citizenship, and the other in late modern cultural citizenship. In this manner, they valued knowledge and enjoyed gaining it, but they were for the most part

aware of its connection to power, showing this by referring to themselves as nerdy or alternative.

Some of the audience members stressed the educational and inclusive aspect of political comedy. By doing so they mirrored the hopes found among scholars like Jones (2010; 2013b) and Day (2011): they followed political comedy to keep up their political interest, learn things, and feel connected to others. But as shown, others tended to stress the levels of education or knowledge needed to be able to enjoy political comedy. They often included themselves among those who can do this, but questioned the abilities of others. This difference of perspective may be tied to their own personal journeys in relation to education and class. For some it was an achievement to be educated and by others it was taken for granted. Some had struggled to get into higher education, while others had not. Some were the first in their families to go to college while others were aiming for a doctoral degree. Coupled with differences in confidence and political ideology, as well as the intensity of the emotions that come with that, we see how engagement in political comedy is complex even within a seemingly quite homogenous group.

The most common production of categorisation related to knowledge was about news, current affairs and, more generally, political issues. While there wasn't a strict consensus on how much a person needs to know about regular news to understand political comedy, audience members constructed such knowledge as important or at least relevant to some extent. As with educational levels, knowledge about the news was constructed as both provided by, and a prerequisite for, enjoyment of engagement in political comedy:

> There are things that, if you don't understand them, you won't find it funny. […] there are things on *Tankesmedjan* that will be extremely boring if you don't know anything about, for instance, what the different parties stand for (Veronika, 31).

> I'd say, I think you need a little previous knowledge because [*Tankesmedjan's*] descriptions of what's happened are often very brief, and you don't always … they don't always start off with a neutral perspective (Gabriel, 24).

> Well [political comedy as a genre] demands a certain amount of … familiarity … but if you look at Liv Strömquist, her stuff is educational. With her you kind of don't need that […]. I mean some familiarity is needed perhaps, but you don't need to know exactly who Carl Bildt[68] is. She explains who he is and why he's so weird [laughter] (Eva, 30).

[68] Sweden's foreign minister at the time.

> since I started [listening to *Tankesmedjan*] I've got some kind of gender perspective and that type of thing, both from Liv Strömquist and Nanna Johansson. Like now, I'm training to get my driver's license. And I'm reading this textbook and it rubs me the wrong way, because, everyone who is mentioned is a *he*. '*He* the lorry driver, *he* the tram driver, he, he, he!' What about throwing in a *she* or even a *s-he*?! (Harald, 18).

The difference among audience members was found in what they highlighted when asked what knowledge is needed to understand the humour in *The Daily Show* and *Tankesmedjan*. Whether or not a person is *interested enough* to engage with them was seen as a result of prior knowledge and interest in current affairs, and in some cases, as illustrated above, formal education. Some would nuance their answers, like Eva, saying it had to do with individual comedians' styles: and some had concrete stories of when they had gained knowledge from political comedy, like Harald, the 18-year-old upper secondary school student.

These quotes show that while education and knowledge about current affairs may be connected to engagement with political comedy, this issue is in no way clear-cut. While interviewees and focus group participants would say they gained knowledge from political comedy, it is also true that this engagement was based not only on an interest in comedy, but in political issues, news and current affairs. When discussing the rising popularity of contemporary forms of satire, Jones proposes that its success doesn't only lie in the skills of its producers, but in an 'increasingly media-savvy public' (2010:182):

> Citizens know that public artifice exists, which is ultimately why the satire that points it out is funny—they just need someone skillful enough to articulate the critique. Though this fake yet real reporting has led Baym to argue that *The Daily Show* is 'reinventing political journalism,' I contend that it is the postmodern audience that comprises its viewership and has made it popular, more accurately, who is reformulating what it is they want from political communication, including journalism (2010:182f).

According to his perspective, political comedy is gaining popularity because of its 'savvy' audience, indicating that one point of identification for audiences may be frustration with contemporary news media. This has been stated in various ways throughout this thesis, but is relevant in relation to identity and community construction because a part of the audience consists of heavy news consumers. Just like other shared emotions, shared frustration with mainstream news is one of the building blocks of community construction for the young adult political comedy audience. Political comedy can then be seen as a form that attracts such audiences, who have this 'savvy,' but it could also be seen as

co-creating it, as it provides meta-commentary and media critique[69]. In the coming section, this is further developed, as it relates to irony and indirection.

Irony and indirection

The ironic mode of discourse used in political comedy is significant, because irony is imperative to the production of pleasure, identity and community. Irony can be controversial as it works through indirection, which is often considered an indicator of superiority or indifference (Hutcheon 1994). Bakhtin has called irony the 'equivocal language of modern times' (1987:132) and Dahlgren sees irony as a late modern structure of feeling (cf. Williams 1961) and wonders if it plays a part in contemporary 'indifference':

> indifference can be understood as the consequence of experiencing either a sense of simple remoteness, or a sense of having some superior insight that thereby renders politics as personally insignificant. This latter mode veers towards the stance of what many see as a key structure of feeling promoted by late modern media culture, namely, irony. This aesthetic stance can encompass playfulness as well as cynicism, but in either case, I would suggest that irony may be the foundation for the indifference circulating within some of today's more urbane disengaged citizens (2009:82f).

While irony can be considered a late modern 'key' structure of feeling, there is a need to probe further what that means in light of Coleman's and Rorty's (1989) ideas on irony as expressing the late modern 'distaste for epistemological foundationalism' (Coleman 2013b:383). Irony arguably isn't easily captured or generalised, as Hutcheon concludes in her study of irony (1994). The only characteristic that seems to be connecting various examples of irony is that it creates indirection. Therefore, to understand it, context is imperative, as irony is common in very different kinds of situations, in various art and media genres, as well as in everyday interaction. It can potentially be applied to anything, such as the self, another person, a group, an institution, a discourse, an idea, a practice, and so on. As shown in the previous chapters, it seems not only to strengthen feelings of community, which are needed to combat indifference, but can be a way to focus on certain issues, and also understand complexity.

[69] This point is further explored in a book chapter by Kolluri (2016) where he recaps and conceptualises the creation of a college course titled 'Satire as Political Critique' where he used *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* actively in the teaching: 'It brought together modern political communication theories, academic research on political humor, and TDS and TCR as pedagogical tools' (2016:216). Kolluri is tentatively positive, stating that even though further research is needed, the programmes 'enabled students to relate to issues relevant to them, and deliberate them in a meaningful and engaging manner' (ibid.:220).

Such constructions of irony are found among comedians in defence of irony and comedy (cf. Silverman 2010b; Lind 2014), but also among scholars such as Day (2011) and Jones (2013b). Useful in this discussion is the more neutral stance of Witkin, who likens irony to a 'tool,' as it can be humorous as well as 'bitter or even tragic' (1993:136). Irony is 'always a reflection of the Janus-faced nature of reality' (ibid.) – exposing paradoxes and contradictions – and if used skilfully, it 'corrodes and undermines pretensions, unmasks appearances, deconstructs' (ibid.). Karolina, the 22-year-old political science major, strongly disagreed with the criticism towards irony and political comedy:

> And I really believe, [that] if you label *Tankesmedjan* as silly or nonsense, and say that young people are only interested in being silly, that they can't … like get into the real political issues instead or whatever … well, then you risk making them see themselves that way as well. Instead of seeing [*Tankesmedjan*] as a way into [political issues] (Karolina, 22).

But Linus, the other political science major among the audience members, came at it from a different perspective, and used examples from his own social interactions to try to understand why some people are so provoked by irony:

> Maybe they can't, some people don't understand irony. I have a colleague who doesn't understand irony; we were sitting there, laughing at him for like five minutes the other day, because he didn't understand that we were joking. […] But this guy, he doesn't have any idea about irony as a concept, it's so funny! […] some just don't get it because they're stupid! (Linus, 26)

The quotes illustrate how contrarily community construction can be related to irony. Karolina speaks of it as inclusive for young people, but Linus' account is harsher and excluding. He constructs it as something that some do not have the ability to understand, while Karolina goes on to press how irony in political comedy is something you learn to understand by engaging with it, a form of audience skill of interpretation (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998:142f):

> JD: Is there anything in particular that you dislike about political comedy? Is there anything that makes you think, if we use *Tankesmedjan* as an example, where you think they've gone too far or are mean or anything … like the stuff they are sometimes criticised for?
>
> K: I mean it depends a bit on how you interpret them, there was this debate. Jonathan Unge had done something on diabetics, and I didn't followed the entire debate, but I think of it like this: they usually make fun of people to get a point across, and you know, he has that style, so I understand how people feel it's going too far, but … if you've listened to the programme and understand how it's made, I don't think you take offense (Karolina, 22).

Mastering the skill of interpreting irony can thus be used to exclude others, but it can work in reverse as well, by strengthening communicative skills in general, and the community of those who enjoy it in particular forms.

Another important community in relation to political comedy was those who identified themselves as sensitive to the potential harm of humour. The positions taken by audience members like the above-quoted Karolina and Linus in the previous paragraph represent an opposing perspective to those who, on normative grounds, spoke about unfair or problematic comedy. Again we see irony's and humour's contradictory character, as Witkin calls it, or its 'edge' as Hutcheon describes it (1994), where two distinct groups are formed in opposition to each other. The defence or criticism of specific jokes or comedians becomes a part of the negotiation of the meaning of political comedy, where the 'big issues' are debated among scholars, journalists and audience – what is the intent? Is this serious? This must be considered a constant feature of political comedy, because the possibility of controversy is a consequence of the form itself. Political comedy succeeds in engaging audiences: it invites them – as well as those who do not engage – to be part of such discussions. Those who defend political comedy will do so in various ways, reflecting the heterogeneity of people and the heterogeneity of pleasure and enjoyment.

The positions taken within the studied audience, in relation to the potential harm or offense of political comedy, are therefore to be considered relational. Billig illustrates this tension, within and between the conflicting attitudes towards the symbolic value of humour, highlighting that it is not about humour itself, 'but in the assumptions that it is morally desirable to be funny and that rebelliously experienced humour is rebellious in effect' (2005b:242). This is problematic, he argues, as 'politics by its nature is serious' (ibid.), and:

> In a culture of fun such seriousness can operate at a disadvantage. The radical can resemble the unwelcome puritan guest, who in former days sought to reduce the levity of every social occasion. The eventual departure of such a guest will be followed by a huge sigh of relief and a burst of laughter (2005b:242).

Comparing those Billig describes as 'radical […] puritan guest[s]' to the previously referenced audience members who focussed on political comedy's underlying analysis of inequality, is fruitful here, as it demonstrates their more critical stance, as well as how they may be perceived by other parts of the audience, as 'unwelcome guests' in a space that should be about fun and silliness.

Community constructing comedy

When comedian Sarah Silverman claims to have a serious anti-racist intent with her seemingly racially insensitive jokes (2010b), she can be accused of using that as an excuse for creating comedy at the expense of others. As Billig reminds us, humour is most often 'acknowledged as something good. In the present era, possessing a sense of humour is seen as a self-evidently desirable virtue' (Billig 2005a:25). For Billig, this means that we forget the fact that ridicule is a central part of most humour and that it is overlooked in its 'central role' in 'maintaining social order' (Billig 2005a:28). With this in mind, ridicule in political comedy is arguably directed not only at those explicitly made fun of, like a politician, but also at those incapable of understanding what is meant to be serious and what isn't; or those who react with unlaughter who might have strong emotions about certain issues, which blocks their amusement. Also, when we speak about enjoyment, we are not only referring to positive feelings. Rather, enjoyment, appreciation and amusement are found in various emotional states, even in comedy: audiences can be disgusted, provoked or fatigued, for instance.

As Day writes, irony has become 'a mode of political discourse' which doesn't appeal to everyone (2011:181). It often polarises or even enrages those who do not appreciate it, since it works through indirection. Such indirection can frustrate its audience 'through a perceived dishonesty or inauthenticity' (2011:181). In her study of activists' use of the ironic mode, she concludes that individuals 'who are unwilling to meet these [activist] groups halfway in reading their performance ironically' tend to disregard them 'as nonsensical' or consider them to be offensive (2011:181). This captures the division that humour and irony potentially creates when used as a mode of political discourse. Authenticity and honesty are equally used by both sides of this argument, because for some irony is dishonest, and for others it is the most honest. As Hutcheon writes:

> Irony removes the security that words mean only what they say. So too does lying, of course, and that is why the ethical as well as the political are never far beneath the surface in discussions of the use of and responses to irony. […] Irony obviously makes people uneasy (1994:14).

When debates about certain jokes or comedians begin, those who weren't originally engaged can potentially become engaged, as indicated by Day. In this way, political comedy engages a secondary audience, which may be engaging with a different stance than that of the regular audience. The two types of au-

diences are engaged with such controversial political comedy for almost opposing reasons, with a substantial rift between them, reflecting and embodying various ongoing conflicts in contemporary society, and various kinds of uneasiness. The value of political comedy – and in a wider perspective, popular culture – may not only be the production of pleasure among its primary audience, but in the emotional reactions and debates that potentially follow.

While we might find it easier to be critical of certain types of humour, such as racist humour, the vital difference between that and the political comedy referred to by audience members is in the object of ridicule, the context of the jokes, and the context of the audience. There are arguably instances of humorous community construction that uses stereotypes in an affirming manner to create a sense of commonality. For instance, in a study of a the oral joking tradition wherein Swedes, Norwegians and Danes joke about each other in specific, cemented ways on the basis of national stereotypes, Gundelach (2000) states that such joking is 'explained in part by the countries' respective national habitus, as they have been shaped by the types of conflictual and co-operative relationships among the countries' (Gundelach 2000:113), which he calls 'joking relationships'. Distancing this humour from that with a more aggressive racist intent, Gundelach goes on to state that such joking relationships 'are primarily expressions of feelings of alliance and affiliation, and they achieve their result by teasingly playing with stereotypes' (2000:122); just like a group of friends or family members that share a common history, including both conflict and co-operation, use humour in a way that might seem hurtful to an outsider. For those in the studied audience who didn't share their engagement in political issues with anyone in their circle of friends or family, political comedy filled a type of social-emotional function, by confirming that there are others who shares their political interest and engagement, and, more importantly, their enjoyment of it.

Whilst critical of the over-positive view of humour within certain fields of research, Billig arrives at a similar conclusion: 'if joke-telling is a social phenomenon, then the meaning of a joke can be affected by the context of its telling' (2005a:31). One cannot set general rules for the interpretation of humour or irony, and there will always be opposing views on the matter – this is inherent in its form and part of its allure (Hutcheon 1994). Potential conflicts of meaning and offensiveness reflect ongoing social relationships, including power structures, taste hierarchies and aesthetics, moral dilemmas and political ideology. The studied audience arguably enjoys this ambiguity, where part of the engagement is about discerning what is to be taken seriously and what isn't. Jones writes extensively about the conflicting notions of serious and silly, argu-

ing for a view of political comedy as an expression of 'a different language' that 'combines aggression and judgment with laughter and play,' allowing audiences to engage in play though the shifting of 'interpretative frames' (2013b:401). The value of this language is that it allows for 'the destabilizations of meanings,' and playful engagement, which creates 'opportunities for leaning and development, enjoyment, bonding and community forming, or resources for improvisation and imagination' (ibid.). These characteristics are close to the ideals of cultural citizenship that have been mentioned throughout this thesis, such as Stevenson's (2012) focus on learning and deliberation in the everyday.

This playful mode of engagement is further described by Morreall:

> Amusement is evoked by fantasies as easily as by real events. In order to laugh at a cartoon or a film comedy, we do not have to believe that the story is true or even that it could be true. Indeed, a lot of humour involves enjoying impossible events for their impossibility – consider the characters in violent cartoons who are crushed by 10-ton weights and then immediately recover. […] Laughing at the sudden twist in a joke is like enjoying the dynamic lines in a painting or the resolution of chords in a symphony: we are not trying to accomplish anything or learn anything, but are simply enjoying the experience of something (2005:68).

The enjoyment is directly related to the shifting of perspectives, which is playful and doesn't always try to 'accomplish anything' as Morreall puts it, but in doing so, paradoxically, it accomplishes something.

The presumed connection between seriousness, goal-orientation and sincerity may be what makes comedy special in the context of cultural citizenship and community construction. Sincerity is associated with perceived authenticity, which is considered differently among different subject positions: what is silly to some might be deadly serious to others, and the uncertainty that comes with non-goal-oriented discourse is more threatening or uncomfortable to some than others. These subject positions represent communities, wherein the rules and values concerning what is or isn't serious are more or less explicit.

Community construction is continually ongoing. Illustrating this, political comedy keeps reminding us to question (almost) everything: no subject positions should be seen as forever included or excluded, or superior or inferior, because the power dynamics that humour plays off are continually in flux – or at least potentially so. In studies of racist or sexist humour, for instance, it is clear that some power dynamics transform, while others seem cemented (cf. Pickering & Lockyer 2005). In the contemporary Swedish and international context, the enjoyment of these kinds of humour has been questioned, which is illustrated by those represented in the study.

Audience members' analysis and understanding of 'where' power lies, with whom, and how this power is exerted, varies, not only in accordance with ideology but in accordance with nationality. For those who mostly engaged with American political comedy, the subjective construction of what institutions of power are relevant was complex and often connected to a wider engagement with American popular culture and political issues. For them, frames of references hadn't necessarily 'moved' but been expanded through the media. They considered themselves to have a history with American popular culture, as it was part of their childhoods and adolescence years, and they felt knowledgeable enough about issues treated in American political comedy, such as American history, the political and judicial systems, and wider aspects of its culture.

In humour studies the issue of culturally determined taste is usually discussed in terms of the universal and the particular. Humour exists in all cultures (universal), but is seen as culturally fixed (particular). As mentioned, Critchley calls it 'a form of insider-knowledge' that is untranslatable and functions 'like a linguistic defence mechanism'; which means that sharing a sense of humour 'is like sharing a secret code' (Critchley 2002:68). It is debatable whether the American and Swedish cultural 'distinctiveness' are really so distinctive: Swedish popular culture and media are undeniably influenced and inspired by that of other countries, especially that of the U.S. and Britain, and American politics are given quite a bit of attention in Swedish news media. The fact that American political comedy is constructed as somewhat different, though familiar, can be seen as an expression of the mixed influences of global popular culture and nationality that Hermes writes about in relation to cultural citizenship. For the audience members who identify as particularly interested in American political issues and culture, the Swedish national identity is clearly 'challenged,' as Hermes puts it. As they engage more with American popular culture and political issues, their points of reference change and widen, and they gain a kind of parallel perspective on the countries. Importantly, though, there are those who don't engage at all with American or other foreign political comedy, which marks a considerable difference between them.

Belonging to a community of those who have the 'insider-knowledge' and 'secret code' referred to by Critchley, is important. Clearly the engagement in political comedy is related to a sense that your knowledge is confirmed and that you are gaining knowledge or familiarity, and that in turn creates a feeling of exclusiveness, of being among the imagined clever people who share that 'secret code'. In actuality, the 'code' might not always be so 'secret,' but we can still enjoy the feeling of it potentially being so. It makes us feel like we belong.

Summary

This chapter has shown how audience members produce categorisations of identity and community related to political comedy. Political comedy provides them with means to bond with or disconnect from others, based on pleasure and enjoyment. In their reflections on these issues, five distinct themes are of relevance for these constructions. The theme of enjoyment and social context illustrates how individuals engage in reflexive dialogues (Burkitt 2014) on their subject positions and social communities, and consider political comedy and its implicit audience a replacement 'friend' that shares one's political interest. The next theme of national contexts shows that there is a significant difference within audiences, in how some of them identify with foreign, particularly American, popular and political culture: political comedy 'challenges' national identity as the main point of identification (Hermes 2005), which has relevance to humour specifically, as it is built upon the use of common references. The following theme of ideology and strong emotions utilises Billig's writing on unlaughter (2005b) to show how different audience members construct quality in political comedy differently, in accordance with ideological stances and strong emotions which block amusement (Morreall 1987; 2005). This section also demonstrates the inherent ambiguity of political comedy, wherein the audience reflects on what is intended to be funny or serious. The fourth theme deals with categorisation related to knowledge and education, as the audience produces inclusion and exclusion: for some, political comedy provides knowledge, while for others, it requires knowledge. This and the final theme of irony and indirection brings the analysis into the territory of symbolic inclusion and exclusion. Irony and humour bonds audiences together, while excluding others (Day 2011; Hutcheon 1994), but does so in part by signalling what Coleman describes as an aversion towards 'fundamentalist certainty,' an aversion which is essentially democratic (2013b). Comedians are constructed as heroes who embody qualities related to comedic skill and intellect, but do so in a self-deprecating manner, illustrating the complexity of this mode of address; showing how its corresponding modes of engagement should be understood and valued within their specific contexts.

8. Conclusions

This thesis has investigated audience engagement in political comedy, and its encouragement of political and cultural citizenship. The findings have added to, as well as problematised, contemporary research related to political comedy and its audience; and to some extent, research on young adult citizenship. This chapter summarises the most important parts of the study, develops its key findings and contextualises them. It ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study, and what possibilities for future research have emerged.

Summary of research

The hybrid genre of political comedy is becoming increasingly popular, both within the Swedish and the international context, while traditional broadcast news engagement among young adults seems to be diminishing. These developments have generated criticism and worry among some scholars and media professionals focussed on issues related to political communication, democratic citizenship, and politics, who pose that political comedy may be contributing to disengagement and cynicism. While an extensive body of research on the textual aspects of political comedy is forming, its audience is mostly ignored within qualitative research.

The aim of the present study was to examine and understand how audience engagement in political comedy encourages political and cultural citizenship. The concept of engagement helps us understand potential commonalities and differences between cultural and political engagement (Dahlgren 2009; 2015; van Zoonen 2005; Hermes 2005); and allows for a fuller understanding of how people become drawn into and connected to something; and how they *stay* connected, or don't. Additionally, in line with an increasing share of contemporary social science research, it allows for the perspective of the rational as inseparable from the emotional. While earlier research has regarded the two as separate, often focussing on the former, the present study joins other contemporaries is reconsidering this dichotomy.

Engagement is culturally, socially and emotionally constructed, the present study argues, and by considering it a spectrum (as suggested by Hill in 2015), we can begin to construct a fuller understanding of what it means conceptually. The idea of a spectrum allows for several important aspects of the audience to be included, most importantly: that subject positions within an audience may vary greatly; that engagement is dynamic, which means that it changes with regard to our everyday routines, over time and throughout a persons' life, as well as according to social or cultural context; that it can vary in intensity; and that changes in engagement can happen abruptly or slowly (ibid.).

The concept of engagement can be applied to a wide variety of objects, which is part of its appeal, and using it to study the political comedy audience makes it possible to accommodate the dynamics of hybrid forms: engagement in political comedy can be understood as a type of double-sided engagement that includes engagements both in culture and in the political. The use of the two theoretical frameworks of cultural citizenship and the civic circuit, which cover slightly different yet sometimes overlapping aspects of media and engagement, has been fruitful in this context.

Political comedy's hybridity, ranging from fact to fiction, focussing on various aspects of the political, related to the social and the cultural, and spanning across most types of media, like talk shows, stand-up acts and graphic novels, is one of the reasons for the continuous debates on its status and function, as it challenges traditional dichotomies of information as separate from entertainment. By focussing on existing young adult members of the political comedy audience, and by working through that data using relevant theoretical concepts, the present study can contribute knowledge about political comedy, its audience, and about engagement as such. In other words, the contribution of this thesis is its creation of a contextualised understanding of political comedy's young adult audiences, with regard to their understanding of the genre; of citizenship; and of how this relates to cultural citizenship.

Based on the data collected during the research process, Swedish young adult audiences of political comedy can be considered self-informing (Coleman 2013b). They enjoy the symbolic levelling (Hariman 2008) provided by political comedy because they are critical of various aspects of traditional news sources and political communication, including its ability to carry out competent journalism, as well as its claim to epistemic authority. Thus, political comedy aids young adults in becoming citizens, as it fosters critical thinking and understanding of the perspectives of others.

The critical stance of the comedy corresponds with similar stances among young adults, connected to changes in citizenship. Researchers from different

fields have established that the modern era model of citizenship may be problematic, from a normative, empirical and methodological perspective. The rational, well-informed and dutiful civic subject seems to be an ideal type that never really existed, nor should be romanticised. People are emotional and rational all at once, and engage with news in different ways, through different forms of media. It is clear that the young adult citizens that engage with political comedy have a critical perspective on information and knowledge production, at least in relation to political elites and journalists.

Associated both with political and cultural citizenship, the young adults represented in this thesis question modern era views of collectivity. They have been characterised as 'uneasy,' in relation to the performance of political citizenship, which seems to prevent them from engaging through the traditional forms of, for instance, political parties. Here it might be said that they are rather confused: while they claim to want to engage further, and, from the perspective of the framework of the civic circuit, have the means to do so, they question their ability to have an impact, as well as the social consequences of such engagement. Hence, while they are well equipped to understand the plight of others and the workings of knowledge production, and actively learn about these issues through political comedy and other sources, they for the most part keep their political engagement confined to their media engagement, and to communities of friends or family.

Based on a mapping of political comedy forms, as well as on interview, questionnaire and focus group data from 31 Swedish young adults (18-35 years old) who regularly follow political comedy (*Tankesmedjan* or *The Daily Show*, as well as other examples), this thesis argues that the growing engagement in political comedy is a symptom of contemporary citizenship, which can be characterised as suffering from the problematic modern era model of a rational and informed citizen. More specifically, the lacking efficacy and affective deficit of contemporary democracy (Coleman 2013a) are important to understanding the context of this growth. Political comedy's use of and reference to irony, both in relation to people's dispositions, and in relation to discursive expression, aids audiences in coping with the uneasiness of citizenship, as well as in the development of an understanding of others. The following section details and discusses these findings further, by answering the research questions of the study.

Key findings

One of the issues concerning scholars interested in political comedy and political entertainment is the ability of its audience to discern what is to be taken seriously and what isn't, which is then often coupled with the idea that political comedy audiences risk becoming misinformed, disengaged or distanced from politics and political issues. While this has been problematised by empirically based effects studies carried out in the American context, the fact that political comedy works by challenging and often ignoring journalistic norms, creates suspicion and criticism. This is understandable, as contemporary journalism faces several threats, in part associated with changes in financing and the fragmentation of audiences. But the findings of the present study clearly oppose such worries, as political comedy is coupled with a quite robust interest and engagement in news and current affairs. Arguably, to be engaged with forms which mock or parody news journalism and political media, audiences need to have some idea of the original object of such ridicule. We enjoy humour about such things that we already have knowledge of. For sure, some of the audience members followed the well documented trend of engaging less with broadcast news programming, but that did not mean that they would avoid news as such. Those who didn't engage with any form of news on a regular basis did so sporadically, and were still interested in political issues.

Situating political comedy: challenging the information/entertainment dichotomy

Based on the mapping of political comedy as a form, as well as of previous research and conceptualisations of it, the study argues that political comedy is a truly hybrid genre. Found in most types of media outlets, it has not only prevailed through time and within most cultures, but challenges the dichotomy of information as separated from entertainment: both to content and in formal qualities. Therefore, it is found among a countless number of subgenres and labels, used by producers, audiences and scholars, and its meaning is never really set. This is true of most media, of course; but in this case, as its mode of address and intent is often perceived as unclear, it attracts certain scrutiny which can result in different kinds of interpretation. While this is part of its allure for audiences, who enjoy the mix of entertainment and information, it can create confusion among secondary audiences, for whom the intention is irrelevant or questioned. This is the reason why producers and comedians are careful to avoid claiming any serious or journalistic ambition. For instance, the

study shows how the label 'satire,' means different things in different contexts: it can be humour with a serious intent when compared to other forms of humour, or it can be seen as strictly humorous when compared to news and current affairs programming. The perception and construction of comedic and satirical intent is what matters, and what in certain instances makes this hybrid genre controversial. For those who can be seen as the primary audience, political comedy provides something that is both information and entertainment: they learn from it and are entertained, and it is not possible to separate these two modes of engagement.

The double mode of discourse of political comedy entails that it is funny and familiar yet thought-provoking. It helps audiences become levelled with political journalism and political elites on a discursive level, since it works to uncover and make fun of political performance and what Hariman calls 'political pageantry' (2008). This partly has to do with the media critique found in contemporary examples of political comedy, which functions as criticism of political communication, news media, and politics itself. The levelling answers to the epistemic authority of political journalism, as well as to the emotional aspects that are associated with engaging with political journalism. Such levelling wouldn't be possible if political comedy was situated 'within' political journalism, because even if some examples are comparable to a form of political journalism, in that it actually informs audiences about various issues, it needs to be firmly situated 'outside' it for the sake of the criticism it delivers. Political comedy often experiments with the norms of conventional journalism. It doesn't itself subscribe to those norms, which means that it can create a critique that conventional journalism cannot. In many ways, this makes for a situation in which political comedy itself guards those norms: it regularly makes fun of journalism that breaks its own norms.

In both the American and Swedish contexts, comedy programmes use comedic labels to protect themselves from criticism and even legal problems, by clearly stating the comedic or satirical purpose, and distancing what they do from what journalists do. While some see this as a way for comedians to avoid accountability, the present study argues that it is important to the genre as such. If the rules and standards regarding factuality and impartiality were imposed on comedy, it would lose the qualities mentioned.

This doesn't mean that there should be no accountability, but that there is a necessary level of freedom required if political comedy is to work the way it does. In fact, as shown, there *are* standards for political comedy; in the Swedish context, public service and broadcast media more generally have to adhere to certain standards regarding impartiality and factuality. They are less strict for

humour, satire, and opinion pieces, but require clear labelling of programmes and segments, and can be subjected to complaints and scrutiny. The present thesis argues that the debates that follow humour controversy are valuable in themselves, as they highlight various communities and their opposing norms in contemporary society.

Audience genre work: enjoying play and emotional authenticity

Moving on to the second research question, this section deals with how the political comedy audience construct and engage with political comedy as a hybrid genre. Illustrating a double mode of engagement, audience members would speak about how funny, but also how intelligent their favourite comedians were. They constructed political comedy as a form of guide or teacher, providing them with critical analysis, and contextualised understanding of institutions of power – including powerful media institutions. Political comedy helped them to analyse and criticise political rhetoric and performance, and acknowledged their emotions about the political, and thus, created a sense of community. Political comedy was constructed as using its humorous mode of discourse to create what might be called play (Jones 2013b) in political discourse. The study argues that it thereby works educationally, providing a form of low-stakes communicative space for political learning and reasoning.

Engagement in forms characterised by play means we can be less goal-oriented than in other forms. That doesn't mean that engaging with political comedy isn't productive, but that we – in addition to the more goal-oriented political media engagement – need freedom when thinking about the political. Audiences can test ideas, compare and contrast, and do so in a relaxed manner. When engaging in play, they are involved in a constant negotiation between what might be serious and what might be silly, since all play necessitates a component of seriousness. This playful approach to the political means they can ask questions like 'is this serious?', 'is this real?' and 'what happens if we do this?' It becomes explorative, and through that, potentially sparks further interest and engagement. Importantly, they don't consider political comedy to be in the same category as news or current affairs media. It relates to political issues and political media, but it isn't 'the same' as such 'straight' or factual forms. Further, they use the label of 'satire' differently: for some, the perceived serious intent 'behind' the comedy was an important marker of quality, signalling critique, transgression and subversion, while by others, no such value judgments were made.

Audiences identify with their favourite comedians. Beyond being funny 'guides,' they are constructed as representatives of the audience. Here, this study argues, the fact that comedians aren't journalists is important. For some it has to do with the mentioned ironic mode of discourse – it is familiar, a mode they themselves employ in their everyday routine. But also on a political or ideological basis: Liv Strömquist, for instance, was often admired for her ability to use humour to express common frustrations with the political, in a way that political journalism cannot.

Another major finding related to audience constructions of the genre is that its often identified ironic mode of discourse seems to be one way in which they would make sense of the political world. For people harbouring various insecurities and levels of uneasiness in relation to the self and the political, irony works as a tool. This tool is especially suitable as it is seen as funny, which invites further and regular engagement, but also because it allows for uncertainty and ambiguity; in accordance to the view of scholars like Coleman (2013b), Combe (2015) and Rorty (1989), the ironic disposition is connected to late modern changes in epistemology, wherein absolute certainty is considered inauthentic and potentially undemocratic. The political comedy audience represented in the present study were for the most part highly educated, and often interested in media itself, and they rejected what might be considered overly simplified descriptions of the political. They valued critical perspectives, which they associated with political comedy, and would often question the ability of journalism to be factual and relevant. They enjoyed when political comedy weighed different arguments against each other; when it compared the motives of different stakeholders, and thereby contextualised political conflicts or issues in a manner that they felt they comprehended.

Enjoyment is crucial, as it creates a sustained engagement. It also provides temporary relief in relation to the emotional aspect of being engaged in political media and political issues, as audience members would complain about feelings of the abovementioned frustration, as well as feelings of irritation, hopelessness, or confusion.

Themes of emotion and affect run through this thesis and has a bearing on many of its findings. Among them is a theme that connects the question about audience construction of the genre with that of political identity, as one of the most important findings of the present study concerns what political comedy provides its audience with, that they do not find in other types of political media. The answer is connected to what the present study considers perceived emotional authenticity. While regular news and political journalism has little space for expressions of emotionality, political comedy allows audiences to *feel*

the political. To be a citizen and to engage with the political means that you care about something political, and are emotionally *as well as* rationally invested. Audience members expressed annoyance, frustration and even sadness in relation to various political issues that mattered to them, such as climate change, corruption, anti-immigration, censorship, free markets, defence issues, integrity, file sharing, inequality, racism and sexism, and this is recognised and represented implicitly and explicitly by political comedy.

Political identity and the 'uneasy' citizen

The idea that contemporary democracy, including institutions of government, political media and civic education, suffers from an affective deficit means that citizens are left to deal with the emotional aspects of citizenship on their own or in their various social contexts. Moreover, such emotional aspects are judged harshly in many contexts. Arguably, this is where the misconception of citizens' cynicism and indifference grows. The prevalence of of ironic dispositions is an indicator of the affective deficit, and is related to lacking efficacy and what the present study calls cautious reflexivity. These ideas are important to the third research question, which deals with the ways in which political comedy audience members construct political identity and citizenship in the context of Swedish politics and political issues. Some of the audience members could be characterised as feeling uneasy in relation to their abilities to create change, as citizens, and this is what political comedy speaks to. In its expression of emotion – be it joy, frustration, sadness or something else – audiences get to realise that others feel like they do. Hence, political comedy is an important space for the expression of a citizen's emotional authenticity.

The need of such perceived authenticity is developed further in the coming section, and is of great importance to the construction of political identity and citizenship. Since emotions have been excluded from the modern era models of a rational citizen, there is a need to fully include them as an area of study. In the analysis of how audience members spoke of citizenship, emotions were an obvious element of engaging with political issues, often related to a lacking political efficacy, a concept which encapsulates both rational and emotional reasoning. Audience members were highly reflexive and lacked both internal and external political efficacy. Here, such a lack has here been understood as derived from the media's misrepresentation of citizens, combined with larger modern and late modern processes of individualisation (cf. Coleman 2013a).

This study argues that the audience members' constructions exposed how they were somehow caught between the modern and late modern ideals of

citizenship mentioned before. For instance, while a portion of them rejected or criticised collective action and the 'package deal' of political parties, they still found it important to participate in elections and keep themselves informed. This follows the general movement of political participation in Sweden, where news engagement and voting is relatively high, with the latter even becoming more popular during the past decade, but party loyalty and membership seem to be diminishing.

In other words, audience members lacked in efficacy, but didn't lack directly in relation to the nodes of Dahlgren's civic circuit framework. To varying degrees, they had high regard for knowledge and learning, liked to problematise the production of knowledge, and were well educated; they discussed democracy extensively, exposing a belief in and knowledge of democratic values; and they had access to spaces of political deliberation. Not only were they engaged in conventional spaces, but their engagement in political comedy was motivated by its capacity as an additional type of hybrid space, where the mix of serious and silly discourse allow for play and emotional authenticity in relation to the political.

The other three nodes on the circuit are less clearly fulfilled among the studied audience, although this is complex: in many ways the 'problem areas' identified are related to young adulthood more generally. While being weary of being 'too naïve,' or trusting, they exposed enough trust to be engaged with political media, and the political. In this sense, they weren't disengaged or 'tuned out' due to distrust – rather, the apprehension shown came from their cautious reflexivity. In relation to practices, they would be variously inclined to take part: on an individual level, many of them participated in various practices that can be related to citizenship, but as mentioned, they were less inclined to join more collectively organised practices, at least if they required more than sporadic engagement. Finally, their political identities were challenged by others aspects of their identities, mainly, in this case, related to their future professional careers or their social environment. Of course, all of the nodes of the civic circuit interact and overlap to a certain extent in the context of person's life, but nonetheless, they are of importance to the overall analysis of audiences of political comedy as they construct themselves as political (or not).

Hence, a pertinent issue in this complex image of contemporary young adult citizenship and political identity is the reluctance to join larger collectives. In the present study it has been characterised as stage fright, because the studied audience has the resources to engage further through such collectives. If we consider the social and emotional dimensions of audience members' explanations, it is important to note that they may have overstated how much they

actually wanted to engage. Such overstating could be because of the intense political focus in Swedish media in 2013 and 2014, during the so-called super-election year, or because they thought that I as a researcher had a normative stance on political participation. Keeping this in mind, we might consider the fact that the stage fright, as it is conceptualised here, has to do with deeper insecurities linked to identity. The fear of losing face is prevalent in the data, and has been established in previous research, illustrating problems related to the affective deficit, as well as problems of civic education more broadly. Here, the media and educational institutions play important roles in lessening this fear of losing face.

One critical remark may be interjected here, even though it must be reiterated that it is difficult to determine empirically: as political comedy regularly works by parodying and criticising political and other elites, audiences may be additionally aware of the risks of losing face for those involved in political discourse. But the present study argues that engagement in most kinds of political media fosters such awareness. Political comedy engagement cannot be isolated from other forms of media engagement. In constructions made by the audience in this study, no such connections were made. Rather, it seemed that political discourse was deemed risky since as all forms of political arguments include the comparison and scrutiny of different views and utterances. While ridicule is an element of humour, so is it in many 'serious' political arguments; politicians and journalists mock each other, and use more or less respectful modes of discourse. According to this study's findings, it is the conflictual nature of political debate that deters some people. They fear the social and emotional consequences, indicating that there is a need to deepen the understanding of resilience and fear in this context, as different individuals react differently, and ascribe varying levels of harmfulness to ridicule.

In this context, a productive approach is found in cultural citizenship, as it focusses on the issue of respect amongst subject positions and communities. The final key finding treated in this concluding chapter discusses how cultural citizenship may be fostered by political comedy.

Fostering cultural citizenship and identity construction

As mentioned, the unease found among the young adult audience can be understood as a result of individualisation, which places a substantial amount of pressure on the individual. For some, it becomes difficult to prioritise a political identity which may include a sustained engagement within one specific

collective, as they want to be able to be flexible, change their minds, and develop – not just politically, but in a wider sense of social identity.

By asking the research question how political comedy fosters identity construction and cultural citizenship, there is a possibility of widening the scope and better the understanding of processes of inclusion and exclusion that are in play; and how they link to the priorities made in audiences' construction of themselves. In this part of the analysis, five themes were identified as especially important. Firstly, the theme of enjoyment and social context illustrated how some of the audience felt that they didn't share their interest in political issues or political comedy with anyone they knew personally. For them, political comedy became an expression of and space for that interest – a substitute. As political comedy addresses audiences as both emotional and rational, these individuals felt less lonely in relation to their political engagement, as it indicated that there is an implicit audience of like-minded people 'out there'. Such feelings are important to acknowledge as a part of engagement, and in this case, engagement in political comedy fills a social void. Hence, engagement is partly motivated by a need to belong, to the programmes themselves, to the comedians who perform in them, and to the implicit audience. For others, political comedy was an addition, rather than a substitute, with regard to political interest. They would discuss the programmes with friends and colleagues, and sometimes used the jokes and themes of such programmes to spark 'serious' political conversations with others.

The theme of national context exposes how varied constructions of national identity are among audiences. They identify as Swedish more or less, in relation to a more or less intense engagement with the culture and politics of, for the most part, the U.S. In this case, political comedy could definitely be constructed as helping audiences to 'broaden' their perspective, but the question is then how this influences individual's priorities in relation to other contexts, such as domestic Swedish politics. Some of them would construct themselves as lacking knowledge about the Swedish context, in relation to both political and popular culture; which means that in some cases, this broadened perspective is associated with more superficial knowledge in certain areas.

The third theme has to do with ideology and strong emotions. For those with strong ideological convictions, the inability or unwillingness to laugh at humour that offended such stances marked an important boundary. Describing certain humour as oppressive, in bad taste, based on false premises, or just not funny, some of the audience members felt a clear difference between themselves and others. Here, the concept of unlaughter illustrates opposing ideological intensities, which both promote and hinder community construction. It's

not just about a particular ideology, but about the ability to laugh at humour that goes against it. As mentioned, audience members all had some political opinions, but not all felt this strongly about them, or as strongly about the harm and severity of the symbolic violence that such humour can achieve. For instance, while several participants considered themselves to be feminist, not all of them considered the same kinds of comedy sexist; and they would consider potential others who laugh at such humour differently.

Two main dimensions are at play here: the emotional aspect of being politically engaged and having strong opinions; as well as the power a person attributes to humour as symbolic violence. Here, one might question the ability of political comedy to foster community construction, because while audiences may become strengthened in their particular ideological stances, and gain a sense of belonging towards likeminded (cf. Day 2011), they may become divided in relation to the emotional aspect of ideological engagement and subsequent laughter or unlaughter responses. As illustrated throughout the thesis, the data contains examples of both: some might be critical of those who enjoy certain forms of offensive humour, while others might be critical of those who react with unlaughter. The possibilities for these different stances to overcome such division, learn from each other's perspectives and construct communities seem to be among the most challenging, in the context of the present study. Ultimately, the provocation of the more 'relaxed' stance is constructed as flippant or even dangerous by some, just as much as the opposite seems overbearing and restrictive by others. The potential for unity in the issue of discursive power seems low, which is important to state if one is interested in the ways that political comedy fosters cultural citizenship. On the other hand, as stated above, the conflicts that appear in the wake of humour scandals make this explicit: the opposing communities become aware of each other's stances, and can potentially learn from the debates that follow.

The fourth theme focusses on knowledge and education. A paramount issue in both kinds of citizenship discussed in this thesis (Dahlgren 2009; Hermes 2005), this area is important yet problematic from the cultural perspective. Audience members would speak widely of learning – especially about opposing interests and stake-holding in political contexts, which is specifically mentioned by authors such Stevenson (cf. 2012) – but they would also speak about the potential problems of political comedy misleading uneducated audiences. In other words, they can be characterised as producing inclusion and exclusion with respect to knowledge: some would emphasise the fact that political comedy provides relevant and interesting knowledge, while others considered political comedy to be a form of media that requires knowledge, often constructed

in the form of higher education (and some would do both). Here, the critique of the knowledge class that scholars like Hermes and Hartley raise is important. As mentioned, audience members would sometimes question mediated elite political expertise, which means that they showed an awareness of the constructed nature of knowledge. At the same time, the construction of knowledge as something quite static that a person either has or doesn't have, was recurring. To problematise the knowledge class further, there were audience members who had gained such higher education quite recently, or were in the process of gaining it, which may make them specifically focussed on it. Some were the first member of their family to be educated on this level, perhaps impacting the production of exclusion or inclusion. It should be mentioned that Swedish higher education is tuition-free, which means that the structural factors that impact a person's choice of education has more to do with social background factors than actual financial situation, even if such situations can impact the cultural or social value ascribed to education. Among such individuals, higher education was valued highly, but they would also construct political comedy as something that helped them make up for their perceived lack of political knowledge: political comedy aided them in keeping up with certain political debates, or understand complex issues, through its playful mode of discourse. It made it possible to approach political debates and issues in a way that news and current affairs programming didn't. Even those who didn't follow news regularly, or who explicitly rejected having any form of political identity, enjoyed this aspect of political comedy.

Even if there are detectable constructions of exclusion at play here, specifically in relation to audiences' lack of awareness of themselves as part of a knowledge class, the present study argues that the inclusiveness of political comedy, with respect to learning about the perspective of others, and at least potentially respecting such perspectives, is one of the areas where political comedy can be considered as fostering cultural citizenship. The levelling function of political comedy not only works on an emotional level, as a protector of pride, but as a discursive leveller, democratising political knowledge, and highlighting various communities.

The final theme of classification found in audience constructions is irony and indirection. In a way, this theme overlaps with the themes of knowledge and of ideology and strong emotions, as it constructs a community of those who understand the ironic message, i.e. can see beyond the indirection, and those who don't. Such understanding was seen as related to intelligence and knowledge, not only in the sense of being educated, but also in a wider, less defined sense. For some of the participants, irony was constructed as both a

way of seeing the world, as in the ironic disposition mentioned throughout this thesis, and as a mode of discourse; these were then associated with various character traits, such as sophistication and having a 'good sense of humour'. Since such traits are connected to personality, they are often considered to be static, which is excluding. As, among others, Day (2011) has shown, the ironic mode of discourse bonds people together firmly, and this was definitely the case in this study as well. From the point of view of such individuals, irony can be liberating and educational, and creating feelings of belonging. Additionally, it created a feeling of being clever, which aids personal confidence; being able to understand the 'secret code' of irony and humour is associated with being intelligent and well-educated. In this way, it is excluding: at least theoretically, some aren't invited into the discursive community. However, the question remains how often people actually experience it this way. In a fragmented media environment where audiences engage with what they like, rather than what happens to 'be on,' the risk of encountering humour that makes them feel excluded diminishes. If someone feels left out by the irony expressed, they probably stop engaging. In the study, no one complained about feeling excluded in this sense – the unlaughter responses mentioned above weren't caused by misunderstanding. But exclusion may be harmful, from the perspective of cultural citizenship as conceived by Hermes and others like her, where it is important to have respect for 'what others like' (2005:159). Even if there aren't any actual individuals who do not understand or appreciate a certain joke, the enjoyment among the irony-appreciating audience partly derives from the idea that such individuals exist. Hence, the exclusion is based upon *presumed* subject positions of others, rather than actual ones.

Part of a comedian's craft is to create a sense of inclusion, while comedy and irony's modes of discourse are inherently indirect, and the reason people engage. Specifically, the present study has shown how comedy and irony invite a double mode of engagement that is less prevalent in other political media forms. It is not considered taxing by the audience, but it arguably does demand a certain level of focus. The element of uncertainty and ambiguity, as well as the commonly used self-deprecative mode it allows for, speaks to the audiences' rejection of fundamentalist certainty, found in other types of political media. To understand further audience division related to irony, more research should be carried out. The fact that some might appreciate indirection and reject certainty more than others is not a problem, though, any more than that some might appreciate different forms of art or literature differently. The appreciation of irony is paramount to the political comedy audience; it somehow represents them, in their view of knowledge production as well as their way of

speaking in the context of their everyday. They feel intelligent and active, and as they engage they continually work to understand what is to be taken serious and not; what is being referenced; what is being said 'between the lines,' and so on, which should be considered highly valuable, especially as it is happening within the context of the political.

The conceptualisation of irony as a 'democratic distaste for fundamentalist certainly' (Coleman 2013b:383) becomes confused with a distaste for democratic values or unwavering morals. While some might not enjoy the ironic mode of discourse, the present study argues that it can be a productive and more authentic way to approach complex or difficult issues of various kinds. This is what makes it significant to engagement. Late modern young adults are engaged with political comedy programmes because they challenge taken-for-granted beliefs, political performance and journalistic convention in an entertaining and challenging manner. This engagement is in some ways the same type of engagement that audiences of Swift and Orwell have, to name some canonised satirists in literature, but is part of a routine engagement. The self-deprecation of political comedy that audiences so thoroughly enjoy is an important aspect of this, as it signals a rejection of authoritative 'top-down' information dissemination, as well as creates a potential for respect among individuals – because no one, not even the comedians they admire, are perfect.

The values of political comedy engagement

This section will develop the key findings in relation to a wider discussion on citizenship and media. Common to various scholars used in this thesis is the criticism or rejection of the idealised modern era citizen. While the division between 'silly' entertainment and 'serious' political information has been problematised, the present thesis shows how this division serves certain purposes in relation to media engagement. The creative freedom that the comedic label provides is vital for the form as such, and plays a significant role for audiences as they engage. However, negative value judgements made by scholars and journalists concerning political comedy and political entertainment are problematic. To counter this, the next section deals with the values that political comedy engagement defends, both in relation to the subjective construction of citizenship and in the wider context of media and cultural citizenship.

Mainly, these values are related to the normative and empirical developments of citizenship. These developments have been discussed throughout the thesis, and relate to issues like emotion and affect, individualisation and the self-informing citizen, as well as a more general holistic perspective on what

should or could be included in the political. By studying political comedy audience engagement, the broader cultural and political values of political comedy can be better understood. Such values can be seen as the rights and responsibilities implicit in political comedy engagement, which differs from, as well as overlaps, the values discussed by Dahlgren (2009) in relation to political engagement. In Hermes' conceptualisation of cultural citizenship and popular culture, such rights include but are not limited to the right to 'belong to a community, to offer one's views, to express preferences' as well as the responsibilities to respect 'other people's tastes,' and being aware of how they are 'different from one's own' (2005:10).

Political comedy engagement entails a number of such values, which can be detected throughout the thesis. Related to the political comedy's formal qualities and the information/entertainment dichotomy, the right to engage with political issues and politics in a wide variety of ways is important. For political comedy audiences, the kind of engagement invited by political journalism or traditional news formats is limited. It may be constructed as boring, complex or depressing, or just not 'enough'. Hence, other alternatives that range from 'serious' to 'silly' programming, in factual and fictional genres, including various modes of address, through which citizens can and want to engage with the political, are valuable too.

More specifically, political comedy engagement defends the right to engage with political issues in playful, non-goal-oriented modes. Such modes allow for learning, deliberation and symbolic levelling, which are important to members of any community, and, this study argues, especially those who are younger, less experienced, or come from less educated backgrounds. If people are to understand issues, be they political, social or cultural, they need to be able to learn about and experiment with such issues in various ways, so that different motives, interests, learning styles and ways of reasoning have a fair chance of being represented.

The corresponding responsibility that political comedy engagement entails has to do with the awareness of these various forms. Audiences as well as producers need to take responsibility for the fact that political comedy is different from political journalism. While it is, again, just as valuable, such values are squandered if political comedy is engaged with as if it were considered as the same as 'straight' or factual programming. This means that audiences need to try their best to be critical, which they according to the data of the present study absolutely have the ability to be, and that the producers of political comedy should work to invite such critical engagement. Political comedy programmes must avoid becoming overly flippant towards critical discourse –

which is hard to determine a priori, but should be continually and openly discussed and negotiated – and should respect and engage with its audiences' critical engagement.

The values of political comedy described above can also be expressed as comprising the values of social, cultural and political critique as such, as well as a rejection of fundamentalist certainty: here we find the raison d'être of political comedy, this thesis argues. Further, keeping a keen eye on whether or not political comedy aids such a rejection of certainty is a way of determining the difference between political comedy that fosters cultural citizenship from that which doesn't, such as racist, homophobic or sexist humour.

Related to this, the second value is the right to 'feel' the political: to engage with and express emotions in all kinds of discourses, including political ones. By putting various kinds of emotions at the forefront, political comedy creates a space for the affective. In the context of political media, most kinds of emotional expression have been ignored or even despised, which is problematic in a number of ways. Beyond the fact that it rather unhelpfully excludes analysis of why or how emotionality is connected to the political, it excludes those who tend to be perceived as emotional, such as women, the uneducated or young adults. In other words, as political journalism has represented idealised political agents – often in the forms of journalists, experts and scholars – as rational and cool, as 'level-headed,' these characteristics have been embodied by middle-aged white men. Those have been considered the trustworthy voices in political debates, which excludes a majority of the various voices that actually exist. While the issue of representing different kinds of voices has become a topic for current debates on journalism, and considerable efforts have been made in the Swedish public service companies by hiring people of different backgrounds and the practice of 'counting heads,' in media content, the role of emotion in political discourse can still be developed. These problems have been characterised in many ways, in this thesis mainly as two-fold: as being constructed without basis in empirical research, as there is no actual separation of emotional and rational reasoning; and as resulting in an affective deficit. Political comedy engagement counters this overemphasis on the rational, and uses various modes of expression to represent the citizen as emotional: comedians laugh and scream, pretend to cry or go insane, which audiences identify with: 'And you know someone feels the same as you do,' as 30-year-old Stefan said. Political comedy explicitly acknowledges these feelings, which can be conceived of as a value. People have a right to feel, express and engage with any number of emotions in political discourses, and the understanding of what it means to be 'rational' must be continually challenged.

Here, the previously mentioned responsibility of applying a critical and reflexive perspective on oneself, in relation to such emotions, should be applied. Further, the responsibility of respecting the feelings of others corresponds to this right, and this is certainly a feature of political comedy, although it has its problems. As mentioned, mutual respect between those who react with unlaughter due to strong feelings, and those who react with laughter, is often lacking. While political comedy as a form allows for the representation of both kinds of responses, its invitation to laughter overrides the invitation to empathise with those who do not laugh. Here, comedians and producers of political comedy need to maintain some level of respect in relation to those who might react with unlaughter. In terms of showing respect for those who do not react in the same way as we do personally, political comedy is not ideal. It can be more or less transparent, as in the controversy sparked by comedian Unge's joke about diabetics, where the producer wrote a message on Facebook in response to the negative reactions; but that mostly happens in cases where the reactions are massive and organised.

As Hermes writes about popular culture in general, one of its values is that it 'makes the presence known of those who are not in positions of direct political or economic power' (2005:11). This rings true for political comedy. By fostering values associated with engaging with political issues in a variety of ways, including the playful and the emotional, audiences who somehow identify with such modes feel like they belong. But if the comedy doesn't invite critical thinking in line with this, it loses these values. If the laughter isn't ever accompanied by critical thinking of some kind, or if its criticism is superficial or continually stereotyping in relation to specific groups, this thesis argues that it loses legitimacy from a cultural citizenship perspective.

Contextualising political comedy engagement values

To further contextualise the findings, we should broaden the perspective for a moment. During the period of data collection, political media in Sweden reported extensively on the 'super election year' that included several national elections (the European Parliament elections in May of 2014 and the local, regional and national elections in September of 2014). News media and popular media, as well as political parties and organisations, worked extensively to engage voters. Issues relating to feminism, racism, identity politics and equality more generally, were high on the agenda as the left-wing party Feminist Initiative had a real chance of gaining their first-ever seats in the abovementioned

elections[70]; while at the same time, the conservative, immigration-critical Sweden Democrats was projected to grow even bigger, than they already had in previous elections[71]. The extensive coverage of these two small, and relatively new, ideologically opposite parties, made for polarised debates and an extensive focus on identity and difference. The more established parties stood to lose voters in both directions, prompting them too, to focus on such issues. For some of the studied audience, these were the exact issues that interested them, and from this perspective, the conditions for their political engagement were good. For instance, those engaged in anti-racism or feminism felt that their issues were actually considered as legitimate politics. However, this seemed double-edged somehow, because the polarisation and in some cases aggressive style of debate seemed to feed into the sense of lacking efficacy mentioned earlier in this thesis. As shown, they felt badly about choosing a party, constructing them as package deals that didn't really fit their personal stances.

In this situation, political comedy and political journalism can work symbiotically as they focus on the same kinds of stories, issues and debates. Political comedy certainly needs input from political journalism to play off, as it provides the political stories that are used in political comedy, as well as input for the media critique that characterises much of political comedy. Swedish public service companies have been conscious of this throughout their existence, and in some cases, satirical programming has been considered paramount to the generic repertoire of public service programming (cf. Bolin 2013; Bruun 2007). While the radio channels P1 and P3 have relatively stable formats in *Public Service* and *Tankesmedjan*, Swedish television has had varying success during the past decade in finding political comedy formats that attract audiences over time, especially younger audiences. During the past decade, a few different formats have been tried out[72], although mainly in the context of the broadcasters' streaming sites, which reach smaller audiences. Beyond the inability of public service companies to attract and keep talent for any longer period of time, so that formats can be developed and refined, critics tend to focus on another aspect of the problem, which is the fact that public service has to adhere to rules of impartiality. For example, critic Johan Croneman asks the following rhetorical question in his overview of Swedish television satire during

[70] It succeeded in winning seats in the European Parliament, and in various local and regional bodies, although didn't make it into the Swedish parliament.
[71] Which they did.
[72] Such as *Anders tar parti* ('Anders takes sides,' SVT 2014) wherein comedian Anders Jansson interviewed local politicians from the eight biggest parties in Sweden, and *Elfte Timmen* ('The Eleventh Hour,' SVT 2010).

the election year: 'Impartial humour? Does that even exist?' (2014). According to Croneman and other television critics, contemporary Swedish political comedy on television is unsophisticated and shallow, as it focusses more on funny impersonations than on satirical analysis (cf. Fjellborg 2014).

Perhaps the problem is even more fundamental: the uncertain future of public service media in Sweden creates a situation where the respective companies not only have problems retaining talent, but are fearful of creating controversy. If a programme causes outrage, which is a risk inherent in political comedy, that might be used as ammunition in political debates on the future of public service. While satire previously had a given place, as it 'satisfied the public service broadcaster's need for popular entertainment with a political legitimacy in the eyes of cultural elite' (Bruun 2007:191), the discussion has now become fraught with arguments concerning the monopolistic position of public service in general. As Bolin writes in a recent collection of research included in a current government inquiry for future media policy, citizenship values associated with information, knowledge and entertainment need to be placed at the centre, without being challenged by commercial arguments (Bolin 2016:127f). In other words, public service media needs to be guaranteed an at least somewhat safer future, as well as question its responses to political threats, to be able to provide Swedish citizens with political comedy programming where engagement is sustained and citizen values are prioritised. It needs to navigate carefully the rules and standards associated with the public service ethos of impartiality, as well as the values identified in the present study: the right to engage with the political through various modes, including the critical and reflexive, the non-goal-oriented and uncertain, and the emotional.

Finally, the values of political comedy may be applied in a wider sense. As part of the critique of the modern era political journalism, this thesis proposes that various forms of political media and journalism may take inspiration from these findings. As argued, there is a need for a broader understanding of what might be included in various modes of discourse and engagement in relation to the political. For political journalism, this means a need to develop its spaces of critique, where reflexive modes of communication that question fundamentalist certainty can thrive, specifically with regard to the assumptions of what is considered to be rational or emotional. For sure, there are examples of such journalism, but this thesis argues that there is room for more. Within this, there should be an awareness of the media critique of political comedy. By critically analysing such critique, political journalism might be able to develop its standards and practices. Journalists and other media professionals do have an interest in political comedy, and while we must be aware of the boundaries

between the forms, there is room for inspiration across them. In terms of public impact, political comedy may then not only encourage young adults to challenge their stage fright and feel a bit more encouraged and comfortable expressing themselves in public, it may also work to expand general notions of what might be considered legitimate kinds of political discourse and culture.

Reflections and future trajectories

This section will outline some of the potential limitations of the present study, and outline possible future trajectories for research on audience engagement and political comedy and cultural citizenship.

As mentioned in previous parts of this thesis, the study of audience engagement with a specific genre has its problems. The dilemma of defining a genre a priori, while still allowing for audiences to define the genre, is present here: if the selection of programmes had been different, the findings may have been impacted. As political comedy is situated somewhere on a spectrum of hybrid political entertainment and infotainment forms, there are different ways to construct its generic boundaries. The focus on genre work helps mitigate this problem somewhat, as the study's participants' definitions of political comedy could be highlighted, and as stated. Future research would benefit from testing different definitions and using other kinds of examples of political comedy, when studying its textual qualities as well the ways audiences engage with them. At the moment, there seems to be a slightly exaggerated focus on news satire specifically, which doesn't include the various forms that political comedy covers. As political comedy is inherently hybrid, there seems to be developments in several directions, which can be related to developments in citizenship itself; both with regard to what is considered to be political, and with regard to its mix of the serious and the silly. The previously mentioned programme *Last Week Tonight* (HBO, 2015-) is one example where methods of investigative journalism are used to produce 'serious' criticism, most often aimed at political and economic power, and the humorous mode of discourse is used mostly as a method of delivering such criticism. Another example is found in the graphic novels of Liv Strömquist, in which academic research is communicated through a humorous mode of discourse. Future research on the genre needs to gain a better understanding of these various developments as the spectrum of different types of hybrids 'thickens': from the mostly serious that borders on journalism with a joke here and there, to the silly that borders on comedy, with a critical point here and there.

Also, if the focus had been made broader, by for instance including political comedy in literature or on stage; or by including political comedy programmes that are directed at an older audience, the findings could have been different. There are of course methodological and theoretical reasons for the chosen focus of this particular study, but it is important to state that political comedy engagement in a broader perspective involves more than broadcasting, more than Swedish or American programmes, and more than young adults. The analytical generalisation achieved in the present study should be understood as primarily applicable to Swedish young adults, and broadcasting. With this focus on broadcasting, alternative spaces for political comedy have been excluded. For instance, there is a growing body of research which documents and analyses the online spaces wherein 'sick' humour thrives (cf. Malmqvist 2015), and audiences of these forms should be investigated in future research as well. Can such forms be considered reflexive or critical, or do they shut down meanings in problematic ways?

Further, other methods might have rendered alternative findings. Such methods could include media diaries or other ethnographic approaches, which could add to a wider understanding concerning audience engagement with political comedy forms. For instance, including ethnographic work on political comedy in the form of stand-up comedy could have focussed the study towards the actual moment of engagement, where the element of liveness and the physical presence of an audience would have been interesting aspects. Similarly, exposing the study's participants to clips of political comedy programming during interviews and focus group sessions might have rendered thought-provoking insights with regard to engagement. As cognitive research on laughter has shown, for example, we are less likely to laugh if we are alone (cf. Scott et al. 2014). Laughter is both rhetorical and social, and fills a wide variety of functions, which need further focus from researchers in many different fields.

Engagement is broad: it includes both what happens 'in the moment' of engagement, as well as how such engagement is sustained and constructed over time. As it stands, the present study is focussed on the latter, which means that it prioritises audiences' lasting constructions. This is in line with Livingstone's proposed approach to research on audiences, wherein focus 'shifts towards the contextualisation of that moment [of textual interpretation]' (1998:3). The point of this has been to avoid drawing conclusions based on isolated moments of audience engagement, but should still be considered somewhat limiting, as engagement includes both short-term and long-term constructions. Moreover, the combination and comparison of such construction would provide a furthering of the holistic understanding of engagement.

As the research on audience engagement in political comedy seems to be growing, various cultural and geographical contexts become included. Such a broader perspective would have benefitted the present study as well. While Sweden is as interesting as any context, specifically in relation to the shifting kinds of political engagement found among its young adult citizens, comparisons of different contexts, in relation to, for instance, differences in voting, party membership and activism, as well as news consumption or civic education, would benefit further work on political comedy engagement.

A final area linked to political comedy engagement which would benefit from further research is that of producers. How do comedians and political comedy producers work to create engagement? Adding to the work of scholars like Hanne Bruun and Sharon Lockyer, the study of practices and environments of political comedy production would contribute to the understanding of how comedians, producers and journalists work together, 'behind the scenes,' which is important in the quest to challenge the information/entertainment dichotomy. Further, as political comedy grows in popularity, and the number of programmes multiplies, there is a need to focus further on the generic developments of the genre.

This thesis has argued for a broader, more contextualised understanding of political comedy and its role as an 'emerging' space of political communication (Coleman 2013b:383). Studying engagement in political comedy helps us understand how this form might encourage political and cultural citizenship. Political media and its audiences would benefit from a further understanding of citizenship as cultural as well as political: the focus on how identities and communities are constructed, and how we might be able to respect each other's subject positions, are important in contemporary societal discourse, where a politics of difference seems to polarise many debates. The constant focus on the rational, well-informed civic subject has created a lack of understanding across various kinds of communities, contributing to an uneven and undemocratic political climate. The fact that individuals feel as if they do not belong, due to age, education, gender, emotion, experience, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, function or religion, delegitimises democracy as such. In the worst-case scenario, elites and citizens alike might confuse the 'democratic distaste for fundamentalist certainty' (Coleman 2013b:383) with a more general distaste for democracy. Here, the values associated with cultural citizenship overlap with those of political comedy engagement, and propose a productive way forward, wherein democratic discourse and knowledge concerning all parts of life can be included, in various modes and across various kinds of communities.

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Appendices

A: Interview guides: individual in English translation and Swedish original; focus groups in English translation and Swedish originals

- INTRODUCTION

Thank participant, introduce myself, project and interview process; ask about general media habits (fill out questionnaire); specific preferences in political comedy; how and where it is consumed; Internet habits especially (forums, sharing clips etc.).

- POLITICAL COMEDY

What's fun about it? Examples of what you like and don't like; what characteristics more generally that you like or don't like; feelings (anger, happiness, hopelessness, cynicism); how it feels to engage.

- CONTEXT/KNOWLEDGE

Cultural context: Swedish versus foreign political comedy? Does it matter? What happens when you don't know political/social/cultural context? Do you feel like you understand everything?

- GENRE

Believability/credibility; comparison to other news and other comedy; truth important? Do you learn and if so, what?

- THE IMAGE OF POLITICS

What image of politics do you find in political comedy; Inclusive or exclusive; Democracy more generally; The image of politicians; possibility to create change; the general effect on people's attitudes or cynicism? The creation of new ideas.

- POLITICAL IDENTITY

How do you feel about politics; voting; engagement in other ways; online/offline; having a political identity; people's responsibilities or duties in general?

- INTRODUCERA

Tacka deltagande, presentera mig själv, projektet och intervjuns gång. Fråga om generella medievanor (fyll i formulär), speciella preferenser inom politisk komedi, hur och var den konsumeras. Internetvanor i samband med detta (forum, dela klipp etc.).

- POLITISK KOMEDI

Vad är roligt med det? Exempel på vad man gillar och inte, vilka karaktäristika som man generellt gillar och inte, känslolägen (ilska, glädje, hopplöshet, cynisms), modes of engagement.

- KONTEXT/KUNSKAP

Kulturell kontext – svenska grejer jämfört med utländska? Spelar roll? Vad händer om man inte känner till politisk/social/kulturell kontext? Fattar man allt?

- SOM GENRE

Trovärdighet, jämförelse med nyheter eller annan komedi. Viktigt med sanning? Lär du dig saker och i så fall vad?

- BILDEN AV POLTIK

Vilken bild av politiken tycker du politisk komedi visar? Inkluderande/exkluderande? Demokrati som system? Politikers image? Möjligheter att ändra saker? Genrens effekter på folks attityd/cynism? Genererandet av idéer?

- POLITISK IDENTITET

Hur känner du inför politiken? Rösta? Engagera sig på andra sätt? Online/offline? Att ha en politisk identitet? Människors skyldigheter eller ansvar i allmänhet.

- WELCOME

Introduce myself, project and focus group sessions: underscore its discussion characteristic, try to speak one at a time. Participants' introduction round: name, political comedy you like. Questionnaire at the end and contact details for follow-up.

- GENRE CHARACTERISTICS

How does political comedy compare to other kinds of comedy, and to other kinds of political media? Probe: how do they define political comedy, credibility, truth, entertainment value, news value, opinions on other genres close to political comedy and possible differences in the focus group about what could be counted as political comedy or not.

- POLITICAL COMEDY

What do you like/dislike about political comedy? Probe: different forms, styles, what's funny and not, what crosses the line, feelings associated with the genre. What personalities and comedians do you like – be attentive to differences within the group.

- CONTEXT

What are the differences between Swedish political comedians and foreign ones? Probe: understanding politics in other countries, gaps in knowledge and learning, entertainment value, political comedy as a source of foreign news.

- POLITICIAL IDENTITY

How would you describe your level of political engagement? Probe: voting, participation in clubs, associations, parties, activist groups; online/offline, political identity and engagement as concepts, citizen duties generally.

- THE IMAGE OF POLITICS

What image of politics do you think political comedy gives you? Probe: what ideas are communicated; what do you learn; democracy as such; the image of politicians; the possibilities for changing things; the genre's effect on societal involvement; cynicism.

- SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS FROM GROUP

Anything you want to add or that you think we missed?

- VÄLKOMNA

Presentera mig själv, projektet och fokusgruppsamtalets form snabbt, understryk vikten av varierade svar och perspektiv, försök att tala en i taget. Presentationsrunda; namn och politisk komedi som man gillar. Frågeformulär delas ut i slutet och kontaktuppgifter klargörs för uppföljning.

- GENREKARKATÄRISTIKA

Hur kan man jämföra politisk komedi med annan komedi, och annan politisk media? Fördjupa: få dem att definiera vad DE ser som politisk komedi, trovärdighet, sanning, underhållningsvärde, nyhetssvärdering, åsikter om andra näraliggande genrer och eventuella skiftande åsikter kring vad som är, och vad som inte är, politisk komedi.

- POLITISK KOMEDI

Vad gillar ni/ inte med politisk komedi? Fördjupa: olika former, stilar, vad som är kul och inte, vad som går över gränsen, känslor associerade med genren. Vilka personligheter och komiker gillar man och uppmärksamma eventuella åsiktsskiljaktigheter.

- KONTEXTER

Vilka skillnader finns det på svenska politiska komiker och icke-svenska? Fördjupa: förstå andra länders politik, kunskapsluckor och -inhämtning, underhållningsvärde, politisk komedi som nyhetskälla för omvärlden.

- POLITISK IDENTITET

Hur skulle ni beskriva nivån på ert politiska engagemang? Fördjupa: att rösta, engagemang i föreningar/klubbar/partier/aktivism, on/offline, ”politisk identitet” och ”engagemang” som begrepp, medborgerliga skyldigheter i allmänhet.

- BILDEN AV POLITIKEN

Vilken bild av politiken tycker ni att politisk komedi förmedlar? Fördjupa: idéer som förmedlas, saker man lär sig, demokrati som system, synen på politikerna, möjligheter att förändra saker, genrens effekt på samhällsengagemanget, cynism.

- SAMMANFATTNING OCH FRÅGOR

Något ni vill lägga till?

B: Comparison of political comedy programmes used for recruitment

Programme	*The Daily Show*	*Tankesmedjan*
Country of origin	USA	Sweden
Language	English	Swedish
Media type	Televison (cable/streamed); audiovisual	Radio (broadcast/streamed/podcast); audio
Funding	Commercial (advertisements)	Public Service (obligatory fees)
Country of broadcast	USA/Sweden/international	Sweden
Content type	News satire/parody	News satire/parody
Frequency of broadcast	4 days/week	4 days/week
Social media/web page activity	Streaming on webpage; extensive clip collection/archives (some geoblocking in Sweden); updates on social media feeds several times per day	Streaming and podcasts on webpage; complete clip archives available; updates on social media feeds several times per day
Target audience	Young/young adult	Young/young adult

C: Participants (in-depth interviews)

Name	Pro-gramme	Recruitment method	Bio	Location/date of interview
ALEXANDER	*Tanke-smedjan The Daily Show*	Facebook (piloting phase)	27-year-old male; one parent Swedish, one from another country; grew up in Sweden; living in medium size city in southern Sweden; freelanc-ing journalist w higher education.	Café 2012-08-27
REMY	*Tanke-smedjan The Daily Show*	Facebook	29-year-old male; one parent Swedish, one from other country; grew up in Sweden; studying journalism.	Café 2013-12-07
CILLA	*Tanke-smedjan The Daily Show*	University website banner	27-year-old female; parents from other country; grew up in other country as well as Sweden; living in medium size city in southern Sweden; higher education (shorter time); not employed.	Café 2013-05-28
BENJAMIN	*The Daily Show*	Facebook (piloting phase)	31-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in big city in middle of Sweden; student/shop assistant.	Café 2012-09-05
LINUS	*The Daily Show*	University website banner	26-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in large city in middle of Sweden; studying political science; working at think tank.	University meeting room 2013-11-28
MORGAN	*The Daily Show*	Facebook	29-year-old male; one parent Swedish, one from other country; grew up in Sweden and other country; higher education in film; working as administrator/receptionist.	University meeting room 2013-12-02
DENNIS	*The Daily Show*	Facebook	29-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden but has lived outside of Sweden; living in big city in middle of Sweden; not employed w higher education.	Café 2013-07-02
NIKLAS	*The Daily Show*	Facebook	35-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in big city in middle of Sweden; nurse; higher education in nursing school	Café 2013-12-17
FREJA	*The Daily Show*	Facebook	22-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in small town and rural area, in southern Sweden; working as shop assistant and studying social work.	Interviewee's home 2013-09-19
OLIVER	*The Daily Show*	University website banner	27-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in big city in southern Sweden; studying (media and communication studies); working at café.	University meeting room 2014-03-11
KAROLINA	*Tanke-smedjan*	Tankesmed-jan website banner	22-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in medium sized city in southern Sweden; studying (political science); mentor to younger students.	University meeting room, 2013-11-27

EVA	*Tanke-smedjan*	Facebook	30-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden but has lived outside Sweden; living in a big city in middle of Sweden; working as teacher in higher education (human rights studies).	Café 2013-09-16
JENNY	*Tanke-smedjan*	Tankesmed-jan website banner	25-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden, living in large city in southern Sweden; writing book/freelancer, higher education in journalism.	University meeting room 2013-11-05
GABRIEL	*Tanke-smedjan*	Tankesmed-jan website banner	24-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in medium sized city in southern Sweden; working as webmaster with a few courses of higher education in media.	Café 2013-09-20
HARALD	*Tanke-smedjan*	Tankesmed-jan website banner	18-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living at home in small village in southern Sweden; studying in upper secondary school (social sciences profiled), part-time work	Café 2013-09-23
IVAR	*Tanke-smedjan*	Tankesmed-jan website banner	23-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in medium sized city in southern Sweden; studying (to be engineer).	Interviewee's home 2013-09-26
VERONIKA	*Tanke-smedjan*	Facebook	30-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in a big city in middle of Sweden; works as project coordinator at a national agency; higher education within media and communication studies.	Café 2013-12-07
PAUL	*Tanke-smedjan*	University website banner	22-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in medium sized city in southern Sweden; studying (chemistry).	University meeting room 2014-03-28

Setting and participants (focus groups)

Focus group 1 was held in a meeting room at one of the participants' work-place (local council offices in mid-sized town in northern Sweden) on December 16th 2013. Most of the participants had never met although a few knew each other a little as colleagues, and Stefanie and Simon are a couple. This group was recruited through one of the interviewees (Veronika), who provided contacts for a few and then asked them to ask their friends. The discussion was about one and a half hour long.

Name	*Bio*
SALLY	33-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in small town in northern Sweden; works as a taxi driver; studies sociology.
STEFAN	30-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in northern Sweden; works as an environmental administrator/officer; higher education in natural sciences.
SANDY	23-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in northern Sweden; studies media and communication studies.
STEFANIE	31-year-old female; parents from other country; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in northern Sweden; works in a hotel restaurant; higher education within graphic design.
SIMON	29-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in northern Sweden; works as a city planner; higher studies within city planning.
STELLA	34-year-old; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in northern Sweden; works as a city planning architect; higher studies within architecture.
SUSANNA	28-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in northern Sweden; works as a landscaping architect; higher studies within architecture.

Focus group 2 was held in a meeting room at a university on April 24th 2014. None of the participants had spoken at length with each other before but a few had met briefly. This group was recruited through a sign-up sheet provided at a live broadcast of *Tankesmedjan*. The discussion was a little more than an hour long.

Name	*Bio*
TAMARA	20-year-old female; one parent Swedish, one from other country; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in southern Sweden; studies law.
TESS	22-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in medium sized town in southern Sweden; works in a café and studies media and communication studies.
TINA	23-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in medium sized town in southern Sweden; studies history of ideas and sciences.
TIM	28-year-old male; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in city in southern Sweden; doctoral student and teacher in Arabic.
THELMA	20-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in medium sized town in southern Sweden; studies media and communication studies.
THERESE	21-year-old female; parents Swedish; grew up in Sweden; living in a medium sized town in southern Sweden; works in grocery shop and studies media and communication studies.

D: Questionnaires and participants' media habits (summarised, not transcribed directly)

OBS! Du är anonym! Dessa uppgifter ses endast av mig och behövs endast för att ingen av intervjupersonerna ska blandas ihop! Om du inte vill eller kan svara på en specifik fråga, hoppa bara vidare!

Namn	
Ålder	
Bostadsort	
Sysselsättning	□ Studerar □ Arbetar och studerar □ Arbetar *VAD STUDERAR OCH/ELLER ARBETAR DU MED?*
Utbildning (kryssa)	□ Grundskola □ Gymnasium □ Högskola/universitet □ Annan eftergymnasial utbildning
Ursprung (kryssa)	□ Helt uppvuxen i Sverige □ Delvis uppvuxen i Sverige, delvis i annat land □ Helt uppvuxen i annat land än Sverige

Föräldrars/ vårdnadshavares ursprung (kryssa)	□ Båda uppvuxna i Sverige □ En uppvuxen i Sverige, en i annat land än Sverige □ Båda uppvuxna i annat land än Sverige
Medievanor: **RADIO** Beskriv ungefär!	*HUR OFTA?* *VILKA KANALER?*
Medievanor: **TV** Beskriv ungefär!	*HUR OFTA?* *VILKA KANALER?* *ANVÄNDER DU PLAYTJÄNSTER PÅ NÄTET?*
Medievanor: **DAGS/KVÄLLS-TIDNINGAR** Beskriv ungefär!	*HUR OFTA?* *VILKA TIDNINGAR?* *PAPPERSVERSION ELLER ONLINE?*
Medievanor: **ANDRA MEDIER (T. EX. BLOGGAR, YOUTUBE, VECKOTID-NINGAR, PODCASTS ETC.)** Beskriv ungefär!	*VAD?* *HUR OFTA?*

Participant	*Radio*	*Television*	*Press*	*Other/Online*
SALLY **Focus group 1** **Female, 33 yrs**	Daily P3, NRJ	Daily Kanal 5, TV3 (streaming)	Rarely Aftonbladet (paper)	Daily Blogs, YouTube, CNN, Huffington post in Face-book feed
STEFAN **Focus group 1** **Male, 30 yrs**	3-4 times/week P3, Rockklassiker	Daily SVT 1, 2 (streamed) TV3, TV4, Discovery, National Geographic	Almost daily ST, Dagbladet (paper)	Daily YouTube, Twit-ter/blogs/online forums
SANDY **Focus group 1** **Female, 23 yrs**	Daily P3, MixMegapol	Daily Downloaded series; SVT1, 2, TV3, TV4, Kanal5, TV6, Sjuan, Kanal 8, Kanal 9	Daily ST, Dagens media, Resume, Aftonbladet, DN (online)	Almost daily Blogs (Lady Dahlmer, Underbara Clara, Politism, Hanna Pee, what's linked on Facebook)
STEFANIE **Focus group 1** **Female, 31 yrs**	Daily P3, P1 (pod), podcast "Värvet"	Daily SVT, downloads (on computer)	1-2 times/week ST, DN, GP (mostly online)	Few times/week YouTube, podcasts
SIMON **Focus group 1** **Male, 29yrs**	Few times/week P1, P3	Daily SVTPlay	Daily for national press/few times/week for local DN, SvD, Sydsvenskan, ST, Dagbladet (mostly online)	Daily YouTube, podcasts, blogs
STELLA **Focus group 1** **Female,** **34 yrs**	Once/week P1	Twice/week SVT, TV4 (streaming)	Daily SvD, DN, ST, Huffing-ton post (online)	Daily Blogs, podcasts, Face-book, YouTube
SUSANNA **Focus group 1** **Female, 23 yrs**	Almost daily P3, MixMegapol, Rock-klassiker	Daily SVT1, 2, TV3, TV4, Kanal5 (sometimes streaming)	Daily Dagbladet (paper), Aftonbladet, ST (online)	Few times/week Blogs, YouTube
TAMARA **Focus group 2** **Female, 20 yrs**	Few times/week P1, P3	Few times/week SVT, Netflix	Daily DN, ETC, NSD, Kuriren (online)	Daily Blogs, YouTube, pod-casts, streaming sites
TESS **Focus group 2** **Female, 22 yrs**	Daily P3, Radio AF	Once/week SVT1, 2, TV4 (often streamed)	Rarely SvD (online)	Daily Social media (FB, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram)
TINA **Focus group 2** **Female, 23 yrs**	Daily P1, P3	Few times/week SVT1, 2 (streaming)	Daily DN, ETC (online)	Daily Blogs (on books), Twitter
THELMA **Focus group 2** **Female, 20 yrs**	Few times/week P3	Few times/week SVT, TV3, TV4, Kanal 5 (streaming)	Rarely Sydsvenskan (online)	Daily YouTube, blogs, Twitter
TIM **Focus group 2** **Male, 28 yrs**	Daily P1 (podcast)	Never	Never	Daily YouTube, BBC documentaries, the Economist podcast, humour podcasts
THERESE **Focus group 2** **Female, 21 yrs**	Few times/week P3	Daily SVT, TV4, Kanal 5 (and other commercial channels) (free streaming)	Few times/month Lundagård, Metro, DN, Aftonbladet (online and paper)	Daily Blogs, Twitter, YouTube, podcasts

ALEXANDER **Interview** **Male, 27 yrs**	Daily P1, P3, Radio AF, Sports podcasts, WTF	Daily SVTPlay, Kanal 5, Kanal 9, Tian	Daily DN, SvD, Sydsvenskan, Aftonbladet, Expressen (both paper and online)	Daily Blogs
BENJAMIN **Interview** **Male, 29 yrs**	Daily P1, P4	Daily	Daily	Daily
DENNIS **Interview** **Male, 29 yrs**	Daily P1, P4	Few times/week Comedy Central (and other things more irregularly)	Daily DN (app), Fria Tidningen (paper)	Daily American NPR-podcasts
EVA **Interview** **Female, 30 yrs**	Daily P1, P3, BBC	Few times/week SVT1, SVT 2, TV4, Netflix	Daily Sydsvenskan, DN, Washington Post, New York Review of Books, BBC, Aftonbladet (online mostly), Le Monde Diplomatique, Arbetaren, Sveriges Natur	Daily Podcasts, political and cultural blogs
FREJA **Interview** **Female, 22 yrs**	Rarely NRJ	Daily TV3, TV4, Kanal 5, Sexan, Sjuan, Comedy central (some streaming)	Never	Weekly YouTube
GABRIEL **Interview** **Male, 24 yrs**	Daily P3	Few times/week TV6, Kanal 5 (streaming)	Daily DN, SvD, Sydsvenskan, HD (online)	Daily YouTube (skits, music)
HARALD **Interview** **Male, 18 yrs**	Few times/week P3 (podcast)	Few times/week SVT1, SVT2, Kunskap-skanalen (exclusively streaming)	Weekly Metro, Fria Tidningen (paper)	Daily Podcasts, YouTube-videoblogs
IVAR **Interview** **Male, 23 yrs**	Few times/week P3	Varies SVTPlay	Rarely/varies Local papers (paper), SvD (online)	Daily YouTube
JENNY **Interview** **Female, 25 yrs**	Daily P1 (daily news), Studio 1, Medierna (pod/streamed)	Few times/week SVTPlay (exclusively streaming)	Daily (subscribing) Sydsvenskan, articles that come up in the social media flow	Daily
KAROLINA **Interview** **Female, 22 yrs**	Daily P1, P3	Daily SVT, BBC, TV4 (almost exclusively streamed)	Daily Sydsvenskan, DN, SvD, Dagens opinion, Resumé (online)	Daily Podcasts like Värvet, Alex och Sigge, En varg söker sin pod
LINUS **Interview** **Male, 26 yrs**	Never	Daily Exclusively streaming (Netflix, SVTPlay)	Daily DN, SvD, Sydsvenskan (online) – some more sporadically when linked in flows	Daily Podcasts, YouTube, certain programmes' dedicated pages, Twitter, Facebook
MORGAN **Interview** **Male, 29 yrs**	Rarely P4, MixMegapol, Guld-kanalen, P3	Daily Exclusively streaming services	Rarely Sydsvenskan, Ex-pressen (both paper and online)	Daily
NIKLAS **Interview** **Male, 25 yrs**	Never	Daily TV4, TV6	Daily Metro (paper), Aftonbladet (online)	Few times/week YouTube

OLIVER **Interview** **Male, 27 yrs**	Daily (at work, podcasts, TSKNAS, Filip & Fred-rik)	Rarely SVT, Netflix, Viaplay (streamed)	Rarely Aftonbladet, SvD (online)	Daily (podcasts, streamed television)
PAUL **Interview** **Male, 22 yrs**	Never	Once/month	Daily Aftonbladet, DN, Sydsvenskan	Daily Mixed
REMY **Interview** **Male, 29 yrs**	Daily P1, P3	Few times/week SVT (streaming)	Daily SvD, DN, Sydsvenskan, ETC	Daily Arena.se, Twitter, YouTube-channels
VERONIKA **Interview** **Female, 30 yrs**	Daily P1, P3, P4	Few times/week SVT, TV4, TV6 (streaming)	Daily DN (online)	Daily

E: Mapping of political comedy examples

Swedish and English speaking political comedy of the 20th and 21st centuries.

TYPE	*EXAMPLES*
News-satire, panel/talk shows, news-related comedy game shows	**SE:** Mosebacke Monarki (SR 1958-1970; SVT 1967-1968), Gamlins Årskrönika (SVT, 1962), Fredag med familjen Kruse (SVT, 1971-1972), Rappnytt (SVT, 1973), Cabaré Öppen Kanal (SR, 1976-1977), Kanal 3 (SVT 1982-1983), På Håret (P1, 1982-2006), Helt Apropå (SVT, 1985-1992), Encyklopiaden (SVT, 1987), Kurt Olssons television (SVT, 1987), Europahumour (SVT, 1989), Klang & Co (P3, 1990-1993), I manegen med Glenn Killing (SVT, 1992), Snacka om Nyheter (SVT, 1995-2003), Detta har hänt (SVT, 1996-1998), Parlamentet (TV4, 1999-), Public Service (P1, 2001-), Lantz i P3/P4 (SR, 2001-2010), I Afton Lantz (SVT, 2002), God Afton Sverige (TV3, 2003-2004), Pass På (ZTV, 2003), Veckans Nyheter (Kanal 5, 2006), Högsta Domstolen (SVT, 2006), Pang Prego (P3, 2007-2010), Tankesmedjan (P3, 2010-), Elfte Timmen (SVT, 2010); Breaking News (Kanal 5, 2011-), Betnér Direkt (Kanal 5, 2012), Alla Mina Kamrater (podcast, 2012-2015), Lantzkampen (P1, 2013-), Lilla Drevet (podcast, 2013-), Folkets Främsta Företrädare (SVT's streamed television, 2013-), SNN News (TV4, 2013-2014), Veckans viktigaste intervju (podcast, 2013-2014), Äkta satir (SR, 2013), Della Sport (podcast, 2014-), Anders Tar Parti (SVT, 2014), Anna Blomberg Show (SVT, 2014), Hårdvinklat (TV 3, 2014) **UK:** That Was The Week That Was (BBC, 1962-1963), The News Quiz (BBC Radio 4, 1977-), Spitting Image (UK, 1984-1996), Have I Got News For You (BBC 1990-), The Day Today (BBC2, 1994), Brass Eye (Channel 4, 1997-2001), The Now Show (BBC Radio 4, 1998-), The Ali G Show (Channel 4, 2000-2004), Mock the Week (BBC Two 2005-), The Russel Brand Show (Channel 4, 2006), The Bugle (podcast, 2012-) **US:** Politically Incorrect (Comedy central/ABC, 1993-2002), Dennis Miller Live (HBO, 1994-2002), The Daily Show (1996-), The Chris Rock Show (HBO, 1997-2000), Real Time with Bill Maher (HBO, 2003-), Crossballs: The Debate Show (Comedy central, 2004), The Colbert Report (Comedy central, 2005-2014), The Al Franken Show (Air America, 2004-2005), Red Eye (Fox News, 2007-), Conan (TBS, 2010-), Onion News Network (IFC, 2011-2012), Last Week Tonight (HBO, 2014-), The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore (Comedy Central, 2015-), Late Night With Stephen Colbert (CBS, 2015-), Full Frontal with Samantha Bee (TBS, 2016-)
Animated (adult) cartoons	The Simpsons (Fox, 1989-), South Park (Comedy Central, 1997-), Daria (MTV, 1997-2002), Family Guy (Fox 1999-), Futurama (Fox, 1999-2013), The Boondocks (Cartoon Network/Adult Swim, 2005-2014), Robot Chicken (Cartoon Network/Adult Swim, 2005-)
Print and online political or editorial cartoons, graphic novels, magazines, comic strips	Grönköpings veckoblad (SE, 1902-), Li'l Abner (US, 1934-1977), MAD Magazine (US, 1952-), Private Eye (UK, 1961-), Galago magazine (SE, 1979-), The Onion (US, 1988-), The spoof (US/UK, 1997-), The Daily Mash (UK, 2007-), Dagens Svenskbladet (SE, 2008-), News Thump (UK, 2009-), Waterford Whispers News (IE, 2009-), Sundsvallsbladet (SE, 2011), Akademikern – Lunds Fria Studenttidning (SE, 2011), The Daily Currant (US/UK, 2012-), Nyheterna Sverige – den ocensurerade verkligheten (SE, 2011-), The Portly Gazelle (UK, 2015-)
Stage/revue	The works of Hasse och Tage (1960s-1985) such as Gröna Hund (SE, 1962), Gula Hund (1966), the works of Magnus och Brasse (1970s), Under dubbelgöken (1979), Med tvättad hals (SE, 1985), Alice Babs bor inte här längre (SE, 1988), Beyond the Fringe (UK/US, 1960), Spitting Image (UK, 1984), Arlövsrevyn (SE, 1995-), R.E.A (Roligt. Elakt. Aktuellt) (SE, 2011-2013), The Book of Mormon (US/UK, 2011-)
Variety and skit/sketch	**US:** Saturday Night Live (NBC, 1975-), Not Necessarily the News (HBO, 1982-1990), In Living Color (Fox, 1990-1994), The State (MTV, 1993-1995), MADtv (Fox 1995-2009, The CW 2016-), Upright

programmes:	Citizens Brigade (Comedy Central, 1998-2000), Chapelle's Show (Comedy Central, 2003-2006), Inside Amy Schumer (Comedy Central, 2013-) **UK:** Not the Nine O'Clock News (BBC, 1979-1982), A Bit of Fry & Laurie (BBC, 1989-1995), Little Britain (BBC One, 2003-2007), Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle (BBC, 2009-) **SE:** Riskradion (P3, 1988-1989), Lorry (SVT, 1989-1995), Släng dig i brunnen (SVT, 1990-1999), Lösdrift (SVT, 1991-1992, The båttom is nådd (SVT, 1995), Riksorganet (SVT, 1998), Reuter & Skoog (SVT, 1999-2000), Salva (P3, 2005), Grotesco (SVT, 2007-), Partaj (Kanal 5, 2011-)
Mockumentaries/satirical documentaries and fiction (including sitcoms and mockumentary sitcoms)	**UK:** Yes, Minister (BBC, 1980-1984), Whoops Apocalypse (ITV, 1982), 'Allo 'Allo! (BBC, 1982-1992), Blackadder (BBC, 1983-1989), Yes, Prime Minister (BBC, 1986-1988), The Office (UK, BBC Two, 2001), The Thick of It (BBC, 2005-2012), Twenty-Twelve (BBC, 2011-2012) **US:** M*A*S*H (CBS, 1972-1983), Tanner '88 (US, 1988), Roger and Me (1989); TV Nation (NBC/BBC/Fox 1994-1995), Spin City (ABC, 1996-2002), The Aweful Truth (Bravo/Channel 4, 1999-2000), That's My Bush! (Comedy Central, 2001), Bowling for Columbine (2002); the trilogy of the Yes Men (2003-2015), Bullshit! (Showtime, 2003-2010), Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004); Tanner on Tanner (US, 2004), The Office (NBC, 2005-2013), Sicko (2007); Religulous (2008), Better off Ted (ABC, 2009-2010), Capitalism: A Love Story (2009); Parks and Recreation (NBC, 2009-2015), Veep (HBO, 2012-), The Newsroom (HBO, 2012-2014), Alpha House (Amazon Video, 2013-) **SE:** Det finns inga smålänningar (1981), Rosenbaddarna (SVT 1990), Ballar av stål (Kanal 5, 2008), Starke Man (SVT, 2010-2011)
Films	The great Dictator (US, 1940), Dr. Strange-love or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (US, 1964), The Jokers (1967), Planet of the Apes series (US, 1968-), M*A*S*H (US, 1970), The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer (1970), Badjävlar (SE, 1971), Network (US, 1976), Nine to Five (US, 1980), Private Benjamin (US, 1980), Stripes (US, 1981), Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984), Trading Places (US, 1983), RoboCop (US, 1987), The Running Man (US, 1987), Broadcast News (US, 1987), Coming to America (US, 1988), Hot Shots! (US, 1991), Demolition man (US, 1993), Citizen Ruth (US, 1996), Weapons of Mass Distraction/Dirty Game (US, 1997), Wag the Dog (US, 1997), SouthPark: Bigger, Longer & Uncut (US, 1999), Team America: World Police (US, 2004), Thank you for Smoking (US, 2006), Simpsons: The Movie (US, 2007), In the Loop (UK, 2009), Four Lions (UK/FR, 2010), The Campaign (US, 2012), The Dictator (US, 2012), The Interview (US, 2014), Trevligt folk (SE, 2014)
Comedians (stand-up and otherwise), writers and performers	**SE:** Tage Danielsson (1928-1985), Hans Alfredson (1931), Jan-Erik Ander (1946), Annika Andersson (1968), Peter Apelgren (1959), Kristoffer Appelquist (1975), Magnus Betnér (1974), Erik Blix (1957), Anna Bromée (1970), Olof Buckard (1933), Anna Carlsson (1971), Dan Ekborg (1955), Ronny Eriksson (1953), Aron Flam (1978), Göran Gabrielsson (1962), Sara Granér (1980), Robert Gustafsson (1964), Sara Hansson (1986), Nina Hemmingson (1971), Kajsa Ingemarsson (1965), Soran Ismail (1987), Josefin Johansson (1982), Nanna Johansson (1986), Sissela Kyle (1957), Carina Lidbom (1957), Kalle Lind (1975), Annika Lantz (1968), Stefan Livh (1957), Anders Lundin (1958), Anna Mannheimer (1963), Rachel Mohlin (1973), Andreas Nilsson (1963), Özz Nûjen (1975), Bosse Parnevik (1938), Suzanne Reuter (1952), Martin Soneby (1976), Charlott Strandberg (1962), Liv Strömquist (1976), Kristoffer Svensson (1981), Simon Svensson (1976), Mikael Tornvig (1962), Jonatan Unge (1979), Erik 'Kar de Mumma' Zetterström (1904-1997) **US:** Samantha Bee (1969), Mel Brooks (1926), Lenny Bruce (1925-1966), George Carlin (1937-2008), Dave Chapelle (1973),Stephen Colbert (1964), Al Franken (1951), Joseph Heller (1923-1999), Bill Maher (1956), Dennis Miller (1953), Michael Moore (1954); Richard Pryor (1940-2005), Chris Rock (1965), Mort Sahl (1927), Jon Stewart (1962), Garry Trudeau (1948) **UK:** Alan Bennett (1934), Russel Brand (1975), Eleanor Bron (1938-2003), Peter Cook (1937-1995), David Frost (1939-2013), Ricky Gervais (1961), Jeremy Hardy (1971), Armando Iannucci (1963), Stewart Lee (1968), Dudley Moore (1935-2002), Terry Pratchett (1948-2015)

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Political comedy engagement

While broadcast news struggles to attract young audiences, political comedy is becoming more and more popular. To understand this popularity, this thesis explores audience engagement in political comedy among Swedish young adults – focussing on how it encourages citizenship, both in the political and the cultural sense. By applying a contextualising, qualitative audience approach, the study considers the generic qualities of contemporary political comedy, how the audience defines and values it, and how this connects to identity and citizenship. The results indicate that political comedy is an important emerging space for political communication. Particularly, political comedy engagement answers to some of the uneasiness and uncertainties facing today's young adult citizens: by inviting, representing, and valuing both critical and emotional investment.

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