

RECONFIGURING THE 'UNRULY' WOMAN IN BRITISH TV COMEDY

'UNRULINESS' THEN

- TV comedy has typically been androcentric and Americentric, but, in the 2010s, British women such as Michaela Coel and Phoebe Waller-Bridge have been transforming the media landscape in writing and/or performing television comedy that has had a lasting impact on the cultural imagination.

- Such women are typically described as 'unruly,' a term coined by Kathleen Rowe to outline how women in comedy are deemed excessive - too fat, too loud, too old - as well as being associated with dirt, liminality, and taboo via their grotesque bodies (1995). She cites Roseanne Barr and Miss Piggy as prime examples of 'unruly' women.

- However, there have been significant social, cultural, and political changes since 'unruliness' was defined in the 1990s.



SO HOW
CAN WE
DEFINE
THE
'UNRULY'
WOMAN
TODAY?

'UNRULINESS' NOW

In the wake of these changes, I have identified key features of the contemporary 'unruly' woman in Britain. She:

- collaborates with women often - whether it be producers, family, friends, or via professional relationships
- is treated ambivalently by critics/audiences and often discussed in terms of class: a comic British tradition that remains significant to contemporary contexts
- is both 'unruly' in a traditional sense - 'too loud,' 'too much,' and 'over the top' in her texts, but also 'fastidious' in talking back to the industry, creating tightly woven/crafted TV series, and navigating the political landscape with care
- can no longer be defined as simply 'unruly' in the shift from second wave to fourth wave feminism - or reduced to a 'grotesque' body. A blanket application of 'unruliness' is no longer fruitful in the contemporary media landscape concerned with intersectionality

ROSEANNE BARR: ROSEANNE

MISS PIGGY: THE MUPPETS

MICHAELA COEL: CHEWING GUM

PHOEBE WALLER-BRIDGE: FLEABAG



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