

2025, Vol. 6(2), 359-370
© The Author(s) 2025
Article reuse guidelines:
<https://dergi.bilgi.edu.tr/index.php/reflektif>
DOI: 10.47613/reflektif.2025.220
Article type: Research Article

Received: 18.04.2025
Accepted: 13.06.2025
Published Online: 21.07.2025

Ebru Thwaites Diken*

The Duke (Michell, 2020): Local Framing, Global Networking The Duke (2020): Yerel Çerçeveleme, Küresel Ağ Kurma

Abstract

The paper analyzes *The Duke (2020)* as a networked narrative that frames the story of the theft of the painting of The Duke of Wellington locally. It explains how the film localizes and de-localizes its narrative in the 'network' (in Latour's sense of the term), while deconstructing Northern Englishness through humour and satire. The film's artistic, philosophical, ethico-political problematique is how, whether and if at all, everyday life escapes the grip of systems? The paper discusses this question by relating it to Michelle De Certeau's theory of tactics and strategy.

359

Öz

Bu makale Goya'nın Wellington Dükü tablosunun çalınması hikayesini Newcastle'da yerel olarak çerçevelenen ağ bağlantılı bir anlatı olarak analiz etmektedir. Filmin Kuzey'i ve Kuzey İngilizliği (mizah kullanarak) nasıl temsil ettiğini ve mizah ve hiciv yoluyla Kuzeyli stereotipini nasıl yapıbozuma uğrattığını açıklamaktadır. Kuzey'in filmin sanatsal, felsefi ve etiko-politik sorunsalını (gündelik hayat sistemlerin kıskacından nasıl kurtulabilir?) ifade ettiği bir coğrafi ve kültürel bir alan olarak nasıl inşa edildiğini sorgulamaktadır. Makale bu soruyu Michelle De Certeau'nun taktik ve strateji teorisiyle ilişkilendirerek tartışmaktadır.

Keywords

Localization, everyday life, humour, Northern Englishness, tactic

Anahtar Kelimeler

Yerelleştirme, gündelik hayat, mizah, Kuzey İngilizlik, taktik

* Istanbul Bilgi University, ebru.diken@bilgi.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-9293-7738.

Introduction

The Duke is based on a true story of the theft of the painting of the British General Arthur Wellesley, 'The Portrait of The Duke of Wellington', by the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya, from the National Gallery in London on the 21st of August, 1961. Arthur Wellesley, the first Duke of Wellington, is a well known military and political figure in British history during the late eighteenth century. He has acted as the Commander in Chief of the army who defeated Napoleon's army in Waterloo, served as the British Ambassador to France after the exile of Napoleon and as the British Prime Minister as a member of the conservative Tory Party between 1828-1830. He was known for his opposition to the Reform Act of The Parliament of the United Kingdom which extended the right to vote to broader constituencies.

The sales of this painting to Charles Wrightsman, an art collector from New York, at a private auction created controversy among the British Parliament (Barron, 2022). Sir John Witt (1907-1982), the Gallery's Chairman of Trustees, has written to a grant charity, the Wolfson Foundation, for their help to keep the painting in British territory (Barron, 2022). The Wolfson Foundation offered to pay £100,000 to buy the painting from Wrightsman. With the additional £40,000 provided by the government, the £140,000 needed to rebuy the painting was collected (Haines, 2022). The painting, considered to be an important part of Britain's cultural heritage, has been put on display in the National Gallery in London. Only nineteen days after its exhibition, the painting was stolen from the gallery and concealed for a number of years until its return to the left luggage office of the Birmingham New Street Station (Nairne, 2011).

The theft made headlines in the national newspapers and the police suspected that it was the work of a criminal mastermind (De Mattei, 2022). The thief's identity was far from what the police had expected; he was a retired bus driver from Newcastle, Kempton Bunton (starred by Jim Broadbent in the film) whose motivation was to receive a ransom of £140,000 to be given to charity. In his own words: "My sole object in all this was to set up a charity to buy television licences for old and poor people who seem to be neglected in an affluent society." (Nairne, 2011). Bunton confessed to committing the theft to draw attention to his political campaign. Bunton's defence lawyer Hutchinson used a loophole in law to defend Bunton; that is, for an act to be considered theft, the person who steals must indefinitely deprive the owner of the painting of the right to use it. However, Bunton's plan was to return the painting once the government agreed to pay the ransom to charity. Therefore, under UK law, Bunton's act could not be technically classified as 'theft'. He was only convicted of stealing the frame which resulted in his conviction for three months. It was revealed years later, it was not Bunton, but his son, John who committed the theft to draw attention to his father's campaign.

The narrative of the film is firmly rooted in real events. In real life, Kempton Bunton was a working class, married man with five children and lived in a council house in Newcastle.

Some dialogues in the film come directly from Bunton's statements in the court trial (Sillito, 2022). The first attempt to film the story was made by Bunton's grandson, Christopher Bunton who says that the film is about a family drama and a working class struggle: "My grandad actually recognised the value of the BBC, so he felt it should be made available to everybody that needs it and this was part of his campaign for free TV licences for pensioners" (Sillito, 2022). Accordingly, the film tells the story from the family's viewpoint. Overall, the story of *The Duke* lies at the intersection of class, politics and art in British history, narrativizing Northernness and Britishness while problematizing everyday life in the grip of macro-systems.

The Film as Network

Central to the story of *The Duke* is the relation between politics (working class politics), space (Northwest of England) and power (the exercise of judicial power) in the United Kingdom. Latour's (2005) Actor-Network theory can be utilised to analyze this relationship in terms of how the local (Newcastle / North / British) and the universal (the proletariat, the trickster, comedy) connect and reconstitute each other in a 'network'. As such, the article conceives of the film as a 'network', a socially and materially heterogeneous ensemble that simultaneously localizes and de-localizes its narrative.

The concept of the network introduces 'a subversion in the notion of distance' through nets, hubs and bridges and renders the geographically distant close and the geographically close distant (Latour, 2010: 8). Furthermore, Latour (2010) says that 'the area 'covered' by any network is 'universal' and 'thanks to the network, universality is now fully localizable' (p.8). Perceived as such, the geographical scales of the local, the national and the global are not distinct, but they are 'the effects of connections' (Müller, 2015, p. 35). The global corporations, for example, all have local interactions; that is, the global feeds on the dynamics of the local ((Müller, 2015:35). In this sense, a network is global, yet it is necessarily framed locally. Nevertheless, this framing is not a total closure, there is always a flow from the inside to the outside and from the outside to the inside. The frame is permeable. To put it differently, a network has two functions. One is framing, a process enabled by the constitution of borders, isolating the inside from the influences of the outside world. Thanks to the frame, the network localizes. The other function of the network is globalization, rendering external elements such as language and culture penetrate the local. Because these two functions are simultaneous, the network is both localized and globalized at the same time.

Against this background, a film is a network in two senses. First, it is a 'heterogeneous network' that transcends cultures and geographies, binding together local contexts and global intellectual and political legacies (Latour, 2005: 6). Films' artistic and intellectual productions transcend national borders by de-territorializing its stories and characters and giving life to them in different contexts; for example through framing a character / typology of global significance locally. The characters and stories travel across time and space.

Second, a film is a network in terms of its production and post-production processes (Spöhrer, 2017, p. 114-115), for a film consists of materiality (conditions and means of production), discourse (theme, ideology, point of view) and social relations (collaborative team work). According to Actor-network theory, in a film production, non-human entities (camera, locations, lighting) are also actors. The film consists of a set of relations between these actors whose positions and stability in the network are continuously redefined. Even after the post-production stage, the film continues to 'translate' itself into other networks such as press receptions, streaming formats and etcetera (Spöhrer, 2017, p. 115, p. 132). The film's identity also continues to be contested and negotiated by the film viewers, film critics and cinephiles after the film is technically finished (Spöhrer, 2017, I p. 131).

Seen in this prism, a brief scrutiny of *The Duke*'s production, distribution and reception sheds light onto the web of relations that the film is a part of. *The Duke* is a British film which was first released in UK cinemas in 2022, became available as a rental home product on platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV, and has recently been streamed on Netflix. It was filmed in the UK, in Leeds (i.e. Holbeck Cemetery, Whitelocks Pub), Bradford (i.e. Cartwright Hall, Cannon Mills) and produced by Pathe (global film studio operating in the UK, France, Switzerland and Netherlands), Ingenious Media (a London based investor in creative media) and partially supported by Screen Yorkshire and Bradford Film Offices. The film consists of a set of human (Bunton, his wife Dorothy and his children) and non-human actors (press releases, the painting of Goya, TV license law, studios), all of which have a connection to the protagonist, Bunton. In fact, it is a non-human object, the painting of Duke Wellington, which frames the network and weaves the narrative together.

The network also extends towards the viewers who develop an affective relationship with the story. As mentioned below, the way in which the Northern British, Southern British and non-British audience relate to the story significantly differs in terms of their understanding of cultural expressions, body language, and regionally and nationally specific humour. That is, they become part of the network in different ways. Their perception, the way they create meaning of the film world and the 'Northern British' transforms the network, while globalizing it.

The press and film critics are also part of the network. The film has been widely acclaimed in international newspapers including *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Guardian*. Film critics have appraised the film for being a distinctively British story with an 'eccentric' character (i.e. Kermode 2022), while at the same time, however, having a global appeal for its universal themes (social inequality, political activism).

Localization: Framed as 'Northern English'

First and foremost, the central plot, the theft of the painting, is rooted in British history. Likewise, The Duke of Wellington is a controversial historical figure in British history, who, in

Bunton's words: 'a duke who was a bastard to his men and who voted against universal suffrage'. The story is locally framed in the context of a class conflict between aristocracy and the working class in the post-war UK. The political environment in post-war UK was marked by reconstruction, the high demand for labour in developing key industries such as coal mining, the increasing trade unionism, and welfare-ism (Glennister, 2020). Social policy in post-war UK is rooted in the *Beveridge Report* (1942) that introduced a social programme to tackle social inequality in Britain by ensuring all citizens a free national health care, education, council housing and employment (Garland 2021). It is important to note that Beveridge's aim in introducing free healthcare and pension system was to relieve the people of this financial burden and increase workers' productivity and the competitiveness of the British industry (Armstrong 2017). On the one hand, this proposal was opposed by some conservative members of parliament; on the other hand, there was a need for the immediate implementation of this proposal for the rapidly industrializing country needed a highly motivated, productive working class (Bourke, 1994: 19). The British history since the First World War also marked by serial strikes, Coal Miners' Strike (1921), General Strike and Coal Miners Strike (1926), the Dock strikes (1948, 1949), the Rail Strike (1955), Seaman Strike (1966), as making profit during the war times was not regarded compatible with patriotism and was labelled 'unBritish' by working class populations (Bourke, 1994: 146). The fact that the country has been at war did not diminish the importance of working class identity; on the contrary, during the post-war period, the identities such as being British and being working class were intertwined (Bourke, 1994: 146). It is this historical and political context that shapes and conditions Bunton's working class identity and values.

Class is not only about economic or employment status and shared interests, but also about an experience which is 'rooted in the intimate locale of the body, home and the neighborhood' (Bourke, 1994: 21). It is inherited, learnt, practised and performed. Bunton's father came back from the First World War where his legs were run over by a British tank. He was a street boogie and Bunton did his runnings for him. In the trial, Bunton did not know his date of birth and his reply to the question of where he was born was 'the back bedroom'. The film portrays the characters within the geographical and cultural boundaries of their neighborhoods. In a similar way, the audience sees no sign of the possibility of Jackie working in anything other than a working class job. There is an intrinsic relationship between working class identity and masculinity as most working class families in the North of Britain relied on male labour in heavy industry; therefore Northernness came to develop as a white male working class identity (Spracklen, 2010: 7). Except for Dorothy, who works as a cleaner, and Marion, the deceased sister, the family in the film consists of three men, Bunton and his two sons, who work either in industrial or unregistered jobs. Jackie works as a boat builder, Kenny works an unregistered, perhaps an illegal job in Leeds, and Bunton works in short term jobs (as a taxi driver, baker). The day Kenny comes from Leeds, Bunton says he is proud of his sons for not 'swallowing what the establishment tells them'.

In the film, the North and Northernness appear as both a physical geography and an imagined cultural identity. North is often imagined as either a 'place of sheep and hills' or a 'place of mills, mines and factories' (Spracklen, 2010: 7). 'Newcastle is shiny and tanned but obsessed with football and booze' (Spracklen, 2010: 7). The film shows the streets of Newcastle, with council houses made of red brick, with garbage bins filled to the brim. The sameness of the terraced houses lined up side by side indicates that the neighborhood is inhabited by a numerous and homogeneous working class. The film puts a stark contrast between Newcastle and London. We see the everyday life (children playing football, men unloading their vans) in the streets of Newcastle, whereas the camera provides a bird's eye view of London, with focus on the architecture of institutions such as the National Gallery, the court room and the Parliament. The contrast between Newcastle and London, the North (working class) / South (bourgeois and aristocrat) divide, is transposed onto the contrast between the everyday life and systems (bureaucracy and elite culture). This is visually evidenced by how the camera positions Bunton, the prosecutor and the judge in the court room. A long take of the court room shows Bunton responding to the prosecutor's questions with his hat off, while the prosecutor puts a wig on, symbolic of the courtroom etiquette. The film sharpens the difference between these two cities by using split screen editing.

364

The authenticity of Northernness is further enhanced by the colloquial English the characters use to communicate. The people of Newcastle use the Geordie language in everyday life. When Bunton calls the Evening chronicle, he addresses the receptionist as 'pet' to mean 'dear'. Bunton also addresses Dorothy in a similar way, meaning 'my love'. Likewise, the other colloquial words Bunton uses include 'champion' for 'great' and 'delicious' (addressing Dorothy: 'This is champion love, a bit of mustard'; addressing the truck driver: 'Morecambe Bay would be champion'). The expression 'Jackie lad' is also specific to the North of England. The daily use of a regional dialect in the film presents the characters in a local context and adds a layer of Northern authenticity to the narrative.

It is important to note that, in British cinema, the North has often been represented in a monolithic fashion, as a site of the Industrial Revolution, 'grey, urban, masculine, working class' (Marin-Lamellet, 2020: 2). This was not just about the social realism, but also about its essentialization as an imaginary geographical space. British New Wave films traditionally start with a long shot of terraced houses, cobbled streets, identical houses and factory chimneys i.e. *Taste of Honey* (1961), *Leather Boys* (1964) (Marin-Lamellet, 2020: 2). The mythical construction of the North is also gendered and psychoanalytical in the sense that the North is covered with phallic chimneys; whereas the landscape of the South is milder and coded as feminine i.e. *Full Monty* (1997), *Term of Trial* (1962) (Marin-Lamellet, 2020: 3). The hero's masculinity appears to be co-ordinated with his northernness (Marin-Lamellet, 2020: 3). Spracklen says television cultures have commodified Northernness through exotic imagery of everyday life, creating characters who are proud and humourous amidst their everyday pov-

erty and deprivation i.e. *Coronation Street* (1960-) (Spracken, 2016: 8, citing Maconie 2008). These characters are sometimes exotic figures and sometimes, targets of parody.

Networked Universally: Intellect, Humour and Satire

The Duke is significant for dealing with the North without being trapped in such gendered stereotypes about the North. It rather subverts the stereotypes, producing unexpected, playful characters who can escape the stereotypical expectations imposed on them. The film deconstructs the stereotypical Northern through humour and satire interchangeably. On the one hand, Bunton's language, dress code and body language clearly indicate that he is a working class Northerner. He is an idealist, a strong believer in his cause and resilient. He continues to send his plays to the BBC despite multiple failures and innovates new methods to pursue his campaign. When collecting signatures does not work, he travels to London, gets thrown out of the Parliament. He has a strong sense of social justice and even gets into trouble for speaking out. He is fired from his second job at the bakery for confronting the factory owner who makes racist comments about a Pakistani fellow worker.

On the other hand, though, he does not fit the classical Northern archetype. He does not display hyper-masculine characteristics. His protest is non-violent, but relies on strong wit and satire. He is not worried about seeming tough. Compared to his wife Dorothy, he is more expressive about his grief over the death of their daughter. He is intellectual, writes plays and reads literature. In his conversations with people, he makes references to legendary figures like Don Quixote (knight), Robin Hood (outlaw), Ludwig Lejzer Zamenhof (an eye doctor and a linguist), all of whom are historical figures with dreams and ideals, just like himself. Don Quixote starts an impossible battle with windmills in an attempt to change his current reality. Robin Hood steals from the rich to give to the poor. Zamenhof believed that languages divided people and created the universal language of Esperanto in order to build a unified humanity. Although Don Quixote (Spain), Robin Hood (England) and Zamenhof (Poland) come from different geographies, they have become universal symbols. The story of Robin Hood is no longer confined to English folklore. He is a universal figure who symbolizes the peoples' power versus the rich and the mighty. Likewise, Don Quixote globally symbolizes idealism – he persists although reality points at a different direction. Zamenhof designed Esperanto as an international auxiliary language that aims to break cultural borders between people introduced by languages. In short, all three figures have an existence beyond their original locality. Bunton's reference to these figures universalizes the narrative of the film, making it globally accessible. For example, in one of the early sequences, the reporter from *The Evening Chronicle* addresses the newspaper audience while taking a photograph of Bunton 'Gentleman, join me. Robin Hood after the adverts'. Once the audience hears the name Robin Hood, an immediate connection is made between the local and the universal, conveying Bunton's motivation to the audience. It is important to note that, as mentioned above, in Latour's terms (2011, p. 802),

within the network, the universality of Robin Hood is localizable in the character Bunton. To put it differently, although Bunton's story is framed locally, it is networked globally. Likewise, when Bunton mentions Don Quixote, a bridge is built between the local and the universal in the sense that universality of the dreamer Don Quixote is impersonated by Bunton who also wants the impossible. The criminal profiler describes Bunton in the following words: 'He is not a writer. He has pretensions, but he cannot write. He is not an educated man. British, Northern. Comma here tells us a lot. It evidences poor education. Self-thought over a life time. I would put him in his late 50's. He is a fantasist who believes he is an idealist. A kind of Don Quixote. He will be active in his community, known for his local campaigns. Parking, litter, pub hours...'. The profiler's description brings 'local campaigns' and 'Don Quixote' together. Thirdly, when Bunton speaks about Zamenhof to his customer in the taxi, the gentleman replies 'I am not paying for conversation', reminding Bunton of the hierarchy between them. In saying this, the gentleman also implies that he does not support the dream of a united humanity in which everyone speaks the same language.

Against this background, the film does not represent Bunton as an admirable heroic figure (as in tragedy). The subject of tragedy is often an admirable, noble, courageous, and an extremely competent hero who is caught up in an ethical dilemma. In tragedies, the individuality and the autonomy of the hero is acknowledged (Girard, 2017, p. 309). The hero is a central character who is confronted with a higher order and faces defeat with pride. The hero remains the center of reference throughout the story. In comedy, however, the focus is rather on the structural patterns that deny the individual autonomy and sovereignty (Girard, 2017, p. 309). Bunton is no hero; he is rather an ordinary guy whose dreams are ridiculed by his wife and who fails to keep a steady job. Despite his imperfections, he is the only person who speaks the truth to the government.

In doing so, he employs humour, wit and satire. Although humour and satire in the film is necessarily 'localized' – expressed in a specific language, as a specific form which is accessible only to the insiders, there is equally necessarily a universal dimension to it in that comedy is always rooted in everyday life, in the world of ordinary people. We laugh at different things, in different ways, but we always laugh for three reasons. We laugh because we feel superior to who we laugh at, or because we feel relieved when we laugh, or because an incongruity in the society or in the person we are dealing with is exposed (Zupancic, 2008; Critchley, 2002). And regardless of why we laugh, we laugh at figures who are, in contrast to the tragic figures, 'little people' rather than glorified heroes. The officer says to Bunton: 'The law is the law and no one is above it. Especially a nobody like you.' The film first introduces Bunton as a 'nobody' who interrupts the symbolic order with humour and satire. The comic figure is always less than a human, an anomic figure, a 'man behaving like a thing' or a 'thing behaving like a man' (Bergson, Critchley, 2002, p. 55-57). Therefore, comedy targets incongruity. The very reason for comedy is, one could say, to point out a disparity at the heart of the subject and the society. For this reason, 'Comedy is the universal at work (Zupančič, 2008: 28)'.

Where does humour and satire lie in *The Duke*? The film starts with scenes from the court case immediately followed by an upbeat, fast paced music which suggests a humourous handling of a criminal case. Next, we see Bunton in the post office having a conversation with a lady about his latest play 'The Adventures of Susan Christ'. He asks the lady to imagine Jesus being born a woman. The fictionalisation of Jesus as a woman in the story of the play foreshadows a stance against systems (the religious establishment). Before the story of the theft, the film introduces Bunton as contradictory, playful and critical in the world of systems. We mainly laugh at Bunton because of his seemingly eccentric and unconventional behaviour. In order to avoid paying tax, he takes out one coil from the terret tuner and does not receive a signal for the BBC. This creative, tactical manoeuvre to evade the juridical system seems absurd at first. Nevertheless, at the heart of this absurdity, Bunton is a truth teller. When the officers remind him of his obligation to pay tax, he argues that it is an unfair tax on ordinary people. 'We are a movement. Television is the modern cure for loneliness. Our aim is to persuade the government that old people should have free televisual viewing'. There is also a subtext, a social critique in Bunton's words that old age pensioners are condemned to loneliness. Bunton rather goes to Durham prison than pay television license tax. The satire is in the seemingly very unreasonable act of going to jail in order not to pay one pound. Nevertheless, it is this satire which prompts the audience to think about social inequality.

As Bunton defends the peoples' rights, Dorothy ridicules him for his idle pursuits: 'Since when have you paid any tax?', 'Are these speeches of yours going to put food on the table?', 'You are not Robin Hood, you are a nuisance', 'You are an idiot', 'Didn't you bring down the government?'. Bunton promises Dorothy that, if he does not achieve anything after his trip to London, he will put an end to 'the plays, politics and the lot', offering to let go of everything that makes him who he is. After his visit to the BBC and the Parliament, the film shows the painting being removed from the National Gallery and the television news proceeding that. Bunton's persistence, stubbornness, passionate attachment to his cause and the lengths he is prepared to go to convince the government to waive the tax are also sources of humour in the service of social critique. Precisely because, stealing a painting to draw attention to social inequality is an action that 'normal' people would not engage in. He also resorts to humour during the trial: 'Do you need a bucket?', 'I feel twenty three', 'If Newcastle was a dog and you'd lift its tail, that hole there, that is Byker.'

Comedy universally functions, in this context, as a paradoxical form of praxis that returns us to everyday life, to life, which is constantly colonized, exploited, repressed, shaped and reshaped by economic, political, and religious systems. Which is what *The Duke* does. The prosecutor asks certain questions to Bunton in order to define and name the act within the framework of law (whether it is technically a theft or not). Bunton's answers mostly drew the subject to everyday life issues (i.e. how he found the bucket shop, the back bedroom he was born in, how he bribed the beat boogie). Through humour and satire, not only the jury,

but also we, as the audience, contemplate about ourselves and others precisely because it illuminates the disparity which is the blind spot in our identity.

Tactic versus Strategy

In *The Practise of Everyday Life* (1980), De Certeau explores how individual actors can transform the establishment by developing tactics. Institutional power uses disciplinary techniques to make people obey its rules and rationale. However, individual users can deploy ‘tactics’ that are ‘articulated in the details of everyday life’ and ‘build a network of antidiscipline’ (De Certeau, 1980: xiv, xv). In other words, De Certeau’s idea is to explore how people subvert the dominant systems through everyday activities. To this end, he introduces a distinction between tactics and strategy. A strategy is produced by power, assumes a ‘place’ and is built on economic, political and scientific rationality. A tactic, however, cannot be reduced to a localization. Since it does not have a place, it depends on seizing the moment in the appropriate time. The everyday practices embody a knowledge of how to get away with things, how to manoeuvre conversations, how to manipulate the system, ‘hunter’s cunning’ and etcetera (De Certeau, 1980: xiv, xv).

368

The tactic and the strategy are ‘two logics of action’. The tactic creates space for itself in a game whose rules are set up by institutional logic. It does so by manipulating the game, pretending to obey the game, in an attempt to subvert the game. In other words, tactics are creative moves that disrupt the routine working of an institutional order in ways that institutions cannot predict or prevent. As opposed to strategies that rely on long term planning, tactics tend to be short term, as they are developed on site and as a response to strategies. Strategies presume a power relationship between a centre of power and its exteriors as ‘competitors, targets, objects of research’; hence are organized around a location. Tactics, on the other hand, cannot be contained within a ‘spatial or an institutional localization’ (De Certeau, 1980: xx).

Bunton faces the legal establishment in the Old Bailey which tries to give a legal name to his action and charge him with theft. Bunton steers the questioning to a different direction, talking about himself and his father, getting the jury to think about social inequality in Britain. He spoke about his principles: ‘I could afford a licence myself. It was about the principle. All my life, I looked out for other people and it got me into trouble’. He tells the court how, after reading Joseph Conrad, he wanted to explore Sunderland and got ridden away by a rip tide. He trusted someone would come and save him; so he spent his energy floating rather than swimming to the shore.

He addressed the court members: ‘I am not me without you and you are not you without me’ – affirming their equality and collective interdependence. His defence was not based on the conception of the citizens as subjects of the legal system, but as a community that trust and rely on each other. He did not steal the painting for personal gain but calculated that with 140.000 pounds, he could provide 3500 television licences a year and make the people connect

with each other. Within the legal framework, Bunton and his defence lawyer, Hutchinson, developed a tactic and used a loophole in the legal system to navigate through the system. Bunton was only charged for stealing the frame, not the painting, as his aim was never to deprive the public permanently of their right to view it.

Acknowledgements

I extend my sincere thanks to George Thwaites who has contributed to this article with his knowledge of Geordie and the colloquial language of the Northwest in Britain.

References

- Armstrong, S. (2017, October 10). *Want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness: Are Beveridge's five evils back?* The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/oct/10/beveridge-five-evils-welfare-state>
- Barron, K. (2022). *The curious case of the stolen portrait*. The Wolfson Foundation. <https://www.wolfson.org.uk/goya-wellington-stolen-portrait/>
- Bourke, J. (1994). *Working class cultures in Britain, 1890–1960: Gender, class and ethnicity*. Routledge.
- Critchley, S. (2002). *On humour*. Routledge.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Rendall, Trans.). University of California Press
- Escalante-de Mattei, S. (2022, February 28). *'The Duke' paints a touching portrait of the family who stole a Goya*. ArtNews. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/the-duke-film-goya-art-heist-review-1234626376/>
- Garland, D. (2021). The emergence of the idea of 'the welfare state' in British political discourse. *History of the Human Sciences*, 35(1), 132–157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951211034412>
- Glennerster, H. (2020). *The post-war welfare state: Stages and disputes*. London School of Economics. <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/121516/1/spdorn03.pdf>
- Kermode, M. (2022, February 27). *The Duke review – Jim Broadbent excels in true tale of art-stealing pensioner*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/feb/27/the-duke-review-roger-michell-jim-broadbent-helen-mirren-kempton-bunton-theft>
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Latour, B. (2010, February). *Networks, societies, spheres: Reflections of an actor-network theorist* [Keynote speech]. International Seminar on Network Theory: Network Multidimensionality in the Digital Age, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, Los Angeles.
- Latour, B. (2011). Networks, societies, spheres: Reflections of an actor-network theorist. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 796–810.

- Müller, M. (2015). Assemblages and actor-networks: Rethinking socio-material power, politics and space. *Geography Compass*, 9(1), 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12192>
- Nairne, S. (2011, August 5). *How Goya's Duke of Wellington was stolen*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/aug/05/art-theft-duke-wellington-goya>
- National Gallery. (n.d.). *Archive record NGA26*. <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/research/research-centre/archive/record/NGA26>
- Spöhrer, Markus. (2017). Applying Actor-Network Theory in Production Studies. In M. Spöhrer, B. Ochsner (Ed.). *Applying the Actor-Network Theory in Media Studies*. IGC Global. Accessed 3 June 2025. <https://www.igiglobal.com/gateway/chapter/164085>
- Travis, A. (2012, November 30). *Revealed: 1961 Goya theft from National Gallery was a family affair*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/nov/30/1961-goya-crime-national-gallery>
- Whiting, S. (2022, April 22). *The true story behind 'The Duke': Fact vs. fiction*. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2022-04-22/the-duke-true-story-fact-fiction>
- Zupančič, A. (2008). *The odd one in: On comedy*. MIT Press.