

“Might All Be a Work”: Professional Wrestling at Butlins Holiday Camps

Mocked as a “B-plus player” by WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) Authority figures Triple H and Stephanie McMahon, Daniel Bryan is small for a wrestler. He does not have the muscle-bound look of a Hulk Hogan or a Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. And yet he has become a firm fan favorite. Bryan, like a number of the most technically gifted wrestlers, began on the independent circuit before joining the more lucrative and high profile WWE. As part of his apprenticeship Bryan toured Japan and Britain, finding his way to the famous Butlins¹ holiday camps where he introduced himself as the “American Dragon.” He later reflected on his experiences:

England! I spent a lot of time at Butlins’ holiday camps. Literally wrestling for kids. I’d get up there, wearing a mask, singing the American national anthem, and they’d be, ‘Boooooooo.’ I was the bad guy. See how many times I’d get tripped up, fall on my face. (Muldoon)

For Bryan, Butlins was a training school, a space of antipathy even if the boos were in response to fictional storylines and pantomimic scenarios.

In the twenty-first century, many professional wrestling fans engage with this unique sport-art through screens, watching on television, through the internet, or, since its inception in 2014, through the WWE’s own subscription-based network. From a performance studies perspective, much has been written in recent years about the tension or cooperation between the live and the mediatized. In a sense, wrestling can be understood as the always already mediatized live performance par excellence. Its storylines, sets, and characters are established as much for (if not more for) the through-screen audience as for the spectator watching live. Philip Auslander has, of course, controversially claimed that mediatization is less a threat to

live performance than an aspect of its intrinsic nature. In claiming that “live performance survives as television,” Auslander is speaking directly about professional wrestling (32).

Despite this, the space where wrestling occurs in a material and temporal sense—the arena, the hall, the backyard—remains a vital facet of the wrestling experience. Clearly this is the case for the live audience who feel the wrestlers’ movements, the promotional monologues, and the pyrotechnics in a decidedly different way than those watching at home. As Stephen di Benedetto has argued, using distinctly performance studies parlance, those watching the event live are transformed from “spectator” to “spect-actor, joining in with chants, taunts and cheers” (29-30). In light of di Benedetto’s reading of the interactions of professional wrestling performance, the actual spaces of wrestling become resonant, meaningful, and fraught. Those who accuse professional wrestling of fakery and of pandering to audiences’ prejudices imagine it as a singular entity regardless of its setting. But this misconception (or perhaps omission, might be a better way to describe it) reappears even in the reflections of those who revere wrestling as an art form. Roland Barthes, for example, the guarantor for anyone working in the scholarship of professional wrestling, focuses on such important elements as characterization, the notion of “work” (that is the scripted nature of the form), and performed violence, but, when it comes to the actual space in which the wrestling takes place, refers only to “second-rate halls” (15). Barthes makes a fine case for wrestling as a “spectacle of excess,” but where the wrestling occurs is understandably less important for his structuralist project than what it looks like (15). Since Barthes’s essay, professional wrestling has moved out of the hall and into the arena, the stadium, and especially in 2016-17, even into politics. In her recent epilogue for the 2016 collection *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, Sharon Mazer makes the convincing argument that even academia can be read in professional wrestling terms with bureaucratic “heels” (“baddies”), fixed fights, and illusory spectacles (196-204).

Bryan's recollections of Butlins, however, reveal the camp as a unique space in which to wrestle; a space where, in sharp contrast to the New York home of professional wrestling, Madison Square Garden, the audience boos Bryan for singing the American National Anthem. Space and place serve as essential contexts for the reception, efficacy, and attributes of professional wrestling matches. Within this broad contextual frame, the British holiday camp Butlins, a unique space where professional wrestling substantiates its tenets, rules, and systems, appears as a simulated space of the kind described by Jean Baudrillard. In this way, wrestling parlance offers a potential means of intervention into the way we engage with the world, especially a world where post-truth politics have become the order of the day.

Professional Wrestling: Space, Nation, Location

In August 2014, I sat in the Staples Center, Los Angeles watching one of the WWE's major pay-per-views of the year: *Summerslam*. Earlier that year, I attended Southside Wrestling's *Day of Reckoning 2* at Rushcliffe Arena, Nottingham, a much smaller local English venue.² Although both these occasions featured professional wrestling, the experiences were very different: the large-scale, technologically impressive afternoon in LA versus a less well-attended, early evening in an East Midlands leisure center. Actually, the smaller-venue wrestling was not any less impressive. The two matches that stand out from these events are Brock Lesnar delivering sixteen German suplexes to John Cena in the former and a fabulous four-way event, featuring the late Kris Travis, in the latter. However, the spaces made a substantial difference to the feel, import, and reactions. It would appear to be a fairly simple initial conclusion to reach: different venues lead to different live experiences of professional wrestling.

But this dynamic is far more complex than might be imagined. Take, for example, professional wrestling's difficult relationship with national identity and geography. By way

of illustration, a famous example: in November 1997 the “Heartbreak Kid” Shawn Michaels took his feud with local hero Bret “The Hitman” Hart to Montreal. Texan Michaels famously humped the Maple Leaf flag antagonizing the partisan Canadian crowd.³ This led to the now infamous “Montreal Screwjob” match in which Hart lost to Michaels. In that match, encouraged by WWE (then WWF) owner Vince McMahon, referee Earl Hebner ordered the bell to be rung early, thereby causing Hart to lose the championship belt despite the agreed plan to allow Hart to win. Hart was furious, notoriously spitting in McMahon’s face as he left the ring. As a result of the “Screwjob,” Michaels (who went on to become a Hall of Famer and self-appointed Mr Wrestlemania) is still booed in Canada, particularly in the French-speaking region. The fact that this occurred in Hart’s backyard, rather than in America, added significantly to the storyline. There are plenty of other examples from the continued chants of “C. M. Punk”—a wrestler who rather acrimoniously left the WWE in 2014—when the WWE arrive in his hometown of Chicago to the booing of obviously “Iraqi” characters such as General Adnan during the 1991 Iraq War. Not all examples of professional wrestling’s locational specificity necessarily pander to xenophobia as critics might imagine. Recently, the WWE launched the WWE UK Championship belt, a clear acknowledgement of the recent growth of the independent British wrestling circuit. While this Championship contest could be watched globally through the WWE Network, the backdrop of Blackpool’s iconic Tower Ballroom and the notable traditional British strong style meant the actual location of this event remained of key importance.

If geography is inherently important to the reception and attributes of particular feuds and storylines, then location (the arena, hall, or theatre) is equally as important. From the pyrotechnic-filled Staples Centre to the Rushcliffe Arena, a hall used for hosting local badminton tournaments and 5-a-side football leagues, the chosen venue is a vital element in the general mise-en-scene. Again, the history of professional wrestling testifies to these

nuances. In 1993, World Championship Wrestling (WCW), WWE's rival promotion until McMahon purchased it in 2001, both in real life and as part of on-going storylines, began taping their events at Disney MGM Studios in Orlando.⁴ There were a number of reasons for this decision but primarily, it was an issue of control. As the WWE still regularly discovers, setting up a touring model for professional wrestling is exciting but tricky; audiences respond differently to the spectacle in different parts of the country (and now the world) and particular reactions cannot be easily guaranteed. Eric Bischoff, then head of the WCW, wanted a greater level of control over the product's reception. Staging the events in one venue in front of predominantly unschooled fans, meant he could "push" (give title runs too) the wrestlers he liked without having to consider the opinions of boisterous hardcore fans. He would not even have to tape the events in succession. While in live-time professional wrestling must maintain a certain level of narrative continuity, if multiple events are being recorded and screened later, then chronological linearity in the filming process is unnecessary. WCW even used "signs to instruct folks when to cheer or boo, just like a standard television show" (Reynolds and Alvarez 55). Suffice to say, the specific location of the wrestling significantly changed the character of these events.

Butlins: "For All of Your Delight"

Billy Butlin established his empire of British seaside holiday camps in 1936 after spending a rather depressing holiday in Barry Island, Wales. Typically, seaside guesthouses would provide breakfast for visitors before throwing them out for the morning until, rain-soaked and bedraggled, they were allowed to tramp back to the welcome warmth of their accommodation (Ferry 5). In response, Butlin created the camps as a getaway for working-class Brits: a cheap, welcoming collection of chalets beside a heated pool with cooked dinners and organized entertainments. Butlins can be read as part of a tradition of British holiday camps

dating from the nineteenth century. However, Billy Butlin was influenced less by the Cunningham's Camp of the Isle of Man, for example, and more by his experiences as a young boy at summer camps in Canada; the idea of trans-Atlantic escape is embedded, therefore, in the very history of the Butlins camps (Tait 5). Although Butlins now has sites at Minehead, Bognor Regis, and Skegness, the last is the chain's flagship resort. For many who grew up in the industrialized north of England, Butlins at Skegness evokes nostalgic memories of clean air, fun, and entertainment.

Butlins seems far away from Disney MGM Studios, climatically if nothing else. Yet, as Bryan's recollections reveal, professional wrestling occurred there as well. Like WCW's studio tapings, the environment, atmosphere, and characteristics of Butlins imitate and define the wrestling within it. Each Butlins camp is based around the same precept: to create places "where hard-working families could rediscover their zest and sparkle" ("Our Beliefs"). Its motto alludes to the embedded sense of utopian escapism and the camp's inextricable connection with the rigidity and privation of working-class life in capitalist societies; the concern, of course, is that the campers would need to "rediscover their zest and sparkle" at all. Days at Butlins are punctuated by enjoyable events rather than tasks on a factory production line, and campers give up the time clock for new schedules that promise fun as well as the recurring concept in Butlins's promotional material of "delight." It is a place where bosses and overseers are replaced with the ubiquitous Red Coats whose "true intent is all for your delight,"⁵ a motto that comes from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* although Billy Butlin was not aware of the overtly theatrical origin when he adopted it. The competitive systems associated with late capitalism do not disappear entirely, however; rather they are reimagined as sources of enjoyment. There are plenty of famous historical examples: the Glamorous Granny competition, the Knobbly Knees contests, or the even more dubious "Cheerful, Chubby and Charming Competition" (Tait 41). Competitions now are a little more

modern; one can race against family members in go-carts or beat them at adventure golf. Entertaining competition, including the wrestling events at Butlins, have always been a key part of the experience. Take, for example, a hula dancing competition, filmed in 1964 at the Beachcomber Bar in Butlins Skegness. A collection of women in grass skirts, bedecked in flowers perform what they imagine to be genuine Polynesian dance moves. The winner, according to the Red Coat, will be the girl who has the most “authentic wiggle” (*Beachcomber*). A tropical island provides the backdrop to this competition complete with totem poles, palm trees, crocodiles, and exotic-sounding drinks. Leaving behind the inevitably grey and windy Skegness, guests enter a completely different world, far away (geographically and culturally) from the eastern England shoreline. The narrator of the British Pathé film confirms, “in this bar you could fancy yourself lost in the Pacific.” Towards the end of the film there is even a pretend tropical storm, evoked by flashing lights and crashing thunder.

Interestingly, Billy Butlin took his idea for the Beachcomber Cabaret Bars found across the Butlins chain, from a visit to Los Angeles in the late 1950s (Ferry 53). Famously, Jean Baudrillard uses another Los Angeles site, Disneyland (incidentally another Disney venue was the home of WCW during the nineties), as the key illustrative example of simulacra. In this simulated space, he says, “there is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity” (Baudrillard 174). But how might this notion of simulacra work at Butlins? As the Beachcomber Bar exemplifies, Butlins has always taken pride in the creation of other escape worlds within its borders. In recent years, Butlins has hosted themed weekends where visitors can imagine they are clubbing in Ibiza or rocking in the 1980s. The Beachcomber Bar is not simply a pleasant place to enjoy a cocktail; it is a world within a world. Baudrillard’s description of Disneyland

as a “play of illusions and phantasms: pirates, the frontier, future world, etc.” fits perfectly into the less spectacular surroundings of Butlins (174).

Butlins exists, however, as a Baudrillardian simulacrum even without the rum and hula of the Beachcomber Bar. Just as Disneyland, according to Baudrillard, exists amidst a sea of simulacra in Los Angeles and even America, Butlins is located in the simulation that is Skegness, a faded Victorian holidaying town, becoming a component of a layered mythos of the British seaside and, therefore, British identity more generally. For Baudrillard, Disneyland is a “miniaturized and *religious* reveling in real America” (174, emphasis original). But it is also confirmation that Los Angeles and America do not exist as real entities at all; actually these definable spaces are all simulacra resting on constructions such as nostalgia, patriotism, territory, and identity. Butlins similarly confirms that the seaside world surrounding it is actually a composite collection of images, relying on a (specifically Northern English) wistfulness, escapism, and perpetual delight.

Simulation and Wrestling at Butlins

If space, location, and geography are important facets of the professional wrestling experience, then how does holiday camp professional wrestling substantiate or destabilize the delightful simulacra of Butlins? When Baudrillard suggests “we are in the third order, no longer the order of the real, but of the hyperreal,” he could be thinking about professional wrestling, a popular culture form that entirely rests on multiple layered simulated constructions (124). This is by no means a criticism. There is no doubting the popularity of the form, the commitment of the performers, nor the excellence of the product. Nor is this analysis necessarily an overt criticism of Butlins. Instead of throwing stones at working-class culture, particularly at an institution that, despite obvious dubious politics, remains so beloved by so many, we should ask what happens when two institutions of British popular

culture, both of which can be read through Baudrillard's hyperreality, are thrown together: what clashes, conglomerates, or combines?

Butlins professional wrestling is markedly different from WWE wrestling or even the British independent circuit; it is a unique form for a unique place. While the WWE will stop off at Butlins Minehead during its UK tours, mostly the holiday camp crowd watches local stars or former or up-and-coming US stars. The wrestling events are part of the general admission price, an additional entertainment along with evening cabarets, sports competitions, or children's clubs. All-Star Wrestling, a company with a long and illustrious history having promoted some of British wrestling's most iconic fighters including Adrian Street, Giant Haystacks, and Big Daddy, has always been the most regular visitor to Butlins.⁶ However, in late 2016, the company lost the contract.⁷ All-Star competed in their final Butlins events in January 2017. This sudden change will upset the way that professional wrestling might reflect and/or disturb the Butlins idyll in the future.⁸

For in this delightful holiday camp space, wrestling exists in a vacuum, just as Butlins exists in its own simulation. This marks it as distinct from other forms of professional wrestling, where storylines and characters are built up over weeks and even years. While this has been the case since professional wrestling first moved from carnival sideshow to televised spectacle, the past thirty years have seen enormous changes as satellite television, video channels, and online subscription services appeared. Even small independent wrestling organizations post weekly updates on YouTube to help develop storylines and characters. Butlins is profoundly different, and this vacuum-packed wrestling product displays unique characteristics that say something far broader about the hyperreality of holiday camp.

Firstly, Butlins wrestling by necessity regresses back to an earlier age of heels (baddies) and faces (goodies). In the current WWE product such distinctions have become intentionally (and sometimes unintentionally) blurred, with the arrival of characters that exist

between these two extremes: “The Beast” Brock Lesnar or “The Eater of Worlds” Bray Wyatt are two current examples. Butlins wrestlers are either good or bad, friend or enemy. They are akin to the sort of characters Barthes recognizes in *Mythologies*. Confirming that “each sign in wrestling is therefore endowed with an absolute clarity,” Barthes describes Thauvin, the “organically repugnant ... bastard” (17). Barthes trusts Thauvin to embody the ignoble, amoral villain as if he were a *Commedia dell’arte* stock character. Such clear-cut characterization feels faintly old-fashioned when read alongside current wrestlers, such as John Cena or, perhaps, Roman Reigns, who are faces to some and heels to others. Especially when seemingly disturbing figures, such as the bullying Lesnar or the manipulative Wyatt, receive cheers.

While it is true to say that audio mediation is a clear tradition in professional wrestling, such commentary is almost always for the audiences at home; it is a TV device. At Butlins, by contrast, the Red Coat provides an audio connection throughout. But his interventions are distinct. He introduces the wrestler, making absolutely clear whom the audience should boo and cheer. He does not provide any real commentary on the moves or the pacing of the match, and he does not allude to any previous conflicts, which is very unusually for modern professional wrestling. These wrestlers are entirely ahistorical. The Red Coat, on the other hand, orchestrates the audience very directly. Anything the heel characters do is met with a led chant of “cheat, cheat, cheat.” He sometimes uses the familiar British football chant of “Who are ye? Who are ye?” To fill the silence, he tells the audience to “clap, clap, clap.” This is not the building of a story. These are simply immediate generic (and decidedly non-wrestling) responses. Just as in the Hula Girls competition in 1964, the Red Coats at Butlins professional wrestling are entirely in charge, manipulating a crowd of mainly young fans. There seems to be no dissent. It also means that Butlins wrestling, unlike contemporary professional wrestling outside the holiday camp, entirely maintains “kayfabe.”

Scott Beekman describes kayfabe as “the notion of keeping the business secret” (40); it is a way of ensuring the fans remain “marks,” totally taken in by the events unfolding in front of them. This is not to say, of course, that some adults in the audience will not roll their eyes at the perceived fakery but, rather, that there is no way of actively disturbing the kayfabe structures of Butlins wrestling. The WWE has partly embraced the erosion of kayfabe—by endorsing, for example, Punk’s now legendary pipebomb promo (in which he jokingly referred to “breaking the fourth wall”) and Paul Heyman’s promise to “shoot from the hip,” by promoting shows such as *Talking Smack* or *Total Divas*, which partly reveal the supposed truth behind the storylines, or by communicating via Twitter. At Butlins, however, kayfabe remains strong and unshakeable. The stories told by wrestling, through the verbal narrative of the Red Coat, are Aristotelian in structure and leave little space for discord. A similar, linear structured and consensual narrative occurs in the broader Butlins context.

However, something even more interesting appears in the identity of the characters. At Butlins, the heels are often introduced first, coming out to a torrent of boos. They are often announced as something like the “World Riot Squad” and appear waving black pirate flags. Sometimes, as Bryan notes, the heels wave the Stars and Stripes instead, but mostly it seems to be the generic pirate flag, particularly in the most recent shows. The faces are usually introduced second, often carrying a Union Jack flag. Such nationalistic gesturing is not new to professional wrestling. The WWE has, over the years, had heels dressed as Iraqi dictators and pushed Rusev, a Russian (actually Bulgarian) heel devoted to Vladimir Putin. As Nicholas Sammond suggests, the WWE has received criticism from the Left “for its violence, homophobia, misogyny, or racism” and from the Right “for excessive violence and moral relativism” (16). More interesting is the way this posturing situates Butlins as a place. The faces fight for the Butlins All-Stars, thereby creating a sense of the occupants of Butlins (under a Union Jack flag) battling against the invasion of the world. There is not only a clear

and arguably troubling xenophobic undertone, but this once again establishes Butlins as a disconnected world, indeed a country in itself. The professional wrestling performance solidifies Butlins's identity as a nationalistic simulacrum. Recently this element of Butlins wrestling actually made the news when the decidedly English-sounding Tony Spitfire took on clearly Muslim Hakim. A father made a high-profile complaint after his children were encouraged to boo the Islamic character. On Twitter he criticized the "horrific race hate-filled ten minutes of everything wrong on racial stereotypes" (Turner).⁹ Interestingly, the promotion took full responsibility for this error, and Butlins seemed to escape as the misinformed victim who had no idea that such an angle would be played out. Given Butlins's nationalist posturing and encouragement of previous angles, this appears disingenuous. Such nationalistic constructs have taken on a new resonance, of course, in Brexit Britain; it is, perhaps, interesting to note that Skegness county of Lincolnshire had the highest Leave vote in the country ("Lincolnshire").

Particularly fascinating, however, is the outcome of the matches. In the world of professional wrestling heels or faces can win a match. Heels sometimes cheat or "screw over" their opponents, but one of the key enjoyments of professional wrestling, even for "smark" fans,¹⁰ is the simulation of competition—no one actually knows who will win. This is illustrated, for example, by The Undertaker's shock loss at Wrestlemania XXX (2014). At Butlins, heel wins are less common and usually the faces are victorious, upholding the happy-world simulacrum of the camp. When there is a heel victory the way these anomalies are presented is especially intriguing. There are many examples, but most are not readily available in recorded form. One, however, does provide a useful uncovering of the heel and face characters in Butlins professional wrestling. This is a 2012 match between Jamie Sleight (face) and Danny Steel (heel). Skull-and-crossbone flag in hand, Steel enters the ring first, followed by Sleight who is greeted with Red Coat-orchestrated cheers. The match lasts about

fifteen minutes, momentum moving back and forth between the two performers with constant commentary from the Red Coat who calls for chicken chants and boos or cheers and clapping depending on which wrestler is ascendant. But the match's conclusion proves particularly interesting. Sleight is not paying attention when the heel Steel runs through the ropes, sneaks up behind his opponent, performs a roll up or small package, and wins. The Red Coat's first response is to orchestrate a "cheat, cheat, cheat" chant, an accusation that is not actually true as Steel does nothing wrong by any wrestling rulebook. In an unusual turn, however, he then asks the ref to overturn the decision. The ref's rather stilted response confirms Steel as the winner but it is Sleight who is left in the ring supported by both the Red Coat and the audience who the Red Coat has encouraged to back his calls for Sleight to be awarded the victory. The whole scenario creates an unbreakable union between the audience, wrestler, and Red Coat. It also presents the ref as an ill-informed jobsworth, not far removed from factory foremen or low-level managerial yes-men; outside the "delight" of the camp, these are figures the working-class audience comes up against every day. Steel is conspicuous by his absence at the end, marginalized to the apron of the ring rather than taking his place as victor in the center. This example illustrates the rebalancing of the fragile positive world of Butlins by pitching the community of Red Coat/audience/Sleight against the forces of evil in the cheating heel Steel and the uncharismatic jobsworth ref. Ultimately, Butlins (the nationalistic construct, the happy, idealized utopia) wins even when Sleight loses.

The Work: Butlins, The World, and The Potential of Wrestling Terms

Sharon Mazer notes that one of the defining characteristics of hardcore wrestling fans is their acknowledgement that "everything—wrestling, life, the whole shooting match—might really be a work" (153). In this professional wrestling context "work" is the opposite of "shoot," fictional storytelling as opposed to real life. It is, of course, a loaded term; as Laurence de

Garis confirms “work”, even in the specific field of professional wrestling, might mean “employment and labor, manipulation and deceit, or cooperation or collusion” (199).

Although the restrictions of kayfabe have been continuously broken in recent years, storytelling continues to drive professional wrestling’s popularity. Oftentimes the most successful storylines—Michaels versus Hart, as described above—are those that traverse that tricky boundary line between work and shoot. But what Mazer suggests here is that the divide between work and shoot is a fiction; everything is a work.

At Butlins the whole experience (including its professional wrestling) is also a work: capitalist inequalities still exist outside the walls of escapist Butlins with its caricatured Red Coats, its simulated desert islands, and its uninterrupted delight. The Butlins professional wrestling experience remains embedded in the overall structures of the holiday camp: goodies generally win and Britain rules while baddies cheat and scheme but can be brought low merely by chanting “Who are ye?” In light of Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum, Butlins and its wrestling become a layered mythos of work, an environment where it is profoundly difficult to really find anything shoot whether in the ring or out. Perhaps in our current world of alt-facts, wrestling parlance—“work,” “shoot,” “kayfabe,” “heel,” “face”—takes on a new resonance. As 2018 continues apace, perhaps professional wrestling’s useful lexicon might help cut through political rhetoric and begin to make sense of the world.

WORKS CITED

- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. Routledge, 2002.
- Barthes, Roland. “The World of Wrestling.” *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang, 1972, pp. 15-25.
- Baudrillard, Jean. “Simulacra and Simulations.” *Selected Writings*, edited by Mark Poster. Stanford UP, 1988, pp. 166-184.

The Beachcomber Bar. British Pathé, 1964, <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-beachcomber-bar/query/Butlins>. Accessed 23 May 2018.

Beekman, Scott. *Ringside: A History of Professional Wrestling in America*. Praeger, 2006.

Chow, Broderick, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden, editors. *Performance and Professional Wrestling*. Routledge, 2016.

Daniels, Morgan. "Some Moments of Flag Desecration." *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, edited by Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden, Routledge, 2016, pp. 188-95.

De Garis, Laurence. "The 'Logic' of Professional Wrestling." *Steel Chair to the Head*, edited by Nicholas Sammond, Duke UP, 2002, pp. 192-212.

Di Benedetto, Stephen. "Playful Engagements: Wrestling with the Attendant Masses." *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, edited by Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden, Routledge, 2016, pp. 26-36.

Dunn, Carrie. *Spandex, Screw Jobs and Cheap Pops*. Pitch, 2013.

Ferry, Kathryn. *Holiday Camps*. Shire, 2010.

"Jamie Sleight v.s Danny Steel (All Star Wrestling @ Butlins Skegness). *YouTube*, uploaded by jamie sleight, 20 Oct. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYyKp8ooQTo>. Accessed 23 May 2018.

"Lincolnshire Records UK's Highest Brexit Vote." *BBC News*, 24 June 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36616740>. Accessed 23 May 2018.

Mahdawi, Arwa. "Wrestling Racism: When Does Crude Caricature Become Islamophobia?" *The Guardian*, 10 Apr. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/shortcuts/2016/apr/10/wrestling-racism-butlins-crude-caricature-islamophobia>. Accessed 24 May 2018.

- Mazer, Sharon. *Professional Wrestling: Sport and Spectacle*. Mississippi UP, 1998.
- . “Epilogue: The Game of Life.” *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, edited by Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden, Routledge, 2016, pp.196-206.
- Muldoon, Rhys. “Tackling a WWE Star.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 Aug. 2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tackling-a-wwe-star-20130801-2r03h.html>. Accessed 23 May 2018.
- “Our Beliefs and Colourful History.” *Butlins*, 2017, <https://www.butlins.com/get-to-know-us/our-beliefs-and-colourful-story/2017-tv-adverts.aspx>. Accessed 23 May 2018.
- Reynolds, R. D., and Bryan Alvarez. *The Death of WCW*. ECW, 2004.
- Sammond, Nicholas. “A Brief and Unnecessary Defense of Professional Wrestling.” *Steel Chair to the Head*, edited by Nicholas Sammond, Duke UP, 2002, pp. 1-22.
- Tait, Derek. *An Illustrated History of Butlin's*. Amberley, 2012.
- Turner, Camilla. “Butlins Apologises for Racist Wrestling Match that Urged Families to Boo Muslim Fighter.” *The Telegraph*, 5 April 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/05/butlins-apologises-for-racist-wrestling-match-that-urged-families/>. Accessed 23 May 2018.

NOTES

With thanks to the PCA for awarding me a Madonna Marsden Travel Award to present this work in its infancy at its conference in New Orleans (2015), and to all at *Reslo*, the first British wrestling conference in Aberystwyth in 2016, who commented on the revised paper.

¹ There is some contention over whether to use an apostrophe or not in Butlins. Given that the holiday camp chain was named after its founder Billy Butlin, the camp's name originally had an apostrophe. However, after refurbishment and rebranding in the latter years of the twentieth century, the apostrophe disappeared. For ease, and in keeping with Butlins's current branding, I too have chosen to omit the apostrophe in this article.

² Just to clarify, this event is in no way connected with the WWE's own *Day of Reckoning 2*, its 2005 video game.

³ See Daniels for more analysis of flags and national identity in professional wrestling, including a more detailed examination of this event.

⁴ With thanks to Sam Ford for originally suggesting this connection with WCW at the first wrestling conference in Aberystwyth (2016).

⁵ This tag line is the first thing to appear if "Butlins" is typed into the Google search engine, online: <https://www.butlins.com>

⁶ For a nuanced overview of the contemporary British professional wrestling, especially its indebtedness to (or desire to escape) the past see Dunn.

⁷ The company will, seemingly, still be providing professional wrestling events for Haven holiday camps.

⁸ This was formally acknowledged by All Star Wrestling on the January 2, 2017 via their Facebook page which recorded "All Star will no longer be contracted to provide Wrestling at Butlins resort" (All-Star Wrestling. *Facebook*, 2 January 2017. <https://en-gb.facebook.com/allstarwrestlinguk/>. Accessed 23 June 2017.)

⁹ This event led to mainstream newspaper coverage in the United Kingdom, including an opinion piece by Arwa Mahdawi in the *Guardian* entitled "Wrestling Racism: When Does Crude Caricature Become Islamophobia?"

¹⁰ "Smark" refers to the "smart mark," fans who understand that professional wrestling is a fiction but enjoy it anyway, often in a very engaged way, taking pride in their knowledge of professional wrestling history and unpacking events and matches in depth.