

Politics As Theatre: Now Let The Real Drama Begin

This post was originally posted on [Charlie Beckett's blog](#) on April 6th.

[Charlie Beckett](#) is the Director of POLIS.



I cannot remember a more staged start to a General Election campaign than today. And the mainstream media are playing their part in one of the most orchestrated opening political Acts in modern history.

As the long-prepared campaigns clear their throats and belt out their lines, so the news-editors' plans spring into action sending correspondents scurrying into their allotted roles. It's a delightful dance of the politically damned.

I remember back in the early '90s when there were serious discussions in newsrooms about whether to even cover the newly-created construct of political photo-opportunities. Newspapers like The Independent actually considered ignoring this pantomime of imagery and soundbite. Now we happily watch the leaders on parade and the media simply puts it on air and the front page.

Of course, the still-vast political press corps then indulges in [endless dissection of what these stunts symbolise](#) in a desperate attempt to show some sort of critical faculty. Hence, the endless exegesis of patently unfelt and meaningless slogans such as 'A future fair for all' or 'the great ignored'.

The public ends up with a blizzard of post-modernist deconstruction of semiotic meanings that blankets any real politics with a deep covering of drifts of non-relevance and unreality.

And so from Day One, process triumphs over policy.

This isn't to say that there isn't some wonderfully detailed attempts to serve up facts. We've had a range of delightful swing-ometers already. And go online and most media organisations are delivering very good psephological and policy information. The FT has a good guide to [election maps, for example, here](#).

But as [I have said elsewhere](#), it is the telly and to a degree the papers that will continue to produce the most impactful and agenda-setting election coverage. We await to see if the Internet, the blogosphere and social media can be any more than a wonderful back-up and secondary source. Please can someone break through the play-acting to create some real drama?