

Slapstick

In line with our green agenda, we replaced the TV with a Punch and Judy show and a fortune teller. It was weird at first, with soaps and home improvement shows alike ending in comic carnage, but within weeks it felt like every voice we'd ever heard had had that rasping burr, and that the prize for every daytime quiz had always been a string of contested sausages. On the hour, the lights dimmed and a made-up man in Victorian gypsy drag came by to prognosticate on the next day's weather and the rise and fall of waves of plague and disaster capitalism. We took him to task on respect and appropriation, but he explained that he was a bankrupt hotelier with a wife, three children, and a modest petting zoo to feed, and that cultural integrity didn't feed the goats, so we cut him slack and had to admit he made the role his own. We nominated him for a BAFTA, but never heard back. Meanwhile, the puppeteer did what he could, taking on everything from the Olympics to classic movies with his wooden archetypes, and we roared as the policeman romped home in the 1500 meters and our stoic eyes glistened with Mr Punch as Judy and the dog turned away on that foggy Casablanca airstrip. It was as if, stripped of big budgets and facial expressions, we saw the stories for the first time, their pain and passion raw as a slapped cheek. And when Punch pranced on as a swazzle-gobbed Prime Minister, we roared at the nonsense and the perfect comic timing, squeaking along with the catchphrases and bawling *Oh no it's not!* at each outrageous fib. You'd think it would wear thin but, more than a year on, here we are, crossing palms with silver, checking our temperatures and our waterproof jackets, and whooping at the painted fool. Here comes the policeman! Here comes the crocodile! That's the way to do it!