



Documented Artistic Research Project
(Doctoral Thesis)

*This Untethered Buffoon or
the Trickster in Everything*

SQUIRM
the book

Spleen 1

Third Opponents and Other Academic Jesters

—
Stacey Sacks

STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS | STOCKHOLMS
KONSTNÄRLIGA HÖGSKOLA

Third Opponents and Other Academic Jesters

—
Stacey Sacks

SQUIRM (THE BOOK)
Spleen No. 1, Third Opponents and Other Academic Jesters
Documented Artistic Research Project (Doctoral Thesis)
Stacey Sacks
Publication Series X Position, No. 8
ISSN 2002-603X;8
© Stacey Sacks
Stockholm University of the Arts
Department of Acting, Valhallavägen, 2019
www.uniarts.se
Design: © Büro Comrie
Copy-Editor: Jill Weintroub
Printing: Typo, South Africa
ISBN 978-91-88407-16-0

Cover Images

Front - Still frame from *Clown Alone*.

Back - Stanley G. playing in the Linnégatan studio, 2016. Photo: Jonas Jörneberg

Topic: academic disputations in Sweden (and likely some other countries) had 'opponents' who would mock the dissertation to entertain the audience. These were usually selected by the respondent and were presumably other academics. The Oxford and Cambridge counterparts were more focused on public entertainment and mocking the establishment.

Possible research questions: how could academic jesters help academic discourse? What is the role of improvisation compared to careful planning (some of the mocking seems to have been carefully planned, others at the spur of the moment)? Is the role just to entertain, to subtly (or not so subtly) question the relevance of the research or institutions, or to create a broader discourse that opens the academic world to the public?

Extracts and salient points from my conversation in Stockholm in 2015 with Dr. Anders Sandberg, Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford Martin School, Oxford University:

-
- A good way to sell an investigation into academic jesters could be as popularisation and accessibility: through the jest, the thesis material is perforce popularised and concentrated.
 - An interesting thing is whether the jokes are just jokes, something liminal outside the boring academic structures, or actually promoting a particular agenda (even if they seem to be an affront). Some of my friends brought up east bloc clowns during lunchtime, and we discussed the role of professional merrymakers in promoting a system (both by making people happy, but also by joking about the 'right' kind of problems, and as a repository of problematic people - apparently some Siberian shamans were turned into clowns which was a useful way of defusing them).
 - I have a feeling much of the Swedish third opponent role was just joking for merrymaking and mild satire rather than anything sociologically deep, but there is no reason academic jesters have to be tame.
 - There is also the issue of being a 'know-nothing'. In academia we are supposed to know stuff. Being a fool is more subversive inside than outside academia.



The following is a rough outline of sources and provocations that emerged from my 2015 conversation with Dr. Sandberg, about the possibilities of a jester/fool/clown in the Academy. It provides openings for future research, should Stanley G. continue to pursue a career in Academia. I'm truly grateful to Dr. Sandberg for taking the time and effort to invest in this compilation of possibilities.

I have not altered the content of his original document, and present it here as a way to locate Stanley G.'s initial evolution. It is not intended to be read as a final academic document, but rather as a revealing of process. The Swedish is not translated.

Oxford: Terrae filius (Cambridge: prevaricator)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terr%C3%A6_filius

Seems that this practice was not exactly a jester vis-a-vis the doctor, but rather a public entertainment that mocked the university institutions and members.

<https://books.google.se/books?id=IzXUOekhwx8C&pg=PA507&ots=4qd-PnuKuj&dq=filius%20terrae%20oxford&pg=PA22#v=onepage&q=filius%20terrae%20oxford&f=false>

pp. 21-24 gives a historical overview of the Terrae filius.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00335635009381578?journalCode=rqjs20>

John Alyiffe, *Antient and Present State of the University of Oxford*, (1714).

'The business of this Terrae Filius is a solemn and grave Disputation, and although this manner of sportive Wit had its first original at the time of the Reformation, when gross Absurdities and Superstitions of the Roman Church were to be exposed, and should have been re-strain'd to Things, and not have reached Mens Persons and Characters; yet it has since become very scandalous and abusive, and in no wise to be tolerated in a University, where nothing ought to appear but Religion, Learning, and good Manners.'

Thomas Baker, *An Act at Oxford* (London, 1704).

'I'll first acquaint you what a Terrae filius is: why, he's the University Jester, the Terrour of fuddling Doctors, and fornicating Commoners, a Serviter of Scandal, and Harlequin of Sciences. ... What is a Terrae Filius's speech? Why, 'tis an Antipanegyrick, where as much pains is taken to detract, as in the other to flatter; 'tis the Reverse of a Funeral Sermon, where the whole care is to bespatter the Living, as that is to bedaub the Dead; 'tis an Incon-gruous Medley of Flash, Invective, Grimace, and Front, a sort of Law-Oratory without Truth or Modesty.'

https://www.academia.edu/1407300/Imagined_Universities_Public_Insult_and_the_Terrae_Filius_in_Early_Modern_Oxford

... Oxford's statutes of 1636 to perform at the annual public Act. These Jesters were known as *terrae filii* or 'sons of the earth', and they met their end, or returned unto dust, at the turn of the 18th century. A 'son of the earth', in Ciceronian Latin, meant one whose parents are unknown, but the Oxford jester's name suggested even more strongly a more general early modern sense of the phrase: a good-for nothing, a shiftless, suspect, or shady character, a varlet. The Oxford *terrae filius* had an early modern Cambridge counterpart called the *praevaricator* ('false accuser'), who was a regular butt of the Oxford *terrae filius*'s jokes, and during the 1680s there was also a mocking performer called the *tripos* in Trinity College, Dublin. The *terrae filius* was by no means the only entertaining person ...

... The institution of the *terrae filius* and his rude dismissal around 1700 raise complex questions about the way in which early modern Oxford constructed its institutional identity. Was the *terrae filius* serving a social function, telling a cultural story, or performing a theatricalised role? Should we think of his performance as institutional self mockery, ritualised inversion, the pre-emptive public admission of collective moral guilt, or something else? One obvious line of interpretation would involve following Victor Turner, pointing to the ritualised character of the *terrae filius*'s performances and concluding that the *filius* occupied a 'liminal' social space, 'betwixt and between' the university's normal categories of experience. Such an interpretation would hinge on identifying the *filius*'s discourse as a ritual inversion of customary academic practices, which would be very easy to do. The *terrae filius* spoke in impeccable Latin, like an academic orator, but he used his speech to vilify, not to praise, his institution. Formally, he was a participant in a disputation, but rather than attacking the respondent's arguments, he attacked the multifarious turpitude of the dons. ...

I will argue here that the *terrae filius*'s discourse is not best understood as inversion, whether we take inversion to constitute genuine subversion or secret complicity with the normal structure of things. Rather than challenging or replicating a pre-existing ideal form of the university, I will suggest, the *terrae filius* actively worked to construct Oxford's institutional identity – to construct the putatively normal structure of things. He did this by characterising the dons' actual behaviour as a farrago of deviations from what the *filius* claimed was normal to expected behaviour. In effect, he pointed to the Oxford it was possible to observe in everyday life, then argued that this was not in fact the real Oxford. In portraying the dons as transgressors of the social law, the *filius* had to imagine or create that law, usually as the precise negation or reversal of the donnish habits he reported. The *filius*'s insults thus produced an imaginary Oxford which was at once normative for real behaviour and, by definition, never in harmony with real behaviour.

John Swift may have been a Cambridge *terrae filius*:

<https://books.google.se/books?id=0VMv9OwdOFUC&lp-g=PA7&ots=MIpezRxxiT&lr&pg=PA7#v=onepage&q=ilius&f=false>

Sweden: third opponent

E. Lous Backman, Doktorsdisputationens tredje opponent

<http://aleph.se/references/Doktorsdisputationens+tredje+opponent.pdf>

Magisterial coverage of the topic at least in Sweden. Includes examples from the past.

https://docplayer.se/106725008-Akademiska-hogtider-och-traditioner.html#show_full_text

'Tredje opponenter slutligen, var en av respondenten utsedd skämtare, som skulle gyckla med avhandlingen och således bereda publik och agerande en välbehövlig avkoppling i slutet av akten. (Det var frivilligt att ha tredje-opponent.) Historiskt sett hade seden med tredje-opponent sin grund i de lustigheter som på 1800-talet var förknippade med studentbeväringens inte alltför mödosamma vapenövningar och därtill hörande måltider i universitetsstäderna.'

<https://books.google.se/books?id=BsHGBQAAQBAJ&lp-g=PT3&ots=EjBQ4JIP-t&dq=tredjeopponent&lr&pg=PT8#v=onepage&q=opponent&f=falsebooks?id=5xtHCgAAQBAJ&lp-g=PT107&ots=oIpfb0JD9&dq=tredjeopponent&pg=PT107#v=onepage&q=tredjeopponent&f=false>

Example of early female opponent in Sweden.

<https://books.google.se/books?id=BsHGBQAAQBAJ&lp-g=PT3&ots=EjBQ4JIP-t&dq=tredjeopponent&lr&pg=PT8#v=onepage&q=opponent&f=false>

Example of third opponent being mentioned in autobiography, questioning methodology mildly.

<https://www.antikvariat.net/sv/lbh779430-tal-over-blandade-amnen-collegium-curiosorum-novum-arsbok-1977-78-lorenz-bhatt>

Reference to an essay by Sten G. Lindberg, 'Terrae filius och hans bröder. Lärda narrar, kloka tokar och tredje opponenter' in Tal över Blandade ämnen. Collegium curio-Sorum Novum. Årsbok 1977-78. 159 s., iiI. Engl. summaries. Carmina. Stockholm, 1980.

'Med en imponerande lärdom berättar Sten G. Lindberg om lärt gyckel allt ifrån medeltiden till 1860-talet. Han anser dock, att Offenbachs operetter mer än nattståndet skämt ger förklaringen till tredje opponenterns tillkomst vid just denna tid. Men det har alltid funnits behov av vardagslivets skrattspegel och, säger Lindberg, det förefaller därför "konstigare att den lärde narren nu fått lämna katedern än att han en gång besteg den". Men då har författaren nog bara i minnet några få kvicka och glansfulla framträdanden och glömt alla de ofta långsökta ordlekar som disputationsåhörare också haft att genomlida.'

Russia: third opponent

https://www.jstor.org/stable/41049008?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Academic joking

https://www.jstor.org/stable/41049008?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

- Jokes with domain content for domain members ('What's purple and commutes? An abelian grape'; the various engineer/physicist/mathematician jokes, etc.).
- Jokes performed using the tools of a domain to achieve the end (MIT and elsewhere engineering hacks/pranks).
- Academic entertainment: jocularities done by academics (often students) intended for a wider audience (studentspex, the IgNobel prizes).
- Jokes using the academic format for enhanced effect, contrast, satire etc. A special subset is spoof papers, sometimes intended for the serious purpose of revealing bad academic practice (e.g. the Sokal hoax).