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Satire and Geopolitics: Vulgarity, Ambiguity and the Body Grotesque in *South Park*

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ABSTRACT

Humour and laughter have become the subject of recent geopolitical scrutiny. Scholars have explored the affirmative and liberatory possibilities of humour, and the affective bodily dimensions of laughter as tools for transformative action in critical geopolitics. Humour that is vulgar and politically ambiguous is yet to be explored as a potent geopolitical avenue of enquiry. Studies of satire have suggested that rather than contesting entrenched geopolitical beliefs, satirical shows can serve to further divide audiences both amenable and antagonistic to the satire in question. I argue that this should not involve a wholesale rejection of satirical shows, as humour that uses irony, subversion, and other discursive techniques is just one way satirical media becomes an effective commentator on political issues. I examine the show *South Park* and argue its satire combines bodily and scatological humour with more traditional satirical techniques to produce a comedy that ridicules contemporary issues by reducing complex politics to the most basic and crass condition possible. This is defined in a Bakhtinian sense of the body grotesque, a social inversion through reference to the common bodily functions of all human beings.

Introduction

In what ways might fart jokes be geopolitical? This question animates this study of the hugely popular cartoon *South Park*, a satirical show that has enjoyed consistently high ratings since its inception in 1997. The show has generated enormous controversy throughout its history, with a battery of criticisms and a dedicated following of protest groups. Despite nearly every episode being rated TV-MA, the most restrictive rating possible in America (designed for mature audiences only), *South Park* has a Wikipedia page dedicated solely to the controversies in which it has been embroiled. Diverse audiences comprised of concerned parents from Action for Children's Television, the Parents Television Council, the government of Sri Lanka and members of the Russian Pentecostal Church have all engaged in efforts to proscribe the viewing of *South Park*.¹

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Such vociferous criticisms stem from a hallmark of the *South Park* style: tackling contemporary issues through lewd toilet humour that targets a plethora of different individuals, social groups and events. Offence has often been taken at the extraordinary confections concocted by the writing team; the Japanese as sociopathic murderers of dolphins and whales, God as a small rodent, Buddha as a cocaine addict and the Queen of England committing suicide. These are but a few of the caricatures that have enraged viewers globally. With overt references to bestiality, cannibalism, genocide and mutilation nobody is safe from the ridicule of writers Trey Parker and Matt Stone, who have described themselves as 'Equal Opportunity Offenders'. This is a problematic defence as each identity or situation targeted is placed on an equal plane and does not acknowledge fully the unequal power relations associated with years of oppression and offence often endured with specific groups. It does however, make it difficult to pin *South Park* down to a coherent political platform from which Parker and Stone operate as they cast their net of derision wide enough to encompass the entirety of the traditional political spectrum.

South Park's impact upon its global audience is therefore understandably complex and contradictory. An episode that used a highly racially charged slur was generally praised by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for its portrayal of white appropriation of the term. Ironically, the same episode was deemed racist and the worst cable content of the week by the Parents Television Council, an organisation whose leadership team and advisory council is nearly exclusively made up of white individuals.² At the same time it has been criticised by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation for its use of homophobic slurs.³ *South Park* occupies an ambiguous role, where episodes can be deemed simultaneously progressive and racist, or educational and offensive. It blurs the boundary between satire and parody, with the former understood as ridicule of shortcomings for the purpose of informing or changing behaviour, and the latter as a simple means of comedy via imitation and exaggeration. It is this ability to be both politically informed and astonishingly vulgar that interests this paper. Do its critics (and often targets) protest its vulgarity, political messages, or both combined? For example, the longest standing criticisms of *South Park* do not decry its depiction of specific identities, but takes umbrage with its relentless vulgarity, persistent revelry in toilet humour and celebrations of the scatological. The website Government Attic made a Freedom of Information request regarding complaints made to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about *South Park* from 2004 to 2007. This detailed some particularly memorable complaints from members of the American public concerned with the 'sickening' and 'disgusting' nature of the show, especially its influence on children. While it would seem that poignant political critique is lost among the deluge of toilet humour, *South Park's* use of

crass humour is endlessly controversial and serves as the primary focus of this paper.⁴

Popular geopolitics is the study of the spatialisations and underpinning geographies that are used to substantiate understandings about other places in popular culture.⁵ The imaginative geographies that underpin blockbuster films, cartoons and books are often explicitly geopolitical, but recently scholars have demonstrated the performance and reception of humour and its capacity to include, alienate, insult and empower as important ways of establishing popular geopolitical narratives.⁶ While valuable insights have been developed from these studies, this paper addresses two concerns. First it draws on feminist critiques of the tendency of critical geopolitics to assume 'that the comprehension of international relations is beyond the abilities of ordinary people'.⁷ Rather than positing consumers of culture as dupes, feminist insights have emphasised the 'need to recognise the hybrid scales and places through which geopolitical narratives are transformed into political practice'.⁸ Accompanying this is a concern with analyses that attempt to force 'the messy complexity of real life geography into the tidy conceptual language of geopolitics'.⁹ The paper builds on Dittmer's assertion that geopolitical analysis has a predilection for cultural artefacts that clearly challenge or reinforce hegemonic representations.¹⁰ If satire predominantly works by derision, it risks further convincing those who agree with it while alienating those who don't agree. Some scholars have argued the satirical mission to 'make laugh, not war' only serves to polemicise the gap between those who agree and disagree with its political message, suggesting its geopolitical worth is limited.¹¹

The second concern dwells on the role of the vulgar. For Simpson, satire is aggressive; always attacking an object of focus. It uses techniques of exaggeration, caricature, and ridicule to create humour in a situation.¹² This has, throughout its history, often involved ridicule based on distorting or emphasising the lewd, grotesque and vulgar. Satire is often political, excoriating the mistakes and deviances of popular figures or situations of the time, drawing heavily on grotesque and bodily humour to do so. In the work of Steve Bell, or in the historical works of James Gilray, the vulgar has played a prominent role in satirical critique. Yet, apart from the work of Klaus Dodds on Steve Bell,¹³ popular geopolitics has not yet examined the role that lewd and bodily humour plays in political satire.

These twin insights constitute the predominant concern of the paper: a lack of study of satirical humour that generates laughter that is politically ambivalent, vulgar and messy in geopolitical scholarship. In other words, how can critical geopolitics accommodate satirical humour that does not easily lend itself to the well-rehearsed, orderly concept of an 'anti geopolitical eye', famously discussed by Ó Tuathail in terms of resistance to hegemony?¹⁴ The paper suggests the political satire in *South Park* offers interesting points

of departure for these critiques. What follows then, is a discussion of the relationship between critical geopolitics and humour, specifically exploring how humour has developed as an analytical framework that would benefit from exploring the role of vulgar and ambiguous comedy. This is followed by a discussion of the work of Mikheal Bakhtin and its relevance for accounting for ambiguous and crass satire. The analysis then goes on to apply these insights to three *South Park* episodes: *The Snuke*, *Goobacks*, and *Mystery of the Urinal Deuce*. The paper concludes with suggestions of how ambiguity and vulgarity should be embraced as important areas of scholarship.

Humour, Cartoons and Critical Geopolitics

A typology of different forms of humour can be extrapolated from the work of Monro. The superiority approach describes humour that is generated from unequal power relations of dominance and subordination. This involves a degree of degradation, where some luckless person has their shortcomings or unfortunate happenings subject to derision. The incongruity approach suggests humour emerges from the shock of extreme contrast and derives from the unexpected pleasure in finding connections in two antipodes. In the relief approach the humour emerges from the release of unsaid yet implicit messages and urges. It draws on the work of Sigmund Freud and the repression of impulses and outwitting our internal censors that control our social conduct.¹⁵ One can surely find examples of all three types of humour, blending and emulsifying into one another in *South Park*. The most relevant type is that of incongruous humour, where two extremes are pitted against one another. Yet Monro concedes that the three concepts do not account for the repulsion, attraction and ambivalence that underpin a key facet of humour: it can simultaneously cause offense and laughter, empowering certain identities at the expense of others. Vulgar political humour that is ambiguous in this way is particularly salient for this paper. First as form of political criticism, and second via its potential to affect individuals. Herbert Spencer argued that degradation is incidental to the cause of humour, not vital to catalysing laughter.¹⁶ This emphasises the opinion of the receiver in both finding a joke funny, repulsive, or vulgar.¹⁷

Yet, this aspect of satirical humour has been neglected in debates within critical geopolitics, with scholars instead concentrating on the 'political' content in satire. Cartoons have been singled out as having a powerful resonance with contemporary popular culture. The *Jyllands-Posten* Danish cartoon controversy is emblematic of this recent state of affairs, as are the horrific murders occurring at *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters in France by extremists. *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons are comparable to the techniques of *South Park*, often making use of vulgar bodily imagery. The horrific responses suggest a

constantly shifting borderlands at which corporeal vulgarity departs from innocuous satire to become inflammatory and dangerous. Dodds has studied cartoons extensively and contends that 'banal and/or routine-based geographical representations and understandings of world politics matter and that they do so as part of the everyday lives of citizens'.¹⁸ His analysis of Steve Bell's images suggests cartoons produce ridicule through exaggerated and nonsensical images that satirise politicians, situations and individuals. Dodds suggests Bell's cartoons use the anti-geopolitical eye,¹⁹ and the vulgar depictions are noted as effective techniques, but the potency of graphic corporeal depictions to incite both offence and humour is a topic yet to be engaged with. Despite a few notable exceptions that have dealt with the contradictory messages occupying the most popular of films,²⁰ the Hollywood blockbuster can almost causally be equated with supporting military interventions and justifying American pre-eminence, whereas satirical cartoon humour serves as a blueprint for anti-military protest and criticism of established political elites and dominant orders. This highlights the problems scholars face when examining complicated and contradictory messages on events offered by *South Park*, a show which refuses to be demarcated as simply critical or supportive of dominant hegemonic narratives, but catalyses broader tensions between geopolitics and religion. This is something *South Park* has achieved on a global level, inciting offence from religious groups with very real consequences.²¹ In *South Park* the sexual body often serves as a criticism of organised religion, especially in relation to everyday contexts of shame and embarrassment.²²

Purcell, Brown, and Gokmen have suggested that new communication technologies allow cultural content to rapidly transgress the context within which it was designed to be delivered.²³ They argue a parochial focus on analysing discourses that reinforce or resist hegemony may not be sufficient to account for ambivalence surrounding the reception to satire in an age of globalised communication. This is an especially important point in relation to the global reception of *South Park*. This concern has been developed in the work of Glynn and Cupples, who draw on a range of feminist interventions in critical geopolitics concerned with the persistence of 'elite abstract and disembodied practices of statecraft' to analyse the television show *Commander in Chief*.²⁴ Their concern is with queer theory and the prosaic realm of the everyday, which is gendered, racialised and striated through many cross-cutting identities in unequal relations of power.²⁵ Their work suggests a key insight for this paper, that culture is a realm of negotiated contest, where meaning is endlessly made and unmade. When combined with Fall's work this shows a pressing need to focus on the body as a scale where identities are negotiated.²⁶ There is a clear demand to engage with the body as an arena upon which geopolitics is enacted, a challenge which the paper rises to by

examining the role of bodily and vulgar humour that is interwoven with wider geopolitical discourses.

A distinction between a source (humour) and its effects (laughter) has become an important heuristic in recent scholarship. Dodds and Kirby have examined Steven Colbert's live performance to the White House Correspondents Association Dinner. They are quick to point to the difference between humour as discursive and laughter as affective, outlined by Macpherson, who is keen to focus on the irrational, unconscious and infectious qualities of humour and laughter.²⁷ While Macpherson suggests it is useful to analytically distinguish between humour and laughter, she emphasises the fuzziness of the concepts. Previous laughter can lubricate situations to improve reception to humour, and Dodds and Kirby suggest the inverse via Michael Billig's notion of unlaughter, or a distinct absence of laughter where it should exist. They conclude that humour can be resentful and cruel but can 'provoke critical thought and resistance through the use of the absurd'.²⁸ The distinction between humour and laughter is useful for theorising *South Park*, specifically in relation to what is perceived as funny.

Dodds and Kirby's concern with humour/laughter in politically minded performances has led Dittmer to explore the geopolitical potential of laughter in the Model United Nations (MUN), a scenario designed for undergraduate students to undertake the role of nation-state diplomats.²⁹ Dittmer is concerned to kick-start Geopolitics 2.0, by eschewing cultural representations, suggesting the symbols, representations and subversions are only half of the story of humour.³⁰ Drawing on scholarship on the body, the everyday and performance, Dittmer reminds us that scholars should consider affect, or the relational quality of inter-personal engagements that ripple and resonate through bodies. Affect refers to shared and pre-conscious feelings that exist as a 'kind of turbulent background field of relational intensity, irreducible to and not containable by any single body or subject'.³¹ By examining the MUN as an assemblage, we learn that jokes and humour are context dependent, constantly re-made and dissolved in the ever-changing mix of emotions, individuals and contexts. Laughter is manifested in bodily reactions and is often linked (but not irreducible) to any one joke, performance or comic incident. Such an argument has affinities with disposition theory, eloquently discussed in the example of a clown by philosopher Gilbert Ryle and the distinction between 'knowing that' and knowing how'. A clown may be skilled in techniques designed to induce laughter, but knowing how (when, where and why) to use them in certain ways is where the ability to create laughter flourishes as the clown responds to audience reactions.³² I take Dittmer and Ryle's insistence on the relational quality of affective humour as important reminders that efforts to engage with humour cannot wholly abandon discursive texts.

Instead scholars should pay attention to the relations between corporeal, material phenomena and representations in popular culture.

Three important points stem from this brief review. First, that critical geopolitics has somewhat avoided the ambiguous potential in humorous content and audience reactions. While an important intervention from Ridanpää suggests the context of ironic humour and its political indeterminacy are important for entrenching geopolitical narratives,³³ there have been no systematic engagements with humour and ambiguity. Second, there is a need to appreciate the wider contexts within which the comedic artefact is produced and consumed. This departs from the problematic route of discussing satire as simply critical of dominant narratives, by considering the aspects such as production and reception. One of the hallmarks of *South Park* is that episodes only take a week to make, from initial inception to premiering on *Comedy Central*.³⁴ This allows the show to comment on topical and sensitive issues very quickly, often while controversy is still ongoing. Third, humour that is disgusting, vulgar and focused on the body and its excretions has not been examined in critical geopolitics, despite its importance in other bodies of scholarship. It is this literature I now examine through the work of Bakhtin.

Bakhtin, Carnival and the Body Grotesque

Born in 1895, Mikheal Bakhtin was famous for developing a series of literary concepts such as that of the carnival, heteroglossia and dialogism. While pre-eminently concerned with literature, Bakhtin's work has been widely used in the social sciences and has influenced political geography, but not geopolitics.³⁵ Bakhtin focused on the usage of lewd, tawdry writings and descriptions of bodily humour that invoked powerful responses in individuals.³⁶ The idea of the vulgar as a tangible and affective mechanism was developed by Bakhtin in his *Rabelais and His World*. This volume deals with the visceral, vulgar and satirical writings of Renaissance scholar Francois Rabelais, specifically his pentalogy of novels entitled *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin examines the role of vulgar and obscene as literary techniques. The first of these is perhaps the most famous of Bakhtin's work: that of the carnival, or a situation where frivolity and chaos associated with carnival celebrations invert the normal functioning of order. They engender a collective, devoid of the usual hierarchical trappings of society.³⁷ This was by no means a fleeting performance but a genuine change in the organisation of social life. Carnival 'is not a spectacle seen by the people, they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people'.³⁸ Furthermore, identities are inverted and new forms of social interaction, gesture, speech and comportment are available in the temporary suspension of hierarchical

norms as new ideas, alliances, and relationships are endlessly tested and rejected in the cacophony of novel social interaction.

Discussions of carnival necessitate a discussion of the next literary technique Bakhtin identifies that is most pertinent to this paper: the body grotesque or a literary focus on all things vulgar. In an archaic sense, the term vulgar was often defined as pertaining to the ribald mass of the common people. However, as Ravenwood suggests, we encounter problems in trying to delineate culture along class-based lines.³⁹ She ruminates on the role of *The Tempest* as an important cultural artefact, showing how it was popular with both the groundlings in the roundhouse as well as rich patrons in the galleries. A more nuanced definition of the vulgar recognises the slippy, relational quality cultural artefacts that help dissolve boundaries between popular and highbrow culture. Both the production and response of and to cultural products is deemed important when examining how *South Park* combines vulgarity and geopolitics via highbrow satire and toilet humour.

As Ravenwood argues, vulgarity may also remind the audience of a concrete, contentious reality 'that high art must, necessarily, make abstract in order to achieve striking artistic unity'.⁴⁰ The vulgar then, is not just the realm of the bawdy, the lewd and the distasteful, but also the register of concrete, stark illustration. The body grotesque illuminates the lowering, or degradation of the abstract, ennobled language of high culture to the world of the base, the lewd and most importantly, the body. In Rabelais' work, the use of vulgar descriptions of bodily excretions, carnal acts, defecation, eating and drinking are all associated with the literal and figurative lower order functions of a body, as compared with the higher faculties of thought, reasoning and emotion, located in the brain. This geography of the upper/lower body serves as a boundary which can indeed be easily transgressed. It is at this juncture that the link between the ideas of carnival as a social liberation of behaviours can be combined with the grotesque body. The body becomes dialogical, concerned with those appendages that dissolve the self and other.⁴¹ The lowest common denominators of humanity are found in the reproductive systems, the need to quench thirst and hunger and reconstitute the body in new ways. The body is thus not limited to individual, atomistic 'selves', but is found in the excess and shared grotesqueness of many bodies participating in similar acts. As Bakhtin was keen to emphasise, the carnival contained the revolutionary potential as hierarchy, rank and order is eschewed and instead replaced by an (albeit brief) explosion of equality. Everybody eats and shits at the carnival.

Terry Eagleton criticises Bakhtin's celebration of the carnival, suggesting it ignores the dangerously narrow distance between humour and oppression. That is, it may be nothing 'more than an intellectual's guilty dues to the populace'.⁴² Eagleton identifies in carnival an empty, vacuous analytic that celebrates the corporeal universality for the human that is a combatively one

sided practice – that reduces all to the level of the lower classes. This focus on the negation in the Carnival as the reduction of hierarchy is troubling and, I argue, a misreading of the ambiguity of Carnival. As Gilmore has argued, to only focus on reduction is to ignore the ‘contradictory, inconsistent and protean nature of carnival’.⁴³ A Bakhtinian emphasis on degradation is also described in a productive fashion, in a similar understanding of the Deleuzian concept of desire.⁴⁴ Degradation does not refer solely to criticism, insults or satire of highbrow culture or process, but also the enmeshing of the corporeal and the mind in a celebration of the cycle of life and death. The Carnival was, for Bakhtin, a ‘turnabout, or a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations profanations [and] comic crownings and uncrownings’.⁴⁵ Nothing was fixed and everything was simultaneously up for grabs and slipping out of grasp. Furthermore, the carnival was chequered with paradox where ‘the impulse to degrade the high and mighty exists alongside a paradoxical reverence for tradition and hierarchy’.⁴⁶ This ambivalence, combined with the body grotesque, offers an extra layer of analytical potential for scholars to better appreciate humour that operates ambivalently – that offends and induces laughter in multiple audiences.

South Park and the Body Grotesque

South Park has been the subject of extensive scholarly critique. An edited collection entitled *Taking South Park Seriously* deals with various aspects of the show ranging from identity politics, cultural pedagogy and the role of music. The collection is important for situating *South Park* in the lineage of American cartoon satire. There is also a notable ancestry of vulgar satire including the eighteenth-century political cartoons of James Gillray, who lampooned the monarchy with vivid, monstrous and lewd images. In Anglo-American contexts, satire’s lewd excesses were tempered in the Victorian era, and its grotesquerie enjoyed only a small revival in the twentieth century after World War II. *That Was the Week that Was* aired for two seasons in the United Kingdom in 1962–1963 and was largely devoid of vulgar and sexual imagery. One programme that is comparable to *South Park* in their focus on bodily exaggerations is the British *Spitting Image*, which ran from 1985 to 1996. Yet even this show, conditioned by the censorship of the BBC, has not achieved the levels of crassness celebrated in *South Park*. Cartoons from the 1990s such as *Beavis and Butthead* were not explicitly political satire and made tentative use of the body grotesque. In the current American context, *South Park* occupies a niche in the satirical repertoire for its ability to ridicule politics, culture and the endless contradictions of American liberalism via gross bodily humour.

Yet this niche is often not recognised as important. *South Park* is regularly not considered political satire due to its focus on the vulgar. An important scholarly intervention entitled *The Ultimate South Park and Philosophy: Respect my Philosophah!* seeks to journey ‘deep beyond the surface of the show’s scatological humour to address the perennial questions raised in *South Park*’.⁴⁷ This paper suggests this is a problematic reading that seeks to evacuate the importance of vulgar and gross humour in its attempt to reach the serious, philosophical underpinnings of the show. Instead, this paper argues the scatological is a central and vital technique that produces a unique brand of satire not easily reducible to conventional political humour. As Puar suggests in relation to *South Park*, ‘The trivial must be attended to precisely because marking it as such may mask or obfuscate its deeper cultural relevance’.⁴⁸ As Ott and other scholars have argued, *South Park* is a perfect example of contradictory, post-modern, polysemic texts.⁴⁹ With its endless references to popular culture, unfurling controversies and stereotypes, it would be mistaken to try to pin the show down to a coherent politics of domination and resistance. The writing team happily takes to task any cultural or political sentiment, including their own show. Parker and Stone are exemplary self-reflexive authors, often inwardly poking fun at their own creations by responding to critiques of their show. In *South Park The Movie: Bigger Longer and Uncut*, the popular Canadian cartoon characters Terrance and Phillip are accused by Conan O’Brian of creating a movie that is ‘nothing but immature fart jokes’. This a clear reference to accusations levelled at *South Park*.⁵⁰ This shows the satirical value of *South Park* in its ability to respond to critics, defending itself as a conscious cultural artefact that is very aware of its own ambiguous reception among viewers. Terrance and Phillip are recurring characters, functioning as the political body grotesque par excellence by showing the effectiveness of combining the scatological and political. Yet it would be problematic to uncritically accept Parker and Stone’s defence as ‘equal opportunity offenders’. This provides a superficial veneer of equality to its ridicule and ignores deeper imbalances and relations of power that are often considered in parochial contexts that ignore the history of discrimination against certain identities. While *South Park* has been praised for its novel parodic representation of certain events and characters, it clearly has offended many people around the world. Efforts to nationally censor the show attest to its geopolitical significance and the varying reception it receives. How can scholars theorise these ambiguities and contradictions that are emblematic of the carnivalesque humour and laughter/offence that *South Park* engenders?

My suggestion would be to follow Bakhtin, and embrace the ‘crownings and uncrownings’ that characterise the show. In the aforementioned *Taking South Park Seriously*, Halsall argues *South Park* exemplifies the themes of

carnival and the body grotesque, seamlessly blending the trashy and the lewd with geopolitical decision making and controversy.⁵¹ With its scatological approach this technique is somewhat observable in the work of Steve Bell, who compares British Prime Minister David Cameron to a condom.⁵² The freedom of the two-dimensional cartoon allows the most extraordinarily repulsive scenes to be created and the boundaries of the human body to be warped. Parker and Stone invoke the body grotesque via incongruity; in *South Park* sex and violence is incredibly visceral, yet this is presented through rudimentary and block-coloured two-dimensional characters. The combination of cartoon violence, sexual practices and a relentless focus on the body grotesque creates a different type of humour, one that is designed to shock the sensibilities, to dare the viewer to laugh at vulgar and crass representations of political issues. Ambiguity was, for Bakhtin, a central part of the carnival that refused to allow emerging social orders to reinforce or establish their position for any length of time. This productive element of the carnival, combined with its subsequent destruction has parallels with the Deleuzian notion of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation⁵³ where assemblages are constantly remade as external elements join and depart from the vibrant heterogeneous configuration.⁵⁴ *South Park* refuses to provide viewers with any coherent narrative or politics, instead celebrating the complexity of a given situation in a dramatically unfolding narrative. In each episode ridiculous and unrealistic events can vividly distort any simplistic narrative, a technique aided by the use of the body grotesque.

That the body grotesque can engender audiences into new ways of thinking and understanding has steadily gained traction in the social sciences, especially in relation to *South Park*.⁵⁵ Puar's work is important for situating the show's humour in relation to queer theory and her study of homonormativity in the light of the attacks of 9/11. She analyses one of the most bizarre episodes, *The Death Camp of Tolerance*, in which the school-children are deemed intolerant of their gay teacher Mr. Garrison. This is because he attempts to get himself fired from school, which would allow him to sue for discrimination. For Puar, the episode's use of sexual humour and queer imagery is geopolitical, as Mr. Garrison employs an 'assistant' Mr. Slave, a sadomasochistic figure who is anally penetrated in front of the children with a gerbil by Mr. Garrison in an extreme effort to get himself dismissed. She describes Mr. Slave as the embodiment of uncertainty and perversity that the US views the world with. This is evident when Cartman, a student who is unable to describe the perversity of Mr. Slave, describes him as 'Pakistani'. For Puar, the transgressive Mr. Slave is comparable to discourse surrounding the uncertain role of Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Her analysis directly highlights the importance of vulgar humour to geopolitical analysis. It is the invitation to laugh

at the sensitive (geo)political descriptions with incongruous references to bodily excretions, defecations, regurgitations and penetrations that makes *South Park* a potent product of geopolitical interest to Puar. However, she doesn't examine the diffuse forms of laughter/offence that emanate from multiple perspectives beyond formal political discourse, nor explicitly theorise the use of ambiguity to complicate simple geopolitical narratives. An example will demonstrate the point.

Episode 118 of season 8 is entitled *Goobacks* and was released in April, 2004. In this episode, people from the year 3034 travel back in time to look for jobs as the bleak future is bereft of employment. These migrants speak a language comprised of all languages and all are hairless, androgynous and nearly identical in appearance. Initially, the townsfolk are initially happy with the cheap labour but become angrier as the migrants begin to work in all occupations, from taxi drivers to geologists for much cheaper wages. The men of the town devise a cunning strategy to stop people from the future (pejoratively known as 'goobacks' due to the ectoplasm of time travel) returning to 2004. To ensure a future devoid of people, all the men in South Park engage in a massive homosexual group act to forestall any future procreation. Their reasoning is that if there are no people in the future, then they cannot migrate through time. The children protagonists, ever the voices of reason, suggest that making the world a better place for future generations would ensure that people from the future do not need to time-travel to find work. This idea is briefly considered, but dismissed as being 'really gay [*sic*]'. As such the episode ends with the town's male population engaged in a writhing frenzy of mass copulation.

The Bakhtinian overtones in this episode are obvious. The carnivalesque consequences of the group sex are prescient, as every male, from the woodcutter to school teacher engage in the act, and all social differences are rendered obsolete. The episode makes a mockery of debates regarding illegal immigration, at a time when concern was rife in the United States, despite a decrease of 24% in illegal immigration from 2000.⁵⁶ The ridiculous narrative uses the body grotesque to reduce the sensitive debate of immigration to a visceral representation of the men's body as sexually deviant, while making the politically salient point that efforts to reduce immigration, instead of addressing the root causes that result in migration, namely poverty, inequality and war are often neglected. We are left amused at the absurd situation and the townsfolk's inability to adequately or sensibly address the problem of migration.

The episode is replete with allegories to contemporary debates concerning immigration and racial profiling. The strange language, and post-racial appearance of migrants as well as the temporal slur of 'goobacks' is a clear allusion to the pejorative language used to refer to migrants of Central and South American descent as 'wetbacks'. It is a mix of the ironic message and

the absurdness of the situation with which the viewer is encouraged to respond with an affective reaction. You might not agree with the portrayal of xenophobic and racist America, but the frenzied, two-dimensional copulation unfolding before your eyes has the potential to engender a somatic response connected to the transgressions of social norms⁵⁷ in the form of laughter, revulsion or a combination of the two. As mentioned, it is important to consider the episode's reception. While *Goobacks* did not generate much controversy, it excoriates the timeless conservative defence associated with the appropriation of jobs by immigrants with the phrase 'they took our jobs!' This descends into 'durp de duur' and has become a well-quoted internet meme according to Google Trends.⁵⁸ The continuing reference to the episode in online social spaces suggests a resonance of this meme that critiques conservative views on migration but creates an ambiguous response that is instantly recognisable and reproducible. The affective ambivalence, notable through its transmission on social media, is an example of politically motivated humour transgressing its referential televisual moorings. It is re-appropriated by fans for a variety of purposes, demonstrating the importance of audience interpretation towards political narratives.⁵⁹

Ambiguous Humour and Geopolitics

It is often argued *South Park* is political satire with a leftist bent, yet it would be inappropriate to affix it to any coherent political ideology. Environmentalists, pacifists, and atheists (who are often the most vociferous protestors of their treatment in *South Park*), are all excoriated in unrefined ways. An example is offered below.

Episode 157 of season 11 is entitled *The Snuke* and was released in March 2004. A clear parody of the national security drama *24*, it details the efforts of the CIA to locate a bomb hidden in the town of South Park primed to explode on the day that senator Hillary Clinton visits to campaign. Following a fruitless search of the town for the device, a suitcase nuke (or Snuke) is revealed to be hidden inside Mrs. Clinton herself, inside her 'snizz' (slang for vagina). After an unlucky volunteer is picked to enter the Senator and disarm the bomb, Russian mercenaries are found to be behind the plot, but it is revealed that they are merely pawns providing a distraction for a much more sinister enemy: the British, whose Redcoat army are using the commotion to discreetly sail across the Atlantic in a wooden war fleet to 'put an end to the American Revolution'. After the plot is finally foiled and the British boats easily sunk by American jet fighters, the episode ends with Her Majesty the Queen shooting herself in disappointment.

It is hopefully evident that no clear geopolitical message can be easily extracted from this episode. While viewers might see the British as the final threat, the ease with which they are defeated by American jets immediately

obviates any idea of British superiority through incongruous humour. While viewers could plausibly deduce a position of American superiority, the aforementioned treatment of the Secretary of State militates against viewing America in a positive light. Furthermore, in true *24* style, the threat emerges not from the obvious enemies, but instead the supposedly loyal British allies. The episode ends with no clear winners and the humour stems again from the absurdity of the use of the body grotesque and ambiguity of the conflict with which viewers are confronted.

With overt references to various past international conflicts and tensions the episode is chequered by the ambiguity of carnival humour. By embracing the abstruseness of *South Park* we can begin to map out a humour that engages with geopolitics but is not amenable to political discourses of reinforcement/resistance of hegemony. Satire has been charged with contributing to a politics devoid of progressive political engagement, and is linked to an attitude of apathy and disinterest in political participation, particularly in young people.⁶⁰ Fostering geopolitical action through the medium of ambiguous vulgar humour, not reducible to the formal strictures of politics, is one way of combating an emerging indifference in formal politics in the UK and US. However, in the true spirit of incoherence that *South Park* embodies, the final example is used to explore how sensitive political matters are viscerally and brutally rendered opaque and unambiguous through the body grotesque.

The final example from season 10 episode 9 is entitled *Mystery of the Urinal Deuce*. In this episode, an unknown student defecates in the urinal at school, causing the furious school councillor to launch a police investigation with the help of the Hartley Boys (a parody of the fictional popular US characters the Hardy Boys). Cartman suggests the event was part of a conspiracy and compares it to the collapse of the 'World Trade Centre' on 9/11. After he is laughed out of school, he decides to find out what really happened on 9/11. After careful 'research' he deduces that Kyle, a Jewish child at school, was responsible for both 9/11 and the incident in the urinal. He presents his ludicrous justification to the whole school (by drawing Kyle's face in a photo of the smoke from the towers). Kyle attempts to clear his name at school by contacting other conspiracy groups, and he is taken in by the founder of the 9/11 Truth organisation. Both are arrested by the US government and ushered to the White House in front of George Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and Dick Cheney, who tell them it was in fact the all-powerful government who was behind 9/11, creating support for an invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, solely for oil. George Bush then kills the founder of 9/11 Truth, but Kyle escapes the White House with suspicious ease, only to then see the founder of 9/11 Truth walking the streets unscathed. This leads him to uncover a further plot twist, that the 9/11 government conspiracy was in fact, a government conspiracy,

an attempt by the government to convince the US population that they were behind 9/11 (when they actually weren't), and are therefore all-powerful. The truth is revealed by Kyle's friend Stan, who covered up his defecation in the urinal by blaming the government for the act, who gladly took the blame to help peddle their own conspiracy.

This episode is replete with themes entrenched in identity politics that are relevant to critical geopolitics, the complexity of which are beyond the scope of this article.⁶¹ However, the work of Laura Jones which examines the 9/11 Truth movement is relevant here, as she has called for more 'situated, embodied and emotional accounts of conspiracy theories'.⁶² While the episode is decidedly unambiguous in its depiction of 9/11 conspiracy theories, the US executive is depicted in a ridiculous manner (Dick Cheney is dressed in hunting gear and armed with a toy crossbow, a fact that is never explained). While the episode plays on the geopolitical fear of the threat from within the US borders, the US government is also desperate to *appear* all powerful, yet it is eventually unable to orchestrate such an elaborate ruse. The plot is foiled by the Hartley boys and South Park's children (a classic 'I would have got away with it if it wasn't for you meddling kids' trope). This attributes an incompetence to the Bush administration and injects ambivalence into any positive representation of the US government. Below the veneer of the conspiracy the US is still fragile, like any other nation vulnerable to attack. The body grotesque manifests through the interweaving of the two conspiracies, that of the destruction of the towers and the soiling of the urinal. Puar has explored the images of Bin Laden being penetrated by the Twin Towers as a satirical technique, and this episode is punctuated by references to the defecating body in the colourful description used by the school councillor to describe the faeces in the urinal.⁶³ Its satirical take on the position of the US government also employs the body grotesque, in the staged killing of the founder of 9/11 Truth, which shows a very visceral explosion of brains in the shot to the head delivered by George Bush, presenting the president in a massively exaggerated satirical light. The Hartley boys are characterised in a sexually perverse way, where their clues used to solve the mystery allude to an erect penis (one of the Hartley boys gets a 'raging' clue). The episode uses these techniques to point towards the incredulity of conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11. Parker and Stone, in the episode commentary, speak candidly about their distaste for conspiracy theories.⁶⁴ Instead of rationally debunking the 9/11 Truth movement, they decided the best way to counter their arguments was to 'bring it all back down to a turd'.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued for geopolitical engagement with vulgar, ambivalent humour. The aim was to contribute to debates in geopolitics regarding the

importance of bodily, vulgar humour and affect as a site where geopolitics is negotiated and experienced ambiguously. By analysing *South Park*, I have demonstrated the continued importance of culturally mediated representations of geopolitics, not for their traditional satirical role of resisting hegemony, but instead for their vulgarity and ability to distort the entrenched political divisions that stifle contemporary political engagement. This is not to say that *South Park* is a product of cultural relativism, bereft of any moral compass. It is often obvious that Parker and Stone disagree with a particular viewpoint, idea or situation, and adopt a particular stance upon issues (as is clear from their position on 9/11 conspiracy theorists). Nor is this to say *South Park* does not engage in traditional satirical techniques. Instead, I have deployed Bakhtinian concepts of the carnival and the body grotesque to suggest that the value of politically ambivalent humour is twofold.

First, the body grotesque dissolves distinctions between high and low culture, reducing politics to the excretions of the human body. This is a powerful method of negotiating and contesting geopolitical debates by linking them to the corporeal vulnerability that all individuals share.⁶⁵ Rather than debasing the value of the political satire, the paper has suggested that gross, bodily humour is an important way of engaging ambivalent, satirical critiques that are worthy of further analysis. This draws from a history of satirical shows such as *Spitting Image* that focus on defaming the body of politicians, rather than their ideas. While *South Park* does often engage in more sophisticated ridiculing of ideas, individuals and situations, its conflation with the body grotesque is a novel way of making satire indeterminate and open. Second, through its continual recourse to commonalities of the body and bodily fluids that so gripped Captain Mandrake in *Dr Strangelove: or How I Learnt to Love the Bomb*, the body grotesque invokes affective reactions, both offensive and humorous in its audiences and individuals. These are translated into emotions of disgust, shock, effrontery, but also humour at the temerity of the depictions. All viewers bring some degree of political engagement to *South Park*, which suggest the ongoing importance of analysing both the source of humour and affective dimensions of laughter that the body grotesque generates. This reaffirms feminist concerns with the body as a geopolitical site of analysis, and provides an outlet from analysing sophisticated political satire and its role in reinforcing or resisting hegemony.

This leads to an important implication for vulgar political humour. Because of its refusal to align itself to any particular ideology or politics, *South Park* often celebrates the messy, contradictory and evolving nature of political situations through absurdity and vulgar humour. The show points to the contradictions, complexities and chaotic nature of contemporary geopolitics. The emphasis on multiple readings and interpretations of the plot dissolves the binary between self/other that is often reinforced by traditional satire. *South Park* repeatedly leaves us scratching our heads, working through the

lack of finitude in the plot and contradictory subtexts. The value of the body grotesque in *South Park* highlights that scholars of geopolitics should not shy away from humour that is not explicitly (geo)political, but instead probe deeper into its ambiguity and vulgarity that has affected audiences worldwide.

While I have focussed on a satirical show, it is hopefully clear that politically ambivalent humour extends beyond the world of television, media and satire into the world of affective, mundane engagements. The body grotesque could also be extended to genres designed to elicit affective reactions by destroying and mutilating bodies, a technique not yet examined by geopolitical scholarship.⁶⁶ Alternatively, scholars could examine how vulgar and ambiguous humour was used to combat the terrifying fear of imagined nuclear cataclysm and perceived failure of world politics during the Cold War.⁶⁷ Recent political engagement and protest⁶⁸ increasingly encompasses a differentiated mass of vague populist disaffection,⁶⁹ indicating that ambivalent and lewd humour has the potential to engage political sensibilities that are apathetic to the conduct of formal politics, yet active in other ways.

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Notes

1. Many groups have tried to censor *South Park*, but have often failed in the US. More success has been had abroad, see for example, C. Baldwin, 'Bid to ban Extremist U.S. Cartoon', *Reuters*, 8 Sep. 2008, available at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/09/08/us-southpark-odd-idUSL869731820080908>>.
2. The PTC's board of eleven directors include one black and ethnic minority member who is also a member of the NAACP; <<http://w2.parentstv.org/main/About/BoardOfDirectors.aspx>>.
3. H. Freeman, 'The Book of Mormon: Not for the Easily Offended', *Guardian*, 4 Jan. 2013, available at <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jan/04/book-of-mormon-stone-parker>>.
4. See A. Bridgeman, 'FCC Complaints Against South Park that Will Enrage You', available at <<http://www.dorkly.com/article/60415/fcc-complaints-against-south-park-that-will-enrage-you>>.
5. See S. Dalby, P. Routledge, and G. Tuathail (eds.), *The Geopolitics Reader*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge 2006) for a typology of different fields of analysis in critical geopolitics.
6. K. Dodds and P. Kirby, 'It's Not a Laughing Matter: Critical Geopolitics, Humour and Unlaughter', *Geopolitics*, 18/1 (2013) pp. 45–59.

7. K. Glynn and J. Cupples, 'Negotiating and Queering US Hegemony in TV Drama: Popular Geopolitics and Cultural Studies', *Gender, Place & Culture* 2/22 (2014) p. 271.
8. E. P. Nicley, 'Placing Blame or Blaming Place? Embodiment, Place and Materiality in Critical Geopolitics', *Political Geography* 28 (2009) p. 21.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
10. J. Dittmer, 'Humour at the Model United Nations: The Role of Laughter in Constituting Geopolitical Assemblages', *Geopolitics* 18/3 (2013) pp. 493–513.
11. The questions as to whether or not satire has any transformative potential is hotly debated. See a TED talk discussion on the value of satire available at <http://www.ted.com/conversations/6205/what_role_does_satire_play_in.html>, as well as L. Colletta, 'Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart', *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42/5 (2009) pp. 856–874.
12. P. Simpson, *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a Stylistic Model of Satirical Humour* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing 2003).
13. K. Dodds, 'Steve Bell's Eye: Cartoons, Geopolitics and the Visualization of the 'War on Terror'', *Security Dialogue* 38/2 (2007) pp. 157–177.
14. G. Ó Tuathail, 'An Anti-geopolitical Eye: Maggie O'Kane in Bosnia, 1992–93', *Gender, Place & Culture* 3/2 (1996) pp. 171–186.
15. D. H. Monro, *Argument of Laughter* (University of Notre Dame Press 1963).
16. H. Spencer, *The Physiology of Laughter* (London: Macmillan 1860).
17. V. Tsakona and D. E. Popa, *Studies in Political Humour: In Between Political Critique and Public Entertainment*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing 2011) p. 11.
18. Dodds, 'Steve Bell's Eye' (note 13) p. 114.
19. K. Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007) p. 93.
20. J. Dittmer, 'Captain America in the News: Changing Mediascapes and the Appropriation of a Superhero', *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics* 3/2 (2012) pp. 143–157.
21. South Park was banned in Sri Lanka for its depictions of Buddha snorting cocaine, and the creators have received death threats for their depictions of Muhammed. See G. Tate, 'The 10 Most Politically Controversial TV Shows of All Time', *Guardian*, 3 Sep. 2014, available at <<http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2014/sep/03/the-10-most-politically-controversial-tv-shows-of-all-time>>. There have been threats made against Trey Parker, Matt Stone and *Comedy Central* that have fortunately never translated into physical violence.
22. Particularly salient here is season 9 episode 14, entitled *Bloody Mary*, which is about a statue of the Virgin Mary which 'miraculously' bleeds out of its rectum. It was deliberately aired on 7 December on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. This episode caused offence with the Catholic League, who demanded an immediate apology; see 'Virgin Mary Defiled on South Park', available at <<http://www.catholicleague.org/virgin-mary-defiled-on-south-park/>>.
23. D. Purcell, M. S. Brown, and M. Gokmen, 'Achmed the Dead Terrorist and Humor in Popular Geopolitics', *GeoJournal* 75/4 (2009) pp. 373–385.
24. K. Glynn and J. Cupples (note 7).
25. Important interventions from feminist geographies include V. A. Massaro and J. Williams, 'Feminist Geopolitics', *Geography Compass* 7/8 (2013) pp. 67–88; J. Sharp, 'Geography and Gender: Finding Feminist Political Geographies', *Progress in Human Geography* 31/3 (2007) pp. 381–387; and R. Pain and S. J. Smith, *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life* (Aldershot, Hants, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2008). These have emphasised the lived, everyday experiences of geopolitics and the multiple scales (including the body) that geopolitics can be experienced through.

26. J. Fall, 'Embodied Geographies, Naturalised Boundaries, and Uncritical Geopolitics in La Frontière Invisible', *Environment and Planning. D, Society and Space* 24/5 (2006) pp. 653–669.
27. H. Macpherson, 'I don't Know Why They Call it the Lake District They Might as Well Call it the Rock District!' The Workings of Humour and Laughter in Research with Members of Visually Impaired Walking Groups', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26/6 (2008) pp. 1080–1095.
28. Dodds and Kirby (note 6) p. 57.
29. Dittmer, 'Humour' (note 10).
30. J. Dittmer and N. Gray, 'Popular Geopolitics 2.0: Towards New Methodologies of the Everyday', *Geography Compass* 4/11 (2010) pp. 1664–1677.
31. S. Carter and D. McCormack, 'Geopolitical Images and Affectivity', in MacDonald, R. Hughes, and K. Dodds (eds.), *Observant States: Geopolitics and Visual Culture* (London and New York: IB Tauris & Co Ltd 2010) p. 107.
32. G. Ryle and D. Dennett, *The Concept of Mind*, New Ed ed. (London: Penguin Classics 2000) p. 35.
33. J. Ridanpää, 'Geopolitics of Humour: The Muhammed Cartoon Crisis and the Kaltio Comic Strip Episode in Finland', *Geopolitics* 14/4 (2009) pp. 729–749.
34. It takes seventy team members working twenty-two-hour days to complete such a quick turnaround. For more detail see J. Davis, 'Smalltown Heroes: South Park', *Guardian*, 4 April 2009, available at <<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/apr/02/sout-park-matt-stone>>.
35. J. Painter, 'Prosaic Geographies of Stateness', *Political Geography* 25/7 (2006) pp. 752–774.
36. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1984).
37. R. Lachmann, R. Eshelman, and M. Davis, 'Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture', *Cultural Critique* 11 (1988) pp. 115–152.
38. Bakhtin (note 36) p. 7.
39. E. Ravenwood, 'The Innocence of Children: Effects of Vulgarity in South Park', *Comparative Literature and Culture* 1/2 (1999) pp. 1–12.
40. Ibid.
41. N. Ruck, 'Some Historical Dimensions of the 'Dialogical Body': From Bakhtin's Dialogical Grotesque Body to the Monological Body of Modernity', *Psychology & Society* 2/1 (2001) p. 11.
42. Eagleton, T 'Bakhtin, Schopenhauer, Kundera' in K. Hirschkop and D. Shepherd (eds.), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2001) p. 229.
43. D. D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol, and Status in Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1998) p. 5.
44. J. Gao, 'Deleuze's Conception of Desire', *Deleuze Studies* 7/3 (2013) p. 408.
45. Bakhtin (note 36) p. 11.
46. Ibid., p. 7.
47. W. Irwin, *The Ultimate South Park and Philosophy: Respect My Philosophah!*, ed. by R. Arp and K. S. Decker (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons 2013).
48. J. K. Puar, 'Mapping US Homonormativities', *Gender, Place & Culture* 13 (2006) p. 80.
49. See Ott, B. 'The Pleasure of South Park, an Experiment in Media Erotics', in J. A. Weinstock (ed.), *Taking South Park Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2008) pp. 39–59; and B. Franklyn, *Towards a Theory of Postmodern Humour: South Park as Carnavalesque Postmodern Narrative Impulse* (Waikato, New Zealand: The University of Waikato 2006).

50. A. Halsall, 'Bigger, Longer, Uncut: South Park and the Carnavalesque', in J. A. Weinstock (ed.), *Taking South Park Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2008) pp. 23–39.
51. Ibid.
52. S. Hoggart, 'What David Cameron said to Steve Bell', *Guardian*, 9 Oct. 2010, available at <<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2010/oct/09/simon-hoggart-diary>>.
53. M. DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London and New York: Continuum 2006).
54. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd. 2004).
55. See discussion of the vulgar in queer theory and discrimination in the social sciences against vulgar language in R. Attwood, 'When it Comes to Pornography, Vulgar Humanities Are Happy to talk Turkey', *Times Higher Education*, 12 Nov. 2009, available at <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/when-it-comes-to-pornography-vulgar-humanities-are-happy-to-talk-turkey/409059.article>>. Also see J. Gardiner, 'South Park, Blue Men, Anality, and Market Masculinity', *Men and Masculinities* 2 (2000) pp. 251–271.
56. J. S. Passel and R. Suro, 'Rise, Peak and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992–2004', *Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project*, available at <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2005/09/27/rise-peak-and-decline-trends-in-us-immigration-1992-2004/>>.
57. For a discussion of the idea of social/somatic connections, see W. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2002).
58. Internet meme popularity examined in terms of trends on Google, accessible at 'Google Trends – Web Search Interest – Worldwide, 2004–Present', available at <<http://www.google.com/trends/explore?hl=en-US>>.
59. Dittmer and Gray (note 30).
60. J. Bynner and S. Ashford, 'Politics and Participation: Some Antecedents of Young People's Attitudes to the Political System and Political Activity', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 24/2 (1994) pp. 223–236.
61. It would be impossible to address all the themes relating to racism, anti-Semitism and other discrimination that arise in *South Park* in one paper. One poignant theme is related to Cartman's immediate accusation of Kyle, whose identity as 'the Jew' is enough to arouse Cartman's racially charged misgivings about threats to America. Cartman's attempts to exterminate Kyle and the Jewish population in general are recurring themes of the show.
62. L. Jones, 'The Commonplace Knowledge of Geopolitical Conspiracy', *Geography Compass* 6/1 (2012) pp. 44.
63. Some of these expressions include 'fudgedragon', 'mudmonkey' and graphic descriptions of the process of defecating into a urinal.
64. The creator's commentary is available at <<http://southpark.cc.com/clips/f71pyn/creator-commentary-mystery-of-the-urinal-deuce>>.
65. V. A. Massaro and J. Williams, 'Feminist Geopolitics', *Geography Compass* 7/8 (2013) pp. 567–577.
66. An discussion of explicitly political horror stories can be found at J. E. Shepherd, 'The 10 Best Political Cult Horror Films Ever', *AlterNet*, 2010, available at <http://www.alternet.org/story/148830/the_10_best_political_cult_horror_films_ever>.
67. D. C. Jolivet, *British Art in the Nuclear Age* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2014).

68. Discussions of Apathy and the growing success of comedian Russell Brand directly invoke a sense of political apathy and therefore abstinence from formal political mechanisms; see more at S. Wilks-Heeg and D. Ellis, 'The State of a politically Ambivalent Nation', *openDemocracy*, 2010, available at <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/stuart-wilks-heeg-dave-ellis/state-of-politically-ambivalent-nation>>. Also see G. Arnett, 'Is Russell Brand Right? Are We Disenchanted by Politics?', *Guardian*, 20 Feb. 2014, available at <<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/feb/20/is-russell-brand-right-are-we-disenchanted-by-politics>>.
69. Laclau has argued populism is feared due to rationality being equated with the individual. When groups of large undifferentiated protestors congregate, then a clear political goal is ostensibly lost. Ambiguous humour could play an important role in legitimising a variety of differentiated viewpoints that may gather to protest. See E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso 2005) p. 35.