

Homo Humour: Metamodernist Acts of Secrecy, Homosexual Identity and Humorous Word Play

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Abstract: This chapter demonstrates how I have worked with humour and the mechanisms of comedy in both my practice as a curator and an artist influenced by metamodernist thinking working across visual art, performance, and filmic forms. These examples show how gay men have a specific skill at using humourous word play performatively. The chapter begins with a discussion about my current curatorial moving image project *Homo Humour* (2020 - now) and then highlights my solo poetry performance *Clever at Seeing Without Being Seen* (2021) and several of my own short poetry films. The chapter concludes with discussion about how I have worked creatively with the gay slang language of Polari.

Keywords: metamodernism, queer cinema, queer humour, performance poetry, queer writing

Resumo: Este capítulo demonstra como trabalhei com o humor e os mecanismos da comédia na minha prática enquanto curador e artista influenciado pelo pensamento metamodernista, trabalhando com artes visuais, performance e formas fílmicas. Os exemplos mostram como os homens homossexuais têm uma capacidade específica para utilizar performativamente o jogo de palavras humorístico. O capítulo começa com uma discussão sobre o meu atual projeto de curadoria de imagens em movimento *Homo Humour* (2020 - até ao presente) e, em seguida, destaca a minha performance de poesia a solo *Clever at Seeing Without Being Seen* (2021) e várias das minhas curtas-metragens de poesia. O capítulo conclui com uma discussão sobre a forma como trabalhei criativamente com a linguagem gay chamada de Polari.

Palavras-chave: metamodernismo, cinema queer, humor queer, performance poética, escrita queer

INTRODUCTION: Storytelling, Secrecy and Subversion



Fig. 1. *Eye, Eye, I, I* by Lee Campbell, Drawing pins and mixed media on canvas (2000)

In the introduction to the catalogue of the *A Secret Service - Art, Compulsion, Concealment* - exhibition held at the Hayward Gallery in London in 2006 that focused on the construction of private worlds or the exposure of hidden facts, Richard Grayson writes:

This increased currency of the very idea of the secret, the unknown and the unknowable, and its spread between categories - spiritual, political and social - means that the autonomous areas that we have enjoyed as individuals - personal, subjective and secret - are increasingly interrogated by the social and the politic. (Grayson 2006: 3)

I was intrigued by the exhibition to see how artists from today and the past, ranging from Kurt Schwitters to Tehching Hsieh, Sophie Calle, Susan Hiller, and Mike Nelson, have responded to ideas within Grayson's statement. However, one area that I found missing in the exhibition was the idea of concealing identity by keeping one's sexuality secret and private. In my case, it's my homosexuality. It has become pertinent to my exploration of poetry films and poetry performances and specifically

in terms of how, as a gay man, I often use humorous word play (and specifically slang languages including Polari) within my films and performances to covert what I am saying and potentially address taboo subject matter.

Comedy historically comes from a queer identity defence, when it was harder to be gay in public, to be funny like the British comedian Kenneth Williams who used gay slang Polari (a slang language for gay people when it was illegal to be gay so they had to talk in a coded language) to communicate with other gay men covertly. As a means to express as well as emotionally protect, homosexual men have historically and to this day embraced and used camp, absurdity and a range of comedy forms.

As Elvis Prusic (2023) suggests, queer cinema has been influenced by metamodernism through its exploration of fluid identities, hybrid storytelling techniques, and a nuanced approach to representation.¹ This chapter theorises, articulates and demonstrates through the examples of my practice address how I have worked with humour and the mechanisms of comedy in both my practice as a curator and an artist influenced by metamodernist thinking working across visual art, performance, and filmic forms. These examples show how gay men have a specific skill at using humour performatively and that queer people have to perform and that performance gives one freedom to develop oneself and finding/demanding your place. The chapter begins with **HOMO HUMOUR: Homosexual Life Through Comedy in Film**, a discussion about my current curatorial moving image project *Homo Humour* (2020 - now) to highlight a selection of contemporary gay male artists and filmmakers who use humour to provoke, entertain and educate. This provides a contextual platform for the next discussion, **COVERT OPERATIONS: Storytelling, Slang and Subversion** highlighting my solo poetry performance *Clever at Seeing Without Being Seen* (2021) and several of my own short poetry films that have featured in the *Homo Humour* showreel which combine both humour, storytelling, covert operations (acts of secrecy) and word play involving various slang languages. Films discussed in this section include *Covert Operation* (2023), *Reclaiming my Voice* (2022) and *The Tale of Benny Harris* (2022). The third and final section, **BONA POLARI: Filth, Flamboyance and Fun in Gay Slang Polari** begins with a socio-historical overview of the gay slang language of Polari which helps frame a discussion around how my films *The Tale of Benny Harris* (2022) and *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023) have been used as catalysts for discussion during a Polari history and creative writing workshop that I have designed and delivered across the U.K since 2022.

HOMO HUMOUR: Homosexual Life Through Comedy in Film

Extending my portfolio of curating exhibitions and events exploring comedy and humour,² *Homo Humour* is a two-part project that I have curated since 2020

comprising a one-hour curated programme of short films by gay male artists and filmmakers, from all over the world and its discussion between curator, audience, filmmakers and invited speakers.



Fig. 2. *Homo Humour* promotional poster canvas (2023)

Homo Humour explores the history of comedy as a queer identity defence, a means of expression and storytelling and the subversive and surprising ways that humour can be used on screen. The showreel has been touring internationally for over three years and on each screening, a modified iteration, moving away from the conventional and narrative driven to the more experimental, transgressive and avant-garde in terms of how the films are made. Screenings have taken place throughout the year raising visibility beyond LGBT History and Pride months, countering the idea that we somehow only come out of the closet in February and June. Whilst queer film festivals such as BFI Flare contain programmes of queer humour as part of wider thematic programmes, *Homo Humour* responds to the growing interest in queer folk using film and moving image to tell their stories by focusing purely on humour. To share aspects of homosexual life through comedy. Given the surge in the last ten years of queer film festivals, there is clearly a desire for queer people to get their voices out and let their stories be heard. It could be argued that a lot of queer films are very representational and serious which is why humour in terms of queer representation should be celebrated. *Homo Humour* demonstrates how gay male culture has employed humour and comedy as strategies to challenge, transgress, subvert and rebel, offering compelling ways of using humour as an artistic, disruptive, cathartic and transgressive act. Through its screening and discussion, narratives can

be challenged, opinions changed, and active bystanders and allies created. Telling our stories through film and self-representing ourselves, many of the stories shared in the showreel get away from the view that we as queer people have to present ourselves in a very 'safe' way and not always about celebratory things, it's about struggle - disowned by our families, homophobia, etc. and also discrimination within the gay community itself e.g. gay men body shaming other gay men. In its current iteration *Homo Humour* includes Swiss director Marcel Borelli's *Dans La Nature (In Nature)* (2021) about homosexuality amongst animals, Australian director Jake Shannon's *Sammy the Salmon* (2018) an absurdist comedy about a man who is helped by a talking salmon to come to terms with his sexual identity, British artist Jordan McKenzie's *Monsieur Poo-Pourri Takes a Tour of His Estate* (2010), a short film featuring a hobby horse and the artist dressed up as jockey riding the horse through the estate he lives on in London, American artist Steve Reinke's *Cory* (1994) about a guy writing a letter to his pen pal Cory, a bowling champion, Ernesto Sarezale's *2020: Lockdown Erotica* (2020) about intimacy during lockdown, Hamid Waheed's *I Wanna Write You Love Songs* (2017) on observations in the field of lying down, dying and love, American filmmaker Charlie Steers' *I'm Not Chris Hemsworth* (2022) - a ridiculous comedy fantasia that parodies the mistaken identity trope with a surprise musical twist, British filmmaker Craig Ford's *The Green Eyed Monster* (2022). Also included is American artist Wrik Mead's *How to Clean Your Closet* (2022) which celebrates the sexy dirtiness of the queer closet where glitched clips from adult films are combined with instructions about closet cleanliness brings delightful irony and sensual pleasure to this hidden space. And finally, a changing carousel of my own films (discussed in more depth in the next section) including *Camp-Belle* (2022) - an experimental poetry film based on my alter-ego (Camp-Belle is a word pun of my surname Campbell)³ and *The Tale of Benny Harris* (2022). Through the language of Polari—historically used by gay men in Britain to communicate covertly—this short film tells a story that subverts masculinity & identity.⁴

The project was first presented in Miami in January 2020 bringing together emerging and established gay male artists and filmmakers for the first time from all over the world. Upon the success of the first screening in Miami, the project then was part of *Sardinia Pride Online* in June 2020 where I invited the showreel filmmakers to take part in Zoom question and answer discussions as lockdown really highlighted feelings of isolation and how much we need each other as a community. Rejuvenating the project in early 2022 was a refreshed showreel of films, moving away from the more conventional, narrative-driven films to the much more experimental. Still raising awareness and visibility of queer issues, the drive towards the experimental was to show issues facing gay men not in a straightforward, linear, or literal kind of way. In the first physical screening since lockdown taking place at METAL, Southend-on-Sea, in February 2022 we spoke about the strange psychology of how laughter works and

the social/group mechanics at work with experiencing comedy/humour. The feeling of watching this refreshed set of films in the physical space after not being able to due to Covid-19 restrictions was quite exhilarating, actually hearing people laugh in the real world. Laughter is infectious, when one person laughs, others feel inclined to laugh with them. An audience member remarked that Steve Reinke's *Cory* (1994) was a reminder that the films within the showreel were not just from different countries but from time periods too (Reinke's film was made in 1994). The film prompted the audience member to recall the dawn of Internet culture and how that has changed relationships. The film reminded her of the weird anonymous relationships that could be had with people over MSN and how these would turn into a pen pal. The audience member commented, 'I wonder what Cory is doing now. Is he still good looking!?'.

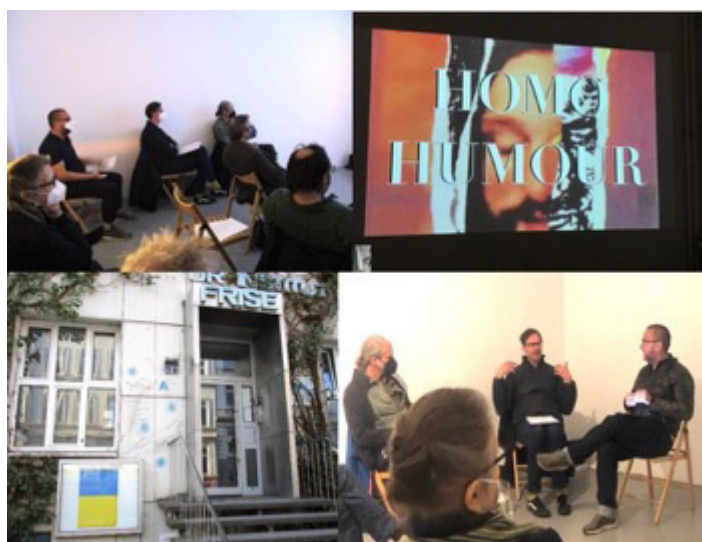


Fig. 3. *Homo Humour* screening and discussion at FRISE, Hamburg, Germany (2022)

In the next screening at FRISE in Hamburg, Germany in March 2022, Stefan Moos led a discussion that encouraged the audience to think about how humour can make a (difficult) situation welcoming, that there's an accessibility with humour and that the showreel does not use (academic) language to exclude some audiences. He suggested that films like that of Jordan McKenzie's included in the showreel demonstrate how humour can break down classist, ableist barriers. Jordan's high camp usage of the hobby horse toy in the film, Stefan suggested, was a gesture of flipping absurdist classist narratives that British society has and turning those on their head and making fun of hierarchies. It was mentioned throughout the discussion that how I work with repetition in my films in the reel underlines how

the more something is repeated, the more different elements can be noticed, and humour can often come through that breaking down. In this sense, I am queering language; if you say something once it goes but say that something again and again and something new emerges. This idea also punched upon a section of the discussion that reflected upon the absurdity in Harold Offeh's film in terms of its duration and that the longer it goes on you start spotting these little details as you cognitively going over what's going on and the film becomes more absurd. The humour in attention. A central theme running through all of this discussion was the relationship between gay people and using humour as a means of survival; as we (LGBTQ+ folk) are growing up, we develop quick humour as a coping mechanism, we shield ourselves against some of the behaviour we receive from people. This theme was also prevalent during the next screening of the showreel at Open Eye gallery in Liverpool in May 2022 where Greg Thorpe led the discussion. Greg encouraged the audience to reflect upon gay humour as a 'trope, as a survival tactic, as a mode of making' going on to suggest:

Gay men bond through a shared usage of humour in order to survive. We are funny because we have to be. It's very empowering to be funny especially if you are outsider or an ostracised person, you can neutralise conflict and bullying and win people over and charm your way into safety. Your survival is incumbent on you being able to do that.⁵

After the screening in Liverpool, I presented a reflective presentation of the project so far at *Queer Pedagogies* conference in Florence at the end of May 2022. Whilst Professor Benno Gammerl acknowledged my referral of gay humour as a coping mechanism/survival tactic, he highlighted an alternative side of gay humour – the ugly and dangerous side of gay humour. 'I remember being scared of the wits by some members of the gay community in Berlin in the 1990s', he recalled, 'a biting humour, an exclusive humour, a humour that actually ridicules people. I experienced it as very problematic and dangerous. It scared me a lot. I remember that very clearly. That ambivalent and also problematic side of gay humour'. In response, I mentioned that I am also aware of this problematic usage of humour by some gay men and how certain subsets of gay subculture promote themselves as generating inclusive spaces whilst containing aspects that discriminate. I also think that gay humour can have a very nasty side, a cruel form of empathy. I referred to my work as laying myself bare using cultural expressions to talk about queerness as a community and speak of its challenges, pressures, pros and the cons etc. The gay male subcultural milieu needs critique – it creates such stereotypes and needs being ripped into/ripped apart. I use the mechanisms of comedy and humour to engage, disarm, and highlight the gay male subcultural milieu of how the certain subsets in the gay male community body shame other gay men, including me. The gay male community is

very controlling about what you should look like and how you should behave – why is the community stereotyping itself?



Fig. 4. Lee Campbell, *Spinach and Eggs*. 2021. Promotional poster.



Fig. 5. *BEARS AND CUBS DON'T JUST LIVE IN THE FOREST* (2020) by Lee Campbell
Marker pen on paper 420x594mm

I gave the example of my poetry films *Spinach and Eggs* (2021) and *Bears with Bananas and Bubbles in their Boxers* (2022)⁶ which talk about how the gay male community is very controlling about what you should look like and how you should behave and in doing so, use humour to make fun of those who do not fit into its ideals around body image. I read out these lines from *Bears with Bananas and Bubbles in their Boxers*:

*I remember my first time in The King's Arms pub
Where I soon learnt gay men can be labelled 'bear' or 'cub'
Surely, it's time to turn the tables
on gay male body shaming and this obsession with labels?
Men seeing and being seen. Brother to brother
But their labelling whilst cruising is bruising each other
Burst the bubbles, ease the troubles
Let's build a love for our own bodies out of the rubble*

My film *Spinach and Eggs* (2021) contains repeated use of gay male slang: 'bears' (a hairy plus size man) and 'cubs' (a younger bear) referring to the body shapes and age groups. At the start of the poem, I include the line 'At the Kings Arms pub in London's Soho, I discovered bears and cubs don't just live in the forest'. I also say things in a 'roundabout way' e.g. I substitute saying the word 'anus hole' for 'the hole at the back of the top of my legs' when I talk about a guy who I thought was chatting me up (seducing me) in the Kings Arms pub in Soho years ago but actually was ridiculing and 'intimidating' me:

*Through his Bacardi and coke and cigarette smoke,
this excuse for a bloke cracked joke after joke.
(He said)
'Blue eyed boy Lee, I love your dark hairy legs
Shame the rest of your frame is like pie from Greggs
Be more like me, on spinach and eggs
You can't be a cub, you're far too old!
Put those legs out on show if you want to get sold!'
I'm getting quite tripped
on these bodies all ripped
Imagine mine stripped
and everything flipped
Mr Spinach and Eggs,
stick your rules and regs
in the hole*

*at the back
of the top of my legs!*

Becoming more and more increasingly aware as a gay man of ideals of body image that the gay male community puts on itself (the endless repetitive chants throughout the film: FIT, FAT, FIT, FAT, FIT, FAT). Reminiscent of early guerrilla protest video art from the 1980s, this film employs protest art, repeated obsessive chanting (NO BODY SHAME!, NO BODY SHAME!) within ACT UP and queer movements, of political campaign, including my own drawings of my own body, and visual techniques used throughout Marlon Riggs' *Voices United* (1989). The narrative poetry highlights identity labelling and stereotyping within the gay male community, a subculture that can be very elitist and ends up reproducing the violence that it claims to be escaping. There is so much humour in this work to critique and at times parody; using humour to address really complex issues here related to mental health because of increasing body image demands in the gay community and within society at large. A shadow of my disembodied fist performing moving up and down repeatedly again and again and again and again; the fist is the spoken language of violence (Figure 6) of my anger/frustration.



Fig. 6. Lee Campbell (dir.) *Spinach and Eggs* (2021)

In 2023, *Homo Humour* screened in a range of U.K venues including in Folkestone, Balham Library and London Metropolitan University where discussion chair Sebastian Cordoba shared that he felt that he had been on an emotional journey starting with the playfulness with the animals at the beginning then jealousy and loneliness then thinking about different personas, queering the context you are in and the kind of persona you bring in and then the scary sense of the monster alongside the sexiness

and playfulness of that as well as the sense of release at the end with the usage of the graphic and the imagination which for him had a lot of playfulness. One audience member (Brian Tutt) commented:

What I enjoyed was the range of different forms – films that are entirely dialogue-less, films where visually very little is happening, a couple which are essentially monologues and very verbal. Lee's poetry films are very inventive verbally demonstrating humour can verbal and visual and a combination of both.

Understanding through research how my work situates itself within the historical and contemporary context of gay artists and filmmakers who use humour and comedy in subversive ways within their practices to share their personal stories, I soon learnt by watching a diverse range of work whilst producing a lot of short films myself during mid to late 2019, how the concept of humour can be strategically deployed to help people sort through issues attached to the LGBTQ+ community as an interesting (and vital) thesis and world to explore, Not just for those in film school but those interested in storytelling in general. Then wanting to curate a selection of the films I had seen alongside a selection of my own films in early 2020, I applied this learning to how I approached designing Homo Humour as a project that not only seeks to engage wider groups of artists, academics and students interested in film and/or the study of humour but also seeks to engage health/inclusion/wellbeing practitioners who are interested in how comedic storytelling may encourage people's understanding of LGBTQ+ communities. In the next section of this paper, I discuss how I have also applied this learning to my own practice as a poetry filmmaker.

COVERT OPERATIONS: Storytelling, Slang and Subversion

As an artist/provocateur, I define my artistic practice as playing with the parameters of contemporary art practice by focusing on the performative and the filmic. Underpinning how I use language to create scenarios that explore the poetics and slippages (Derrida 1979) of language is how I skilfully play with language and words in their excessive repetition. Using repetition in excess is to provoke humour by using repetition as a mechanism of comedy. I work with the autoethnographic act of storytelling to subvert and challenge the sophisticated usage of slang, camp, innuendo and double-entendres to speak of personal narratives that are often raw, painful but generous and authentic.



Fig. 7. Lee Campbell, *Clever at Seeing without Being Seen*. 2021. Promotional poster

Clever at Seeing without being Seen (2021) is a live solo performance I perform via Zoom combining performance art, moving imagery, and spoken word poetry.⁷ I explore the possibilities of media re-use, feeding-back and looping round of text, and the layering of voices. It is a multi-layered multimedia socio-creative live Zoom performance of a colourful, immersive, textured, organic and disorienting montage of young queer experience told through my autobiography. It is a sharp and poignant evocation of my feelings which are so common to discovering my own sexuality in adolescence. As a teenager, one does not really know who you are. For me too, it was a self-reflection - a journey through identity and a ‘this is what it was like’ to come to terms with my homosexuality; of me finding somebody attractive (men) but not really knowing what I am. I spoke my personal truth in the performance.



Fig. 8. Lee Campbell, *Clever at Seeing without Being Seen*. 2021.
Live Zoom performance

The performance is an attempt at nailing a specific talent queer people need to acquire, the title. As I state in the performance, LGBT people, including myself as a gay man, across the world, are ‘very clever, very clever at seeing, without being seen’. That way, it’s an attempt at exploring visibility and the politics of seeing as well not seeing. For example, the double of the term ‘tackle’ in my poetry performance *Clever at Seeing Without Being Seen* (2021), one meaning of the term ‘tackle’ is to challenge an opponent and the other meaning in British slang is a man’s penis. I state:

Football with my dad
Chelsea v Arsenal
Dad watched the match
I watched the players
Dad remembers the midfielder’s tackle
I remember the midfielder’s tackle
Balls and sports
Men in shorts
Football with Dad, both happy and sad
Dad watching one way, me quite the other
Nothing beats a good tackle when seen undercover

The humour in my films and the poems is also related to the nostalgia of me looking back to my experiences. It is only now, 30 years later after my teenage experiences that I speak about in my performances and films such as *Clever at Seeing without being Seen* (2021) and *Covert Operations* (2022) in retrospect of my actions of concealing my sexuality. A friend who watched a selection of these films recently suggested to me that the discomfort of observing myself and finding something funny about it is really interesting. His observation was that my work operates between discomfort, humour and seriousness. ‘Would it have been really so bad if your parents or friends discovered you were gay? They probably knew anyway!’, he said.

I view humour as a tactic to subvert and challenge the issues of homosexual identity and its representation in relation to the themes addressing seeing/not seeing etc. My films, *Covert Operations* (2022), *The Tale of Benny Harris* (2022) and *Reclaiming my Voice* (2022) offer different ways of understanding how gay people have developed ‘covert operations’ to conceal their identities.⁸ I drew upon my own experiences while looking at other’s lives. The poetry adds humour and critique to the imagery and sounds the audience sees/hears. I have chosen the first film *Covert Operations* as it specifically talks about homosexual desire in relation to secret acts of viewing, gazing and associated terms for ‘seeing’. This film is grounded in personal experience, and whilst factual, does contain elements of fiction, which nevertheless

are based on real-life personal experiences. The second film, *The Tale of Benny Harris* offers a different perspective on secret acts of homosexual desire by focusing upon listening, hearing and verbal communication gay men used to have with each other in the past using gay slang Polari. Rather than focusing on my experience, I focus on the experience of other gay men from a specific period in history when Polari was the only way men could communicate with each other without fear of being arrested. The third film, *Reclaiming my Voice* combines aspects of the first and the second films. It begins with me talking about looking at my friend and realising I found him sexually attractive, but the emphasis of the film is on the voice and how I felt I needed to change my voice so that others would not realise that I was gay. The film ends with self-acceptance of my voice as a form of both emancipation and self-reclamation.



Fig. 9. Lee Campbell, *Covert Operations* (2022). Promotional poster

Covert Operations was made using my drawings, paintings, and sound and moving image spanning more than 25 years. It is about sharing my personal stories as a gay man, and the different ways I have had to navigate my homosexuality through ‘covert operations’. It charts difficult and awkward situations at high school. Juxtaposing the politics and practices of cruising and spaces of production, a section of this film also explores some of the complexities involved in men looking for men. Not just about going around looking for men in cruising spots like in the woods or public toilets but also looking for men on the internet and telephone chat lines, and in particular at work. I draw upon my own personal experience of fancying a guy on the train on the London Underground in 1993. A playful reflection on everyday temporary and fleeting pornographic encounters and temporary acts of looking, desiring, and fantasising that are often covert. The constant blowing and bouncing around of a balloon stands in for imagined (homo) sexual adventure. Using the language of consumerism

(*bargain basement, reduced, top value, sale, blue X*) in the film, the character Bobby spends all day cruising gay dating websites. His character refers to how many gay men put themselves ‘on sale’: the nasty side of cruising: cheapening/ ‘reducing’ yourself/ selling yourself cheap. The fictional characters were also developed around ideas of how the dynamics of cruising produces and constantly reproduces relations.

Covert Operations explores the ways that many queer people have to learn to covertly hide their sexuality very often before and after they realise they are gay/ lesbian/queer etc. This film shares personal stories from my own experience as a gay man, and the different ways I had to navigate my homosexuality growing up through ‘covert operations’ and how some men are forced to lead a ‘double life’, in heterosexual relationships whilst knowing they are gay. Trapped in military like repetitions at work where you see the same people day in day out, everything in these hyper regulated spaces accentuates the desire and need for ‘satisfaction’.



Fig. 10. Lee Campbell (dir.) *Covert Operations* (2022)

Customers always want customer satisfaction, guys cruising always want satisfaction. There are two sides to cruising, two sides to ‘you’ve been matched’: It’s not just about stalking but wanting to be seen – you want to look/be the voyeur and you also want to be seen: the word ‘SEE ME’ written in a font that looks like old computer writing from the 1980s – on repeat reminds us of this. There is also a certain amount of lying: the cruiser as listener and voyeur and the guys the cruiser is cruising as in listening to or looking at both embellish the truth to make themselves more desirable to each other in a bid to get that all important hook-up/have sex. But cruising, like shopping, is a totally unsatisfying experience: we are never satisfied at any point in the process. This section of the film has the message ‘YOU’RE MATCHED, SAY HELLO!’ on repeat. What exactly are you ‘matched’ for? Both Andrew and Mr ‘B.J.’ Bellingham

Jones are closeted homosexuals until B.J (in British slang, BJ stands for ‘blow-job’, oral sex) is discovered having sex with John. But the most complex character here is Andrew, ‘a timid man’, who leads a double life. He is married to a woman and has children but enjoys being the submissive ‘cub’ of an older man, his ‘daddy’, whenever he is able to. As I suggest in the film:

*‘He couldn’t wait to work late
then come a quarter to eight he was out on his date
With his muscular daddy at the Kings Arms pub
Where Andrew loved being daddy’s little boy cub
Spending the hours before, on the draw
Andrew’s fantasies of Daddy in pencil drawing
Hoping that as he was doodling, the manager ignoring’*



Fig. 11. Lee Campbell (dir.) Various stills from *Covert Operations* (2022)

The penultimate section of this film uses both repetition and humour in visual and sonic ways too, at times, to devastating effect. It starts on a river where the tour guide of a riverboat cruise announces that we can see ‘Devil’s Hole’ – ‘hole’ taking on a very different meaning (innuendo for ‘rectum’) when it comes to cruising (Figure 15). The double play on words of the term ‘cruise’ is one of many humorous double-entendres and double meanings (others include ‘ride’, ‘head’, ‘hole’, ‘horn’ included and when these terms are presented on repeat again and again – both heard and seen – they highlight the seedier even dangerous side of gay male cruising. Whilst audiences may or may not pick up on all the many references here, it is intended that they will, at base level, have a sensory/elusive view of the work and that this section of the film. The fictional character of Andrew, the timid office worker who has a ‘double life’ in *Covert Operations*, makes a re-appearance in *The Tale of Benny*

Harris, a poetry film that is an imaginary tale written in Polari – gay slang language. This short film tells the tale of a fictional character whose name is a play on Polari ‘bene aris’, which translates to ‘[a man with a] nice bum’. Whilst Polari is commonly associated with ‘camp’ performers like comedian Kenneth Williams and is as such often considered effeminate. *The Tale of Benny Harris* subverts gender, masculinity and identity, most notably when a ‘butch’ policeman reveals he is gay by speaking in Polari to Benny.

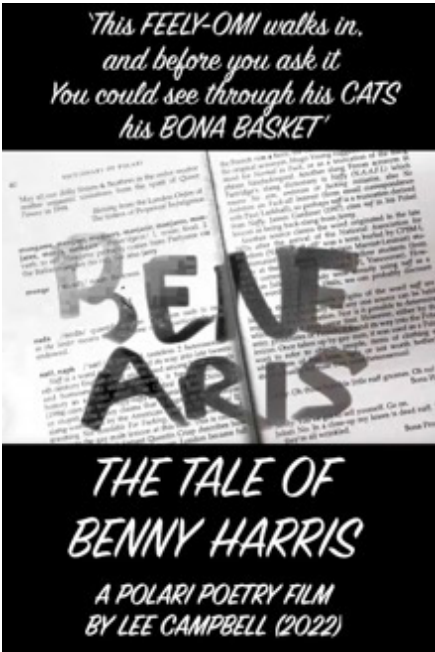


Fig. 12. Lee Campbell, *The Tale of Benny Harris* (2022). Promotional poster

In this section of the film, (before Benny meets the gay policeman) Benny has his eyes on Andrew (referred to as Andy in the film) and the barman gives him some advice. I write:

Benny’s excitement soon ended in scharda (disappointment)
when the barman took him aside and told him to nellyarda (listen)
‘Benny, mais oui, that number is nice to vada (look at)
But take it from me, Andy only tips the brandy (rims as in ‘anal rimming’)
rather than charver an aspro-arva (have sex with a prostitute)
Have a shot of Vera (Vera Lynn – gin) You’ll vada (see) things clearer
She’s (He’s) part time in the life (a part-time homosexual), got chavvy (child) and wife

*Not full time so (homosexual), she parkers the measures (pays money)
to feel what it's like to have omee (homosexual) pleasures*

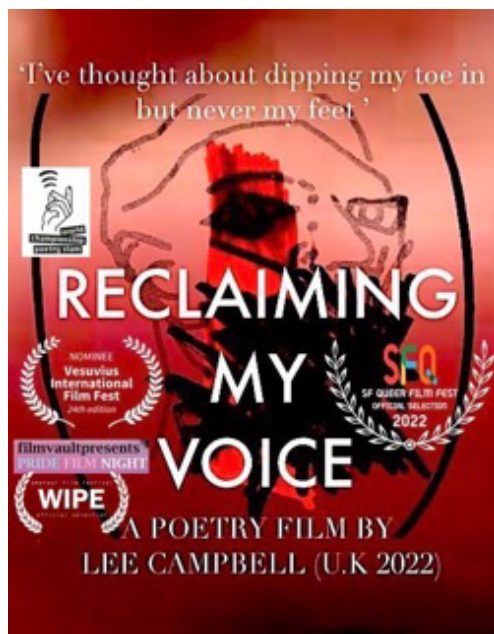


Fig. 13. Lee Campbell (dir.), *Reclaiming my Voice* (2022). Promotional poster.

Throughout *Reclaiming my Voice* (2022), the chant ‘eye-eye’ can be heard. Depending on who the subject of the call is, the ‘eye-eye’ imagery and audio chants can be seen as threatening or flirtatious/provocative in a threatening or flirtatious way. Indeed, one viewer commented that ‘The ‘eye, eye, eye, eye’ sounds like ‘oi, oi, oi, oi’ on repeat, a tease that becomes a threat!’ The film begins with me talking about looking at my friend Danny and realising I found him sexually attractive, but the emphasis of the film is on the voice and how I felt I needed to change my voice so that others would not realise that I was gay. The film ends with self-acceptance of my voice as a form of both emancipation and self-reclamation. The covert operation in this film deals with the difficulty of a teenager gay growing up in a heteronormative environment relates to me trying to disguise. Looking back, I laugh at the ridiculousness and absurdity of me trying to disguise myself in this way:

*Sound manly, act the geezer on my Harley
Hide that in my bedroom, I learnt the language of gay Polari
Be the bloke when I spoke*

'Alright mate', 'Alright Dad'
I tried to sound more 'lad'
When I opened my mouth to speak

The poetry finishes with sharing how I overcame these difficulties and no longer worry about how I act/behave/fear of sounding camp:

My voice no longer haunts me, it liberates
It's no longer me and them
It's we
And so now I choose to open my mouth
and take pride in its texture when I speak

It is important here to reflect upon the appearance of words in these three previous films discussed. The lettering that appears in *Covert Operations*, *The Tale of Benny Harris* and *Reclaiming my Voice* is generated by me screen recording myself creating words using the pen/pencil on my iPad and then using the recording as a green screen layer within the films. I like the way the words reveal themselves: sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly across the screen. They don't just sit on top of the imagery but often become images within themselves.



Fig. 14. Lee Campbell (dir.), *Reclaiming my Voice* (2022)



Fig. 15. Lee Campbell (dir.), *Reclaiming my Voice* (2022)

Especially so, in terms of the way they bleed into the imagery within *Reclaiming my Voice* during the ‘dipping my toe in but never my feet’ section. You can see the words ‘dipping my toe in’ on the screen but only slightly. This corresponds to what I say in the poem, about my straight mate Danny experimenting with his sexuality (‘dipping his toe in’) but not going as far as being a ‘full time full-blown gayboy’. The appearance of the black text on the white background in the following sequence in the film containing the words ‘never my feet’ underlines Danny’s affirmation that he is straight (or so he claims) in black and white. Full stop. Whereas in *Covert Operations*, the double-entendres and word play puns such as ‘tackle’ relate to my experience of hiding my sexuality, and in *The Tale of Benny Harris*, coded language is used by gay men to communicate covertly. The innuendo, double-entendres and word play puns are used by Danny who is a heterosexual straight male who can’t seem to (possibly through his own discomfort) speak directly about homosexuality or having the same sex desire. The usage of cryptolect (coded language) here is reversed. Some of the cryptolect here is the well-known British working-class slang and in other cases (like ‘dipping my toe in’), I have invented for the purposes of the poem:

‘Don’t bother me mate’ he said, ‘that particular street’ (being gay)
But I hope I don’t catch it (discover I am homosexual)
Did you get it from something you eat?
It doesn’t make me gay, I was just having a peek
at the size of Ben’s tackle (penis) whilst he was having a leak
I might listen to Kylie and boogie to Chic
And got a big hard-on (erection) when Ben did a streak
Running stark bollock naked at the footie last week, him running over the pitch when The
Gunners got beat. All of us lads admired the size of his meat (penis)

*But me, a full time full blown gayboy (a guy who has come out as homosexual)
Sure, I've thought about dipping my toe in but never my feet' (experimenting with
homosexuality, with limits)*

BONA POLARI: Filth, Flamboyance and Fun in Gay Slang Polari

'Bona Polari' is gay slang for 'good chat'. Polari is the language of survival. Polari is more than clever plays on words, it is as a political act – 'this is who we are, accept who we are'. In Britain, criminals, prostitutes, and homosexuals all used Polari in different ways. From its earliest origins in the late 1800s to when sex between men was decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967, gay men used Polari in public (mainly in bars and pubs) to communicate things in public that they didn't always want people to know about. Polari hovers between being blunt and not and allows users 'to get away with' being very rude. Historically so, when used in abundance on mainstream radio, for example, by Julian and Sandy, two gay male characters on the BBC radio show *Round the Horne* (which in its heyday got 20 million listeners) when the majority heteronormative listener would be oblivious to the innuendo they were listening to (and laughing at). Polari was never designed to be politically correct. Polari could be said to be a language of contradiction; the language largely allows its users to say things without being obvious yet a man can still call his male lover his husband. Polari is a language that can be played with and can be used to stretch language to its limit almost. Maybe its simplest covert is substituting 'he' for 'she' when a gay man wanted to talk about a man he liked the look of in public.

This final discussion of this chapter begins by exploring the language's sociohistorical significance and delves into aspects of its etymology. Although a language predominantly used in the past when it was (in Britain) illegal to be gay, the paper will share how aspects of Polari are still adopted by the queer community today. The main body of this discussion speaks about how, since early 2022, I have been delivering workshops across the U.K to encourage participants to engage in Polari and write their own Polari.



Fig. 16. Promotional material for Bona Polari workshop at Belfast Pride 2023



Fig. 17. Bona Polari workshop at Liverpool Pride 2023

The workshop begins with a screening of my poetry film *The Tale of Benny Harris* to stimulate discussion around how Polari can be seen as a playful yet sophisticated disruption of language in terms of grammar, syntax and structure. What I really like

about Polari is a language that the oppressed (gay men) came up with to put those that were the oppressor in the position that they didn't understand what was going on – a response to that but when it's flipped it's almost like an aggressive use of language i.e., an exclusionary usage of language.

Melting Pot: Polari's etymology and usage

Polari in its current version started in the 19th century. Its precursors include thieves' cant (a cryptolect used by criminals in the 17th and 18th centuries), lingua franca used by sailors and those in maritime industries, and also words from Romany primarily transmitted through carnivals and festivals because a lot of theatre at the time was involved with carnivals which moved around Britain. The language was a colourful melting pot of all kinds of influences with different versions spread by the sailors. There is also South African equivalent – Gayle, which has a unique way of using women's names to refer to things like 'Aunty Ida' (*AIDS*), 'Amanda' (*amazing*), 'Agnetha' (*acne*) and Diana (*disgusting*). There is an Indian equivalent of Polari – *Ulti Bhasha*, roughly translated means a language upside down. 'Ulti' means, upside-down or reverse or alternate and 'bhasha' means language. Ulti Bhasha is a specifically working class language and has (other) commonalities with Polari as both languages have so many different terms for 'police'. It is still prevalent today in the LGBT community in India as a 'rite of passage'. In London, there were two different versions of Polari; an East End version which emphasised Cockney rhyming slang elements like 'Vera' (from Cockney slang 'Vera Lynn' = gin) and 'brandy' (from Cockney slang 'brandy', brandy rum = bum) and a West End version which was allegedly more classical, drawing more on Italian and lingua franca. Often the East End and West End Polari speaker could not always understand each other as the East End speaker were far more flamboyant and over the top with their language. Amongst a plethora of socially oriented languages and dialects, Polari would have been one amongst several in London including East End etc. Sailors and chimney sweeps had their own language/ occupational slang so Polari may not have stood out as being unusual amongst various people having their own social languages- a marker or gesture of its subcultural origins.

Bona Polari! workshop

I became aware of Polari when I researched different forms of humour in terms of spoken language whilst undertaking a PhD back in 2011 at Loughborough University. After re-discovering my love of the language by writing a poem *The Tale of Benny Harris* with accompanying poetry film in early 2022, I then decided to create my own Polari workshop, similar to the workshop in Manchester but this time using my film as the catalyst for discussion at the start of the workshop. Over the course of approximately 90 minutes, I help participants engage in a creative writing exercise

using Polari at its base and develop skills in sharing their writing in an informal, non-judgemental and fun way.



Fig. 18. Bona Polari workshop at Bristol Pride 2023

The workshop has so far taken place at The Margate School, Margate (Feb 2022) University of the Arts, London (Feb and June 2022), The Transforming Sexuality & Gender Research Centre at the University of Brighton (March 2023), Liverpool Pride (May 2023) Bristol Pride (June 2023), University of Southampton (June 2023), Belfast Pride (July 2023) and London Metropolitan Archives (November 2023). At the start of the workshop, I explain how my interest in Polari started in 2018 when I attended the event *Polari Creative Writing Workshop for Gay & Bi Men* at Islington Mill in Manchester where I was encouraged to write my own Polari phrases by workshop host Adam Lowe. I explain that many people assume Polari is about puns, being flamboyant and camp for the sake of it, and being rude but actually often those speaking Polari are not being rude, it's just that it sounds rude. People often laugh at hearing Polari because there's an implication that it is innuendo. Whilst some Polari might seem pointless i.e., wouldn't it just be easier to say 'car' or say the word directly rather than using a substitute?, I suggest that one of the charms of Polari is that you can say anything and make it sound filthy and that what is so fascinating about Polari is that some words are for things that you can't talk about, and others seem just for fun or play. We watch a short interview with KMTV (local Kent TV) about a screening of my Polari film at The Margate School, Margate in February 2022.



Fig. 19. Lee Campbell (dir.), *Slang Bang* (2023). Promotional poster

Having watched the interview (which many previous workshop participants find quite amusing when I am trying to teach Polari to the Angelina, the interviewer), I then discuss how the workshop acts as an extension to my ongoing interest in LGBT slang languages (e.g. ‘bears’ and ‘cubs’) including a screening of my short poetry film *Slangbang* (2023) in which men within gay communities nowadays indicate their presence or signal their identity / that they are there/ that they are available through body labelling ‘cub’, ‘twink’, ‘fox’, ‘chaser’ etc.⁹ This is then followed by a screening of *The Tale of Benny Harris*. After asking participants to share with me what they thought was happening during the film i.e. who were the characters, where were they etc., I distribute prints out of the poem and translate some of the Polari words. Then, having shown a short clip of *Round the Horne* so that participants can hear Polari spoken long ago by Julian (Kenneth Williams) and Sandy to more recently in a clip of the short film *Putting on the Dish* by Brian Fairbairn and Karl Eccleston (2015), participants are then given printed out copies of a Polari dictionary which I use as a basis for discussion including identifying Polari words that they may already be using. I encourage participants to notice how words like ‘naff’ are used in everyday language which makes us question whether these words come from Polari or the other way round. Some of my favourite remarks from previous workshops have been, ‘Cod wrap – we’ve all been to one of those!’, ‘Be useful to have a reverse dictionary – sorted in English’, ‘Colin takes on a whole new meaning – not such a boring name!’, ‘*Schwartz* sounds like German for ‘gay’ – *schuwle*’.



Fig. 20. Bona Polari workshop at London Metropolitan Archives in October 2023

Participants are then invited to write their own rhyming Polari phrases and poems and then invited to speak their Polari creations out aloud for everyone to enjoy.¹⁰ One previous creation which I particularly enjoyed was ‘Dish and do a turn ... Aunt nell aunties! Bencove beany Hetty HP Nice dish love to have a turn – admiring their aris, love to have a go on it!’ translated into English as ‘I was asking my old gay man friend if their friend is (fluid) /bisexual with their sexuality as I would ‘love to have a go’ on his bum!’. At the end of the workshop, now that participants have been fully immersed in not only hearing Polari language but have written their own Polari, I screen my short film *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023). *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023) is a homoerotic fantasy-filled experimental poetry film written in Polari.¹¹ Before screening it in the workshop, I announce, ‘I won’t give you a translation, use your filthy imagination,’ and hope that participants will now recognise and understand many of the Polari terms used, having learnt some its words. *Cleaning* depicts the speaker’s covert fantasies in various public scenarios. The final section is about the speaker fantasising about a coffee server called Tom.



Fig. 21. Lee Campbell (dir.), *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023). Promotional poster



Fig. 22. Stills selection of Tom and his ‘bene aris.’
Lee Campbell (dir.), *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023)

A transcript of the section in the film with Tom:

Filiome fairy

Swishing camp coffee

with his blonde haired **blob queen fag hag**

Tom doesn't like gherkins.

Complaining about Chloe

The coffee waste clangs

I think of other bangs

I watch him

Why look at the served when you can look at the server?

Get Tom in the meat locker

Sniff *purple hearts*

Rip off his *schmutter*

Plate his dish

Put on the brandy

Have the full harva

His *box* ready for my gherkin

Harver and charver this aspro arva

Squirt my *Maria*

Tootsie trade but I can be a *manly Alice*

Tonight is our *wedding night!*

FINAL THOUGHTS

This chapter has explored how I have worked with humour as a means of expression within gay male storytelling as both a curator (*Homo Humour*), in my solo practice as an artist, filmmaker and poet, and as workshop leader (*Bona Polari*).

Extending discussion of *Homo Humour* in the first section of this chapter, during a filmmaker discussion led by chair Peter Bond, filmmaker Ilker Cınarel suggested that 'Humour is in our (gay men) blood' whilst Peter described the project as underlining humour as a means to counter/avert awkward situations and ways of coping with situations. As well as being an exposé which demonstrates how the gay scene can be liberating, embodied through what Peter described as the rich texture in the showreel and also praising the beautiful rawness in all the films. Filmmaker Sean Leviashvili spoke about the shame of being in the closet i.e. not 'out' and when you come out of the closet, there are residual effects which last years, even lifetimes and that queer people shouldn't have to pretend to be glamorous or happy all the time. He suggested, 'There are things that need to be worked on. These are discussions which need to happen in academia, in mental health spheres, in artistic

worlds.’ The films in *Homo Humour* punch on these points and could be a way to instigate these conversations in the spaces Sean identified. Curating a project where humour is the theme but the approaches and the range of topics, often challenging (dealing with anxiety, confusion, and relationships etc.) are explored in experimental, provocative and exciting ways remind us as a community (the LGBTQ+ community) that we are not a monolith and that we have many different stories and experiences as demonstrated in the diverse range of stories and experiences shared in *Homo Humour* that I highlighted in the first section of this chapter.¹²

In the next discussion in this chapter, I selected examples of my recent poetry film work which demonstrate how gay men have used ‘covert operations’ or acts of secrecy including humour to hide and shield themselves from others. In my discussion of *Covert Operations*, I gave an account of my teenage years when the acts of ‘secrecy’ was in the making usage of what was available to me at the time (in pre-Internet times in the early 1990s) and making things ‘queer’. It was about how others reacted to making things queer’ when I mention when I bought a copy of *Playgirl* (a pornographic magazine of men aimed at a female audience). I extend it into when I finally had the confidence of buying the material that aimed at the gay community. I talk about smuggling copies of the magazine *Gay Times* into my bedroom ‘just to see guys like me’ and hiding them from my parents. In discussion of *The Tale of Benny Harris*, rather than talking about the viewpoints drawn from my own personal experience, I presented the viewpoints of gay men in history who used the covert language – Polari, to communicate with one another. In my discussion of *Reclaiming my Voice*, I explained how I tried to modify my voice in order to fit in within my straight mates at the time. The most pertinent act of secrecy in this film is from the point of view of Danny, my straight mate, who uses the covert language to hide his internalised homophobia as well as the suggestion that he has in fact engaged in (and probably enjoyed) homosexual desire himself. As the saying goes, however you try and hide something, the more visible or more obvious you actually make it. Indeed, I do laugh at myself (in a funny but slightly painful way) at how I tried to sound less ‘camp’ to my mate and more ‘lad-like’ with the irony being that I probably sounded so ridiculous that it made me sound *even more camp*. Despite the playful innuendo and humorous wordplays found in all the films referred to, there is also a menacing quality to them; the continual ‘eye, eye, eye’ in *Reclaiming* attempts to put the viewer in a mental space which is unsettling where they feel trapped in its obsessive repetition. Repetition as a propulsive force.

In the third and final discussion, I explained how the humorous sounding gay slang language of Polari was used a protective shield at a time when gay relationships were criminalised and suggested that Polari is so clever as it mixes intellect and filth. Speaking about my Polari workshop, I shared how I give visitors chance to discover and play with a language from another era and find their own creative voice

in Polari. Previous *Bona Polari* participants have remarked upon the musicality of the rhyming within *The Tale of Benny Harris*, including ‘nada to vada in the larder’ and ‘shonks him on his onk’. When the workshop took place in May 2023 as part of Liverpool Pride Poet and printmaker Jeremy Dixon remarked: ‘I enjoyed [Lee’s] Polari film as it demonstrates Polari’s ability to conceal what you are saying in order to exclude and how it’s about saying something so other people don’t know what you are talking about.’ He liked the way that the pages of the Polari glossary flip over at speed during my film. It’s like me saying to viewer, ‘You have to listen to this, you can’t translate. I’m showing you a translation, but you can’t read it. You are going to have to listen to this!’.

Engaging participants to learn about, reflect upon and then create their own Polari during my workshops underlines the enormous amount of creativity and joy in a language coming out of oppression at a time when it was harder to be gay in public, to be funny like Kenneth Williams, who used Polari to communicate with other gay men covertly. Williams’s humour was audacious, but respectful. What is so fascinating about Polari is that some words are for things that can’t be openly talked about, and others seem just for fun or play. The need to be discreet can be seen running through Polari, but so can the joy of rhyming and invention. Polari keeps you sharp, on your toes, trying to understand what’s going on. Initially used to maintain secrecy, it is also a means of socializing, acting out camp performances and reconstructing a shared gay identity and world view amongst its speakers. It is certainly quirky that Polari has made its way into the mainstream but without the mainstream realising that they are using it. Polari words angling their way into more general speak. What can be lost by integration? Is that a mainstream slur that Polari has taken on or the other way round? Do we ever really think about the language we are using and its origins? It is certainly fascinating how quickly language spreads today. There are very few subcultures left – languages spread on the Internet and then gets picked on and commercialised. You could be in different parts of town, have different slangs and not understand each other. Either way, Polari remains subversive if its traditional users find some perverse humour in hearing these words repeated by non-members of the gay community.

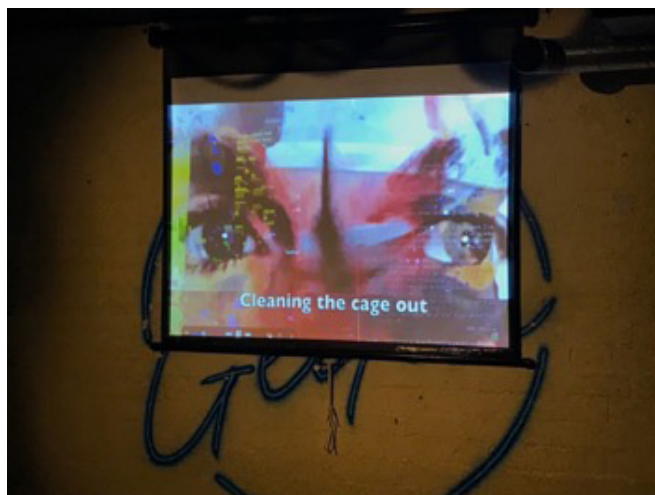


Fig. 23. '*Cleaning the cage out*'. Lee Campbell (dir.), *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023)
Screening at The Glitch, Waterloo, London, September 2023



Fig. 24. '*Bet he's got a Colin. Tonight up her beef curtains*'.
Lee Campbell (dir.), *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023)
Screening at The Glitch, Waterloo, London, September 2023



Fig. 25. *'His box is ready for my gherkin'.*

Lee Campbell (dir.), *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023)
Screening at The Glitch, Waterloo, London, September 2023



Fig. 26. *'Squirt my Maria'.*

Lee Campbell (dir.), *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023)
Screening at The Glitch, Waterloo, London, September 2023

Notes

* Lee Campbell is an artist, Senior Lecturer at University of the Arts London, and founder of *Homo Humour*, the first of its kind project on contemporary queer male film and moving image practices that explore humour and LGBTQ+ storytelling. Lee had his first solo exhibition in North America of his poetry films, *See Me: Performance Poetry Films* at Fountain Street, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A in July 2022. His research has been published widely in publications including *The International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, *Body Space Technology*, *Moving Image Artists (MIA) Journal*, *Paradigm and Performance Research: On Interruptions*.

¹ He also goes on to suggest that Metamodernism as a movement has allowed for a more complex and diverse portrayal of queer experiences, challenging traditional narratives and embracing the liminal spaces between binaries. Metamodernism in relation to queer cinema is characterized by a blending of modernist and postmodernist elements. It embraces both sincerity and irony, oscillating between hope and despair, and blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction. It encourages a multiplicity of perspectives and challenges fixed notions of identity, allowing for a more nuanced and inclusive representation of queer experiences. Metamodernism influences the themes and storytelling in queer cinema by encouraging a more nuanced and complex exploration of queer experiences. It allows for a blending of different narrative styles, perspectives, and emotions, creating a space for the exploration of fluid identities, the questioning of binaries, and a deeper understanding of the complexities of queer lives. Metamodernism also challenges traditional narratives and embraces the liminal spaces between sincerity and irony, hope and despair, creating a more dynamic and inclusive representation of queer stories.

² For example, *All for Show* was an internationally touring exhibition I curated between 2005-2007 of short film made by artists which test the acceptable limits of humour in the white cube gallery space. In her review of the exhibition for I-D Magazine, Jessica Lack described the project as 'slapstick theatrics', 'awkward and macabre sense of humour' and 'cringingly funny'; 'these idiosyncratic films succeed in finding surreal quirks in the banalities of everyday life' (Lack 2005: 55).

³ You can watch *Camp-Belle* (2021) here; <https://filmfreeway.com/CAMP-BELLE2021>

⁴ Previous iterations of *Homo Humour* have included João Dall'Stella's *Stalls* (2019), a comedic take on the world of gay cruising and glory holes, Sean Leviashvili and Stephen Riscica's *Limp* (2019) which follows Sean, a young gay man with cerebral palsy as he navigates dating with a disability in New York City. The showreel has also included my film *How Can I Get My Partner to be my Finger?* (2019) where in a pitch-black space, a spotlight is shone on my finger. What follows is a conversation ripe with absurdist comedy between a gay couple - one present, one technologically distant - my partner Alex and I. Alex 'speaks through' my finger via a tape-recording. Sometimes I 'speak for' Alex. The big question is: is it Alex speaking or is it me speaking? Operating almost like a marriage guidance film, the film is an insight into human relationships (and not just because the couple here is gay). The constant question of the dog and of marriage is absurd and funny but it does reflect any relationship. Watch this film here: <https://filmfreeway.com/HOWCANIGETMYPARTNERBEMYFINGER>

⁵ We also spoke about Polari as an amalgamation of linguistic roots, cockney slang, back slang, a very working class dialect. An audience member usefully remarked that gay people still use Polari in situations they don't feel safe. For example, in taxis by saying 'g' for 'gay' where there is a heightened need for self-protection when you do not know who is driving the cab. In such a situation, there is a very serious need for secrecy and harks back to the 'living a double life' which still applies to many gay people or at least the scars of it are. In this sense, the covert language used could be seen as a form of humorous reclamation. This sense of reclaiming something was also later picked up in a discussion that took place around self-deprecation and humour. Greg suggested, 'Once you've laughed at yourself, you've got the permission to go anywhere'. Using the analogy of the bullied kid who overcomes bullies with wit and humorous prowess, Greg referred to this as 'taking the comedy back. A lot of queer art is about the reclamation of something'. Indeed, being funny is very controlling. At the symposium *Dialogues in Performance I: Collaboration* at Central Saint Martins in 2011, Professor Jane Collins suggested that nothing is *more controlling* than laughter.

⁶ To watch these films, please visit: <https://filmfreeway.com/WROGKINGOFFATTHESNAKEINSIDE2021> Videopoem by Lee Campbell;

<https://filmfreeway.com/BEARSWITHBANANASANDBUBBLESINTHEIRBOXERS>

⁷ To watch this performance, see: <https://filmfreeway.com/CLEVERATSEEINGWITHOUTBEINGSEEN2021>

⁸ To watch *Covert Operations*, see <https://filmfreeway.com/COVERTOPERATIONS2020>

Watch *The Tale of Benny Harris* (2022) here: <https://filmfreeway.com/THETALEOFBENNYHARRIS>

To watch *Reclaiming my Voice*, see: <https://filmfreeway.com/FINDINGMYVOICE476>

⁹ Watch *Slangbang* (2023) here: <https://filmfreeway.com/SLANGBANG>

¹⁰ Watch this TV interview with KMTV (local Kent TV) about Polari workshop and screening of my Polari film in February 2022: <https://filmfreeway.com/KMTV800>

Click here to listen to a BBC Radio Kent interview about the Polari workshop when held in Margate with Dominic King in February 2022: <https://filmfreeway.com/dompol>

Click here to listen to a BBC Radio Surrey and Sussex interview about the Polari workshop when held in Brighton with Kathy Caton in February 2023: <https://filmfreeway.com/kathy805>

¹¹ Watch *Cleaning His Kitchen* (2023) here: <https://filmfreeway.com/CLEANINGHISKITCHEN2023>

¹² To keep up to date with the project, please visit: <https://leecampbellartist.blogspot.com/p/homo-humour-films.html>

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