

THE ARTILLERY OF CRITIQUE VERSUS THE GENERAL UNCRITICAL CONSENSUS:  
STANDING UP TO PROPAGANDA, 1990-1999

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Artillery of Critique versus the General Uncritical Consensus: Standing Up to Propaganda, 1990-1999

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In 2011, leading comedy scholars singled-out two shortcomings in stand-up comedy research. The first shortcoming suggests a theoretical void: that although “a number of different disciplines take comedy as their subject matter, the opportunities afforded to the inter-disciplinary study of comedy are rarely, if ever, capitalized on.”<sup>1</sup> The second indicates a methodological void: there is a “lack of literature on ‘how’ to analyse stand-up comedy.”<sup>2</sup> This research project examines the relationship between political consciousness and satirical humour in stand-up comedy and attempts to redress these two shortcomings. It offers a new theoretical model and a new set of longitudinal data: the political content of American stand-up comedy over the course of the decade from 1990-1999. It capitalizes on the interdisciplinary study of comedy, which scholars describe as a “huge cultural phenomenon,”<sup>3</sup> by offering a plausible context for the manifestation of satirical stand-up comedy content. The development of the context proceeds in logical steps integrating insights from five realms of inquiry – language science, political economy, propaganda studies, mass media effects and humour theory – into a consistent theoretical framework. The interdisciplinary effort offers a new method to analyse stand-up comedy, captured by the symbolic formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ , whereby the satirical content of stand-up comedy ( $SC^2$ ) manifests itself in the association of two sets of statements: operative group beliefs (OGBs) and contrary empirical rational propositions (CERPs).

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<sup>1</sup> Lockyer *et al.*, 2011:99.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 100.

As a whole, this research project falls within the conflict theory tradition of sociological research.<sup>1</sup> It argues that structurally, the aggregate demand for stand-up satire is stimulated by the dominion exerted by mass media over mass opinions. Given that elite “control of society, while certainly manifest in material modes of production, is culturally embedded and naturalized in the minds of the people via its hegemony over discourse,”<sup>2</sup> the content of stand-up satire cannot be properly examined unless the political economic repercussions of mass communication are taken into account. Mass propaganda and satire are inextricably entwined. This dissertation hypothesizes that the former fuels the general uncritical consensus while the latter acts as the artillery of critique.

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<sup>1</sup> Klaehn *et al.*, 2010:10.

<sup>2</sup> Theobald, 2006:26.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My late grandfather, Mario Odorico (1923-2016)

My late doctoral supervisor, Christopher David Innes, PhD, CRC (1941-2017)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF CHARTS .....	x
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1. Origin of the Project.....	1
2. Research Project.....	6
3. Research Paradigm and Literature.....	9
4. Research Scope .....	15
5. General Framework.....	17
6. Conclusion.....	19
CHAPTER 2: THE LANGUAGE FACULTY.....	23
1. Preview.....	23
2. Core Properties .....	27
3. Emergence of Language .....	30
4. Language as Play .....	35
5. Conclusion.....	37
CHAPTER 3: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY .....	40
1. Preview.....	40
2. Language as Competitive Advantage .....	42
3. The Power Advantage .....	46
4. Micro Political Economy.....	49
5. Macro Political Economy .....	55
5.1 Contextualizing the Macro .....	62
5.2 Causality in the Macro.....	65
6. Global Political Economy .....	70
7. Conclusion.....	72
CHAPTER 4: IDEOLOGY.....	75
1. Preview.....	75
2. The Twin Pillars of Political Economic Ideology.....	78
3. Ideological Policies .....	81
4. Ideology and Culture .....	85
5. Ideology and Education.....	88
6. Class Consciousness.....	91
7. Conclusion.....	95
CHAPTER 5: PROPAGANDA.....	97
1. Preview.....	97
2. Propaganda.....	98
3. Propaganda Redux.....	101
4. Psychic Manipulation .....	109
5. The Battle for the Mind.....	113
6. A System for Mass Propaganda .....	120
7. Conclusion.....	126
CHAPTER 6: THE GENERAL UNCRITICAL CONSENSUS.....	131
1. Preview.....	131
2. Mass Cognition.....	134
3. Mass Content.....	138
4. The General Uncritical Consensus .....	143

5. The Society of Spectators.....	149
6. The Society of the Spectacle .....	152
7. The Society of Uniformity.....	155
8. Conclusion.....	160
CHAPTER 7: THE ARTILLERY OF DISSENSUS.....	167
1. Preview.....	167
2. Contextual Considerations.....	171
3. Terminological Distinctions .....	174
3.1 Laughter, Humour, Comedy, Satire .....	174
4. Common Theoretical Denominators.....	178
4.1 Classic Theory .....	178
4.2 Modern Theory.....	181
4.3 Contemporary Theory .....	186
5. The Artillery of Dissensus .....	197
6. The Brigade of Dissensus.....	202
7. Conclusion.....	210
CHAPTER 8: METHOD & METHODOLOGY.....	214
1. Preview.....	214
2. Procedural Disclaimers .....	216
2.1 Facts and Propositions .....	217
2.2 Beliefs and Propositions .....	219
2.3 Vagueness and Externalized Language.....	223
3. The Object of Investigation .....	227
3.1 Satirical Statements .....	228
3.2 Satirical Mechanism.....	231
4. Research Design .....	232
4.1 Ontology and Epistemology.....	233
4.2 Two-Pronged Methodology .....	236
4.3 Sample Selection .....	237
4.4 Hypothesis Testing.....	239
5. Conclusion.....	240
CHAPTER 9: SC <sup>2</sup> CONTENT ANALYSIS.....	242
1. Preview.....	242
2. The Data.....	245
3. Quantitative Coding .....	248
4. Qualitative Coding .....	250
5. Evidence & Analysis.....	256
6. Discussion .....	284
7. Conclusion.....	292
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION.....	295
1. Inferences.....	295
2. Limitations.....	298
3. Scholarly Contributions.....	300
4. Suggestions for Future Research.....	310
APPENDIX 1: SC <sup>2</sup> 1990-1994.....	313
APPENDIX 2: SC <sup>2</sup> 1995-1999.....	354
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	397
STAND-UP SPECIALS REFERENCES .....	421



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 .....	3
Table 2 .....	3
Table 3 .....	4
Table 4 .....	4
Table 5 .....	24
Table 6 .....	247
Table 7 .....	253
Table 8 .....	254

## LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1 .....	244
Chart 2 .....	246
Chart 3 .....	246

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 .....	312
Appendix 2 .....	353

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CERP	Contrary Empirical Rational Propositions
ET AL.	Et Alia (and others)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GUC	General Uncritical Consensus
IBID.	Ibidem (same as above)
LOP	Law of Pressure (Shaftesbury's)
OGB	Operative Group Beliefs
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares (regression)
OP.CIT.	Opere Citato (already cited)
PEP	Political Economic Propaganda
PES	Political Economic System
PG	Political Groups
SC <sup>2</sup>	Satirical Content of Stand-Up Comedy (SCSC>SC <sup>2</sup> )
SPF	Specific Political Figure

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*"'Tis the habit alone of reasoning,  
which can make a reasoner.  
And [people] can never be  
better invited to the habit,  
than when they find pleasure in it."  
Lord Shaftesbury<sup>1</sup>*

*"The great power of humorous writing  
as a social force (...)   
help[s] to return to sanity the mind (...)   
still a little delirious."  
Stephen Leacock<sup>2</sup>*

*"Questioning authority is often  
done effectively through  
ridicule, mockery, lampooning, satire."  
Noam Chomsky<sup>3</sup>*

### 1. Origin of the Project

This dissertation examines the relationship between political consciousness and stand-up satire in the United States in the decade 1990-1999. It investigates the contrast between the persuasive force of propaganda and the dissuasive force of satire. While the former stimulates the "general uncritical consensus" regarding the status quo, the latter acts as the "artillery of dissensus" against the status quo. The "general uncritical consensus" is a mass media effects concept offered by Theodore Adorno in *Culture Industry Reconsidered*. The ubiquitous mass mediated deployment of commercial content, Adorno posits, has the following effect: "the culture industry turns into public relations, the manufacturing of 'goodwill' per se, without regard for particular firms or saleable objects. Brought to bear is a general uncritical consensus, advertisements produced for the world."<sup>4</sup> And furthermore, "the concepts of order

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<sup>1</sup> 1773:70.

<sup>2</sup> 1938:69.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Adorno, 2001:100.

which [The Culture Industry] hammers into human beings are always those of the status quo. They remain unquestioned, unanalyzed and undialectically presupposed, even if they no longer have any substance for those who accept them.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, “the artillery of critique” is borrowed from Harold Innis’s *Bias of Communication*. Following a masterful synthesis of the role that various types of media played in the political economy of empires, Innis argued that “with the outbreak of revolution, newspapers became the artillery of ideas.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, there is a dichotomy: the “general uncritical consensus” on one end, and the “artillery of critique/dissensus” on the other.

From an empirical standpoint, a dichotomy between propaganda and satire is suggested by some apparent congruities between a certain tradition of critical political scholarship and the satirical content of stand-up comedy in the period under scrutiny. A sample of the congruities is reproduced below. These congruities have never been reviewed nor examined in social science scholarship to my knowledge. As such, they offer an opportunity for inquiry. The empirical record on stand-up comedians’ perspectives bears to a select political scholarship a stronger affinity, both in the treated information and the chosen point of view, than could possibly have been produced by accident. So strong indeed, that no investigator could examine both without supposing them to have a foundation in some common, underlying principle,<sup>3</sup> perhaps implemented neutrally and manifested socially. This research project takes its cue from this affinity because it is puzzling. It is evident in many cases, but four prominent

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno, 2001:104.

<sup>2</sup> Innis, 1971:58.

<sup>3</sup> This hypothesis is intentionally modeled on Sir William Jones’ famous observation on the similarities between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin. “The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.” See Jones, 1824:28 (*Emphasis added*).

examples are reproduced below, verbatim. As Stephen Leacock said, “one may with profit set some extracts side by side,”<sup>1</sup> and thus they are. The first set is on the issue of class.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE 1. Class	
<p><b>1.A George Carlin</b>          “You know how I describe the economic and social classes in this country? The upper class keeps all of the money, pays none of the taxes. The middle class pays all of the taxes and does all of the work. The poor are there ... just to <b>scare the shit</b> out of the middle class.”</p>	<p><b>1.B. Howard Zinn</b>          “My upbringing, the family that I grew up in, the neighbourhood that I grew up in, working in a shipyard, made me, you might say, class conscious. And I was very conscious of the fact that we live in a class society of rich and poor, and a lot of people in between, <b>a lot of nervous people in between</b>, not knowing which way they’re gonna go.”</p>

The second set is on the issue of war and the international arms trade.

TABLE 2. War & Armaments	
<p><b>2.A Bill Hicks</b>          “Bush tried to buy votes towards the end of the election. Goes around, you know, selling weapons to everyone, getting that military-industrial complex vote happening for him. Sold 160 fighter jets to Korea and then 240 tanks to Kuwait and then goes around making speeches why he should be Commander-in-Chief because, “We still live in a dangerous world.”...Thanks to you, you fucker! You know we armed Iraq. I wondered about that too, you know during the Persian Gulf War those intelligence reports would come out: <b>“Iraq: incredible weapons - incredible weapons.”</b> How do</p>	<p><b>2.B Noam Chomsky</b>          “After the worst atrocities that Saddam carried out, including the chemical gassing of the Kurds, and the rest, the US and Britain happily gave him aid and support, including aid that enabled him to develop weapons of mass destruction and as they knew perfectly well, and at that time nothing was considered wrong with this. That was a couple of months before he became the <b>butcher of Bagdad, conquering the world</b>, and so on and so forth. So those words are omitted, and we know that it’s not his crimes that are the reason for the intended conquest, nor is it his development of weapons of mass</p>

<sup>1</sup> 1935:74.

<sup>2</sup> Disclaimer: the present research project examines the relationship between political consciousness and satire in Western culture as expressed in speech. For the purposes of this analysis, select excerpts of satirical critiques are reproduced verbatim, uncensored. Some include profanities, expletives, and/or slang pejoratives. Reader discretion is advised.

<p>you know that? "Uh, well...<b>we looked at the receipts.</b>" But as soon as that cheque clears we're going in. What time's the bank open, at eight? We're going in at nine. We're going in for God and Country and Democracy."</p>	<p>destruction which George Bush number one was aiding him in constructing at a time when he really was dangerous, as was Britain. This is just <b>the ultimate hypocrisy.</b>"</p>
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The third set is on the issue of national borders, their purely artificial nature, and the historical process by which imperial powers imposed them by splitting territories that were home to the same or contiguous ethnic groups.

TABLE 3. National Borders	
<p><b>3.A Eddie Griffin</b>          "They trying to tell our Mexican brothers and sisters that they need to stay away from the border. I don't understand that, when California is Mexico. <b>Listen to the name of it:</b> California, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose. If it starts with 'San' it's Mexican. Ain't no cities called William Brookshire."</p>	<p><b>3.B Noam Chomsky</b>          "The effort to establish borders has been a very, very violent process. (...) Take say the US-Mexico border. That was established by a war of aggression, in which the US conquered half of Mexico. <b>Take a look at the names of the cities</b> in southwest and western Unites States, San Francisco, San Diego, Santa Cruz, I mean, Spanish names."</p>

The fourth set is on the issue of religion and freedom.

TABLE 4. Religion & Freedom	
<p><b>4.A Eddie Griffin</b>          "Every war in humanity's history has been over some kind of motherfucking religion. You know what I mean? I don't get caught up in that bullshit 'cause I don't think God ever wrote a Bible or a Qur'an. He didn't have to write no shit. He ain't no playwright. It's written in your essence, 'cause the Bible was written by men. The book of Peter. The book of John. The whole book is about Jesus, but that nigga ain't wrote one book.</p>	<p><b>4.B Mikhail Bakunin</b>          "The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has <b>himself recognized them as such</b>, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual."</p>



<p>The motherfucker that it's about didn't write shit. God didn't write no book. <b>It's written in your essence.</b> Nobody ever had to tell you it's wrong to kill your mama. Somehow you born <b>innately knowing that.</b> Which means you born knowing right and wrong, so put the book down, 'cause it will fuck you up. You understand me?"</p>	
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There are many other examples of congruities, but these four sets suffice as an introduction this inquiry. 1A is by stand-up comedian George Carlin<sup>1</sup> and 1B by renowned historian, academic and political critic Howard Zinn.<sup>2</sup> 2A is by stand-up comedian Bill Hicks<sup>3</sup> and 2B is by renowned MIT Linguist, public intellectual, and US foreign policy critic Noam Chomsky.<sup>4</sup> 3A is by stand-up comedian Eddie Griffin<sup>5</sup> and 3B again by Noam Chomsky.<sup>6</sup> 4A again is by Eddie Griffin<sup>7</sup> and 4B by anarchist philosopher Mikhail Bakunin.<sup>8</sup> The affinities are manifest both in the content but also, and more importantly, in the critical perspective endorsed.

These and several other affinities have never been examined nor mentioned in the scholarship on political satire, and yet it is at the very least interesting to note that three comedians from very different cultural backgrounds have both information and perspectives in common with two scholars of the calibre of Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky. Nor does the scholarship on political communication ponder why certain critiques, based on the same information but treated in different ways, endorse the

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<sup>1</sup> Carlin, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Zinn, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Hicks, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Chomsky, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Griffin, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Chomsky, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Griffin, 2011(b).

<sup>8</sup> Bakunin, 1871.

same critical perspective. This void in the literature provides an opening for inquiry. The objective is then to pursue a general framework that may take into account these affinities and posit a causal context for their manifestation.

## 2. Research Project

The subject of this research project is the aggregate political content of US stand-up comedy in the period 1990-1999. It looks at ‘aggregate’ content in that the focus is on the political material elicited in the chosen sample of stand-up comedians’ repertoires, as opposed to an analysis of satirical content in any given year by a number of comics, or an analysis of a specific comedian’s satirical opus over a long period. For convenience, the political content of stand-up comedy will be simply referred to as its satire. In carrying out the aggregate analysis, this project examines a large sample<sup>1</sup> of satirical content over ten years: 66 stand-up comedy specials by 35 comics, consisting of 2910 minutes, or 48 hours and 30 minutes of spoken word material. The gathered data can thus speak legitimately to stand-up comedy’s institutional role, taken as a whole, and its relationship with general political consciousness.

This research project is worthwhile for three main reasons: 1) stand-up comedy is a “huge cultural phenomenon”<sup>2</sup> and is currently experiencing a “second boom”<sup>3</sup>; 2) according to industry polls, “25% of Millennials say comedy helps them shape their political beliefs” while “53% say comedy makes them think and gives them perspective;”<sup>4</sup> and 3) research on millennials’ attitudes vis a’ vis the mainstream media has shown opposite results: a national survey on news engagement carried out by

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<sup>1</sup> Sample rationale is explained in Ch.8 Sec.4.3 ; sample derivation in Ch.9 Sec.1.

<sup>2</sup> Lockyer *et al.* 2011:100.

<sup>3</sup> Fox, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Cook, 2012. The issue of modern media creating “echo-chambers,” in which people access information and opinions they already agree with, is explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

Professor Paula Poindexter at the University of Texas, Austin, has found that “Millennials describe news as garbage, lies, one-sided, propaganda, repetitive and boring.”<sup>1</sup> Quite the contrast compared to comedy. Furthermore, although “a number of different disciplines take comedy as their subject matter, the opportunities afforded to the inter-disciplinary study of comedy are rarely, if ever, capitalized on” and experts have noticed a “lack of literature on ‘how’ to analyse stand-up comedy.”<sup>2</sup> For this reason, an investigation of this kind is opportune and worthwhile. It is opportune because scholars agree that there is “growing recognition both within academic circles and non-academic communities that comedy is an important part of our contemporary lives that warrants academic attention and scrutiny.”<sup>3</sup> It is worthwhile because, as scholars note, comedy is “one of the most dynamic, complex and contradictory features of our lives.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the principal research question is the following: what are the characteristics of aggregate stand-up satire in the period that help people “shape their political beliefs,” make them “think and give them perspective”?

The inquiry proceeds in five steps: identification, transcription, extraction, analysis, plotting. The first step involves identifying the most popular US stand-up comedians between 1990 and 1999 to assemble the most representative sample. The second consists in gathering the comedy specials they produced in the given timeframe and transcribing the content from the specials, which will yield the total corpus of material. The third step involves extracting the political content – the satire – from the total corpus of material, and discarding other content (dog jokes, relationship gags, observational humour, etc.). This will yield the corpus of analysis. The fourth step employs textual content analysis to study the extrapolated satire. The definition of

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<sup>1</sup> Poindexter, 2012:35.

<sup>2</sup> Lockyer *et al*, 2011:99.

<sup>3</sup> Lockyer, 2016:153.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

categories will proceed along with the extrapolation, which is consistent with content analysis, because, as noted by Glaser *et al.*, “one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept.”<sup>1</sup> And the categories will yield replicable data. The fifth step involves analyzing the political content via Gilens & Page “Political theories” test model,<sup>2</sup> and placing satire within a specific tradition of political theory. This research process will yield verifiable findings on the structure of stand-up comedy’s satirical content, summarized as SCSC, or simply SC<sup>2</sup> for conceptual convenience.<sup>3</sup> The dataset produced by the systematic content analysis will answer the initial question on the characteristics of aggregate stand-up satire and will represent the empirical culmination of the research project’s rationale.

Three basic methodological hypotheses guide this research project. The first emerged during the literature review, while the second and third were refined post-literature review. Together, the hypotheses are driven more by the absence of systematic, longitudinal textual analysis of the political content of stand-up comedy, than by mere intuition. The first hypothesis regards reliability: the systematic cataloguing of SC<sup>2</sup> will reveal that it can be analyzed ideologically in a reliable fashion, much like political statements generally, ranging from abrasive anti-establishment dissent to moderate political incorrectness. The second regards verifiability. The data on SC<sup>2</sup> will indicate that commonly held assumptions about the nature of political humour and the leading theories of humour should be revised, given the verifiable frequency of congruity between stand up satire and anarchist/radical political critiques,

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<sup>1</sup> Glaser *et al.*, 1999:23.

<sup>2</sup> Gilens, M. *et al.* 2014:564-581.

<sup>3</sup> Note that SC<sup>2</sup> does not have mathematical properties, nor does the symbolic equation  $SC^2 = \{OGB, CERP\}$  introduced on p.18. The superscript SC<sup>2</sup> is for conceptual convenience only.

defined as “Economic-Elite Domination”<sup>1</sup> in the Gilens & Page model – a stronger affinity than could possibly have been produced by accident and that this research project aims to address – that remains unaccounted for in the scholarly literature. The third regards replicability: a systematic content analysis of SC<sup>2</sup> will reveal that its characteristic target is the general uncritical consensus in mass-mediated society, as defined by Theodore Adorno in 1963<sup>2</sup> and also Guy Debord in 1969<sup>3</sup> in a manner that is consistent with other rigorous scholarship.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent investigations, provided that their design is identical and the background literature is accounted for, will yield the same results. This project guards against assuming the conclusions by reproducing texts verbatim for the reader and making explicit the coding criteria. The goal is to contribute to the literature on satirical critique by: 1) seizing the opportunities afforded by interdisciplinary studies - in Parts I and II of this dissertation - which scholars observe “are rarely, if ever, capitalized on;”<sup>5</sup> and 2) offering a new method to analyze stand-up comedy content, given the “lack of literature on ‘how’ to analyse”<sup>6</sup> it, in part III of this dissertation.

### 3. Research Paradigm and Literature

This project endorses a post-positivist ontology, by which reality is assumed to exist but to be only imperfectly apprehensible<sup>7</sup> and a positivist epistemology, by which investigator and investigated object are assumed to be independent entities.<sup>8</sup> Ontology and epistemology are consistent with the chosen empirical, quantitative methodology (the systematic content analysis) which will produce verifiable and replicable data. And

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> 2000.

<sup>3</sup> 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Notably, among others, with Edward Bernays, Paul Lazarsfeld, Marshall McLuhan, CW Mills, Vance Packard, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Alex Carey, Thomas Ferguson, Edward Herman.

<sup>5</sup> Lockyer *et al.*, 2011:99.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Guba et al. 1998:205.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*:204.

the data will test the three leading theories of humour: incongruity, superiority and relief.<sup>1</sup> It will also add a social dimension to Hurley's "debugging" theory of humour,<sup>2</sup> conceived, in evolutionary psychology terms, as "an 'error correction' mechanism (...) to debug certain mistakes that enter our conscious mind when they should not."<sup>3</sup> The debugging theory falls within the scholarly tradition that started with Aristotle's *Poetics*, through Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, to Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, who, to varying degrees and in different terminologies, viewed humour as a cognitive mechanism that indicates and resolves mistakes and procures relief. This tradition found other scholars to support it,<sup>4</sup> and among them prominently Lord Shaftesbury<sup>5</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Sigmund Freud<sup>6</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Mary Douglas<sup>7</sup> in the twentieth.

My leading theoretical perspective is that SC<sup>2</sup> is essentially anarchic and subversive, following Bakhtin's carnivalesque model,<sup>8</sup> and that stand-up satire perspectives are generally congruous with anarchist (or radical) political critiques and as such fall within the "Economic-Elite Domination" theory of politics.<sup>9</sup> Finally, on political humour in particular, the dominant theory is the "Gateway Hypothesis" developed by Baum<sup>10</sup> positing that comedy "reduces the opportunity costs associated with learning about political issues [by] offering the prospect of entertainment or laughter [via] a priming effect in which thoughts about certain issues are made more

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<sup>1</sup> Dynel *et al.* 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Grengross *et al.*, 2012:444.

<sup>4</sup> Stott, 2005; Morreall, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:59-150.

<sup>6</sup> 1960.

<sup>7</sup> 1999.

<sup>8</sup> 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Gilens *et al.*, 2014:564.

<sup>10</sup> 2003, and see Xenos *et al.* 2009.

accessible through comedic exposure”.<sup>1</sup> Most analyses of political comedy provide support for or contest these dominant theories.

Finally, the main theoretical perspective that guides this research project regards the function of stand-up satire in society. It draws from six fields of inquiry: the scientific literature on the language faculty, roughly coinciding with the field of *bio-linguistics*<sup>2</sup>; the theoretical and scientific literature on political economy<sup>3</sup>; the literature on ideology; the scholarship on mass-mediated propaganda<sup>4</sup>; the theoretical literature on the general uncritical consensus<sup>5</sup>; and the theoretical literature on humour/comedy and satire.<sup>6</sup> These six domains have never been reviewed in the context of stand-up comedy specifically, nor humour studies more generally, which is striking. After all, if the hypothesis that SC<sup>2</sup> mainly targets the general uncritical consensus is validated, then political economy and mass propaganda studies ought to be a central feature of satire scholarship.

The findings of the content analysis will speak to the institutional role of SC<sup>2</sup> with greater accuracy and precision that has been hitherto provided by the available scholarship. And the contextual analysis will place satire in its main operative environment. As Stephen Leacock noted, “the humour involved in *Don Quixote* cannot be understood without the background.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, SC<sup>2</sup> cannot be understood without the background. This project hypothesizes that the background of SC<sup>2</sup> consists of a

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<sup>1</sup> Xenos *et al.* 2009:320.

<sup>2</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2013; Bolhuis *et al.*, 2015; Everaert *et al.*, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Consisting of congruent scholarship by Adam Smith, Robert Dahl, John Dewey, Larry Bartels, Martin Gilens, Thomas Ferguson, Noam Chomsky, Stefania Vitali, Marianna Mazzuccato, Greta Krippner, explored in later chapters.

<sup>4</sup> Consisting of congruent scholarship by Smith, Marx, Gramsci, Bernays, Lazarsfeld, McLuhan, C.W. Mills, Packard, Adorno, Debord, Alex Carey, Fones-Wolf, explored in later chapters.

<sup>5</sup> Notable contributions are from Theodore Adorno, Guy Debord, Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky, among others.

<sup>6</sup> Consisting of congruent scholarship offered by Socrates, Aristotle, Averroes, Erasmus, Lord Shaftesbury, Sigmund Freud, Mary Douglas, John Morreall, explored in later chapters.

<sup>7</sup> 1938:68.

specific set of conditions, reviewed in Chapters 2-5, that yield the general uncritical consensus.

The expected contribution to the field reflects the void in the literature that the dataset and analysis aim to fill. The satire produced by late-night television comedy shows, parodic newscasters - such as Jon Stewart, Steven Colbert, David Letterman, Jay Leno etc. - and also print and radio comics, has received abundant scholarly attention, albeit more in case-studies as opposed to systematic analyses. Although there are a few anecdotal analyses of stand-up comedy's political content,<sup>1</sup> to date there is no systematic analysis of the political content of US stand-up comedy ten year interval. The focus is thus on stand-up satire in comedy clubs and theatrical venues alone. The rationale is as follows. As any theatrical venue, comedy clubs in western countries - regardless of the subsequent distribution of content via cable, dvd and internet - provide for a locus in which freedom of speech can be exercised to a fuller extent vis à vis television, radio, and other institutional mass-media, which, as studies have shown, allow only for narrower exercises of free, critical expression.<sup>2</sup> In the words of stand-up comedian Bill Hicks:

(stand-up) comedy is the last bastion of free speech. You get to see on stage at the comedy club someone calling a spade a spade, not any network censorship. And this is when it's good. I'm not saying it's all like that by any stretch of the imagination. You get your share of hacks of course: in any booming business you're gonna get the leeches and bootlickers.<sup>3</sup>

There are many examples of network censorship of comedy. The most prominent ones have been catalogued in Provenza *et al.*'s 2009 compendium of interviews with comics and satirists, titled *!Satiristas!*. Some high-profile cases include The Smothers Brothers,

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<sup>1</sup> Mintz, 1985; Rivers, 2011; Lockyer & Myers, 2011; Auslander, 1993; Lockyer et al., 2005; Klapp, 1949; Douglas, 1999; Zoglin, 2008; Wagg, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Herman et al. 1988; Mullen et al 2010.

<sup>3</sup> 1988.



censored by CBS, “repeatedly and ultimately cancelled under false pretenses”;<sup>1</sup> Comedy Central and the Motion Picture Association of America’s censoring of South Park<sup>2</sup>; MTV’s censoring of *Wonder Showzen*<sup>3</sup>; NBC’s Standards & Practices Office censoring Saturday Night Live<sup>4</sup> and Sam Kinison’s religious satire on SNL;<sup>5</sup> the pre-emptive censoring of network TV shows by advertisers & sponsors<sup>6</sup>; CBS’s censoring of The Kids in the Hall’s Aids sketch<sup>7</sup>; ABC’s censoring of Bill Maher’s Harry Potterhead marijuana sketch.<sup>8</sup> Not to mention CBS’s censorship of Bill Hicks’ 12<sup>th</sup> and final performance on Late Night with David Letterman.<sup>9</sup> And in addition to outright censorship, there are structural factors that limit the likelihood that critical speech reaches the airwaves. As observed by Dr. Rebecca Tushnet, Professor of Law at Georgetown University, “there remain substantial concentrations of power over public discourse,”<sup>10</sup> such that “the right to speech is only as good as the right to access to venues in which speech can be heard. And in an environment where public spaces are relatively rare,”<sup>11</sup> those concentrations of power (media conglomerates) cannot be counted on to refrain from placing restrictions on speech.

This research project therefore aims to offer a contribution to contemporary satire scholarship and studies of western political critique, in light of the following observations. The existing literature on political humour is neither systematically

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<sup>1</sup> Provenza, 2009:47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:120;123.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:129.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:133.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*:189.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*:235.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*:248.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*:295.

<sup>9</sup> Lahr, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> 2008:108.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 114.

focused on stand-up comedy alone,<sup>1</sup> nor does it examine the connections between stand-up comedy and political-economic dissent specifically.<sup>2</sup> There is substantial research on television comedy and televised political satire, and their effects on audience political attitudes,<sup>3</sup> but the literature lacks a comparable and systematic content analysis of stand-up satire, and its effects on, or correlations with, audience political attitudes. The literature, overall, lacks an engagement with political economy and mass propaganda scholarship, which, in light of the theoretical review seems necessary. Moreover, most humour researchers overwhelmingly use content analysis to determine the content of comedy, and multivariate/regression analyses to determine the impact of the content on audience attitudes. While this project will use content analysis to reveal the aggregate characteristics of SC<sup>2</sup>, it will not examine effects.

The community the proposed research engages with consists of political communication scholars, mass media scholars, and humour/comedy scholars.<sup>4</sup> Other non-empirical scholarship has employed anecdotal methods of analysis, which belong to the more interpretive research paradigms, but have exhibited far lower impact factors, because the methods are not systematic and the conclusions have low reliability, given the low replicability and verifiability of their findings.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bloom *et al.*, 1979; Cao *et al.*, 2008; Davies *et al.*, 2008; Day, 2011; Eco, 1984; Feinberg, 1967; Gournelos *et al.*, 2011; Griffin, 1994; Holbert *et al.*, 2011; Lee, 2012; Lockyer *et al.*, 2005; Morreall, 2009; Soper, 2009; Webber, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Auslander, 1993; Badarneh, 2011; Baumgartner *et al.*, 2012; Carter, 2010; Double, 2013; Lewis, 2006; Limon, 2000; Lockyer *et al.*, 2011; Mintz, 1985; Peterson, 2008; Robinson, 2010; Shouse, 2007; Wilson, 1990; Westwood, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Baek *et al.*, 2009; Baumgartner *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Baym, 2005; Becker *et al.*, 2010; Bennett, 2007; Colletta, 2009; Day *et al.*, 2012; Dorman, 2007; Gray *et al.*, 2009; Hart *et al.*, 2007; Holbert *et al.*, 2007; Hmielowski *et al.*, 2011; Jones, 2010; Jones *et al.*, 2010; Keighron, 1998; LaMarre *et al.*, 2009; Meddaugh, 2010; Painter *et al.*, 2010; Polk *et al.*, 2009; Warner, 2007; Wayne, 1998; Xenos *et al.*, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> References above.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4. Research Scope

The main research method this project will employ is a systematic content analysis to uncover the aggregate political content of stand-up comedy, SC<sup>2</sup>. The systematic content analysis provides for exclusions to reduce the sample of comedic material to its content-significant size. The scope of research sources is thus delimited in five dimensions. The first is linguistic: stand-up satire in the English language. The second is cultural: stand-up satire mainly by US comedians. The third is contextual: stand-up satire produced between 1990 and 1999. To my knowledge, there is no systematic scholarship on the satirical content of US stand-up comedy in the 1990-1999 period, which is a historically significant period for three main reasons that pertain to this research project on propaganda and satire: it is the first post-Cold War decade, when certain ideological filters, like communism and anti-communism, relinquish their censoring force<sup>1</sup>; it is the first period of “unipolarity” in international politics, where the US stands alone as the one world hegemon, exporting its neo-liberal political economic model to the rest of the world<sup>2</sup>; it is the last decade in which traditional media (tv, radio, print) are still dominant, before the rise and takeover of new media (internet, satellite, etc.).<sup>3</sup>

The fourth delimitation is institutional: this is not a study of political humour or political satire as produced by parodic newscasters (such as Jon Stewart, Steven Colbert) or print satirists (George Orwell, Ambrose Bierce, Salman Rushdie, Voltaire, Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, to name a few) or radio comics. This study focuses exclusively on stand-up comedy, insofar as the theatrical venue, as

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<sup>1</sup> Herman, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Waltz, 1993:44; Monteiro, 2012:9.

<sup>3</sup> McChesney, 2015:10.

aforementioned, allows greater freedom of expression *vis a' vis* modern mass media.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this choice are both historical and technological. With the rise of electronic mass media in the 1920s, the chief locus of the spectacle shifted from theatrical stage to the cinema and television screens; and in much the same way, the locus of power shifted to electronic media because they enjoyed a far greater reach.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, after the relatively free pioneering years, along with concentration of ownership and increasing advertising revenue, came censorship.<sup>3</sup> This left the theatre, an older medium, and later comedy clubs (which arose simultaneously, but uncoordinatedly, throughout the US) with greater freedom than compared to, for instance, western theatres in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when they were placed under substantial cultural and political control. In fact, in the UK for instance, it was only in the late 1960s that Britain officially abolished censorship of the stage with the Theatres Act<sup>4</sup> after “231 years of making some of the barmiest decisions known to man.”<sup>5</sup> No coincidence. At exactly the time when more powerful and modern media arise and their ownership begins to concentrate, censorship is lifted from the less powerful and more archaic ones and is transferred “above”; in other words, “basic themes persist in different guise.”<sup>6</sup>

The fifth dimension is economic: satire by stand-up comedians who have produced at least two specials or albums, which, in terms of industry standards, are collections of their best material. This final delimitation reduces the sample to a manageable size while maintaining variety; thus increasing feasibility without jeopardizing quality and thus validity. Furthermore, it is important to state,

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<sup>1</sup> Herman *et al.*, 1994; Herman, 2000; Mullen *et al.*, 2010; Mullen, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Innis, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* & Herman *et al.*, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Chomsky, 1997:x.

unequivocally, that this project is neither an inquiry on what constitutes “funny” nor what causes “laughter,” and will not examine effects nor offer a structural, linguistic or logical analysis of the content. The primary aim of this research project is limited to a very basic question, “what are the aggregate characteristics of SC<sup>2</sup> in the period under investigation?” and a very basic objective: to offer a new way theoretical framework for the analysis of SC<sup>2</sup> that takes into consideration six realms of scholarship. This project’s dataset will add a “social” dimension to Hurley’s “debugging” theory of humour, taking it from the evolutionary psychology field (thus individual and genetic) to the social sciences field (stand-up satire as an institution that seeks to correct, via rational association, mistaken beliefs that circulate in the sphere of general uncritical consensus). But first, it is necessary to take a step back and place stand-up satire in its proper intellectual context.

## 5. General Framework

Stand-up satire is a form of human expression, which traces back to the language faculty, a species-specific computational system.<sup>1</sup> Satire has a very eminent history of inquiry, and a literature review reveals that it manifests itself within societies already *ex ante* saturated with “ruling class” ideas that produce and sustain a state of “general uncritical consensus” about the status quo. Therefore, to review how bio-linguists describe language, how media scholars and political economists describe the political economy in mass-mediated societies, and how philosophers, humanists and

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<sup>1</sup> As Ryerson University Professor Dr. Jamin Pelkey notes, “some scholars consider language to be a species specific computational system, but the conclusion is far from stable and not necessarily representative of scholarly community consensus.” (Dissertation review notes, 18.5.2018)

psychologists have described humour and satire,<sup>1</sup> is indispensable in any adequate treatment of our subject.

The framework for the analysis of the relationship between humour and political consciousness will develop incrementally, in the chapters that follow, in logical inductive steps, via a critical literature review. The development of a theoretical framework to analyze stand-up comedy follows Lockyer *et al.*'s observation that there is a "lack of literature on 'how' to analyze stand-up comedy."<sup>2</sup> It develops in the three main parts of this dissertation: Part I focuses the Context of SC<sup>2</sup>, Part II focuses on the Contest of SC<sup>2</sup>, and Part III on the Content of SC<sup>2</sup>. Context, Contest, Content.

The Context of SC<sup>2</sup> is informed by the nature of the language faculty (Chapter 2), by the political economy (Chapter 3), by ideology (Chapter 4) and propaganda (Chapter 5). The Contest of SC<sup>2</sup> involves the interplay between the by-product of propaganda, the general uncritical consensus (Chapter 6) and satire, the artillery of critique/dissensus (Chapter 7). The Content of SC<sup>2</sup> consists of statements, examined via a specific methodology (Chapter 8) yielding original and replicable data and original findings (Chapter 9). The findings and their contribution to current scholarship are discussed (Chapter 10) along with suggestions for future research.

This project's rationale is therefore inductive: given the context and the contest, what can a rational observer expect to find in the content? The guiding hypothesis is expressed in a symbolic equation, whereby the satirical content of stand-up comedy (SC<sup>2</sup>) manifests itself in the interaction between operative group beliefs (OGB) and contrary empirical/rational propositions (CERP). The set formula  $SC^2 = \{OGB, CERP\}$

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<sup>1</sup> Respectively, Berwick, Bolhuis, Everaert, citation details in Chapter 2; Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Gramsci, Lazarsfeld, Adorno, Debord, McLuhan, Herman & Chomsky, citation details in Chapters 3-5; Socrates, Aristotle, Averroes, Aquinas, Erasmus, Shaftesbury, Freud, Bakhtin, Douglas, citation details in Chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lockyer *et al.* 2011:99.

posits that the presence of a manufactured sphere of general uncritical consensus is strongly indicated by the aggregate satirical content of stand-up comedy, which manifests itself by association with it.

This research project therefore offers two original contributions to the scholarship. The first is a new method to analyze stand-up comedy, outlined above, which strongly suggests the need to combine critical political scholarship and propaganda studies to understand the context for satire. The second is original data on the satirical content of stand-up comedy over a wide timeframe, which is absent from the literature. These contributions are offered in light of the fact that, as prominent scholars in the field of comedy note, “[a]lthough a number of different disciplines take comedy as their subject matter, the opportunities afforded to the inter-disciplinary study of comedy are rarely, if ever, capitalized on. Comedy scholars seldom consult other scholars from outside their own specific fields.”<sup>1</sup> The two contributions this research project aims to offer are precisely an attempt to capitalize on the inter-disciplinary study of comedy, consulting scholarship from other fields.

## 6. Conclusion

On the question of the general context in which the satirical content of stand-up comedy manifests itself, the literature on stand-up comedy, so far, remains silent. On the question of the general characteristics of the satirical content of stand-up comedy between 1990-1999, the literature on stand-up comedy also remains silent. But on the question of worthiness, that is, if these questions are worthy of inquiry, the literature does not remain silent. If, along with Morreall, we assume that a sense of humour is key

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

in preserving intellectual independence from propaganda,<sup>1</sup> offering a sort of immunity to brainwashing,<sup>2</sup> at present no scholarship explains how this property plays out in stand-up comedy, where the sense of humour is so frequently employed to challenge ideas, beliefs, events that people take for granted. When a stand-up comedian delivers satirical content, the intent is to dissuade the hearer: “don’t buy into that, don’t fall for that.” A common audience reaction is to laugh and then to say or think “that’s so true, I never thought of that before.” This dissuasive and critical aspect of stand-up comedy satire has never been examined systematically, but deserves close study. Because stand-up comedy is “a huge cultural phenomenon”<sup>3</sup> to which “relatively little academic attention has been paid.”<sup>4</sup> After all, as theorists speculate, humour “grew to turn on a contrast between the thing as it is, or ought to be, and the thing smashed out of shape and as it ought not to be.”<sup>5</sup> This theme, of a contrast between the ideal and the real, of society falling short of an ideal, of reality being a raw deal, is central to this research project.

The first impression is that satirical humour, as a mental skill, must be based on some underlying properties, functioning in accordance with basic principles, that encourage, among other things, the questioning and critique of society. Therefore, as a conceptual skill it is valuable in itself and a worthy topic for inquiry. And it is a skill because, even though an “innate aptitude is required for real excellence (...) humour may be indefinitely improved by art.”<sup>6</sup> To explain why and show how SC<sup>2</sup> functions as the artillery of dissensus against the general uncritical consensus is the central aim of this project, believing, along with Yevgeny Zamyatin, that “heretics are the only (bitter)

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<sup>1</sup> Explored in Chapter 7, Section 4.3.

<sup>2</sup> Morreall, 1983:107.

<sup>3</sup> Lockyer *et al.* 2011:99..

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Leacock, 1935:13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: 9.



remedy against the entropy of human thought.”<sup>1</sup> The first step, therefore, is to look at underlying properties, and that requires turning our attention to language.

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Sterling, 2006:ix.

## **PART I**

### **THE CONTEXT OF $SC^2$**

## CHAPTER 2: THE LANGUAGE FACULTY

*“What makes us most truly  
unique and unprecedented,  
and certainly what makes us feel  
so different from the rest of Nature,  
is the way in which  
we process information in our minds.”*

Ian Tattersall<sup>1</sup>

*“We conclude then, with the same certainty,  
that the brain digests, as it were, the impressions,  
ie. that organically  
it makes the secretion of thought.”*

P.J.G. Cabanis<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Preview

Persuasion and dissuasion, propaganda and satire, the general uncritical consensus and critical thinking are all cultural activities, forms of human expression. This chapter will argue that they rest on the “language faculty”<sup>3</sup>, as they are all fundamentally emanations of the same underlying mental ability, shared by the entire human species (except in cases of pathology), which knows no parallel in the animal kingdom.<sup>4</sup> As Ernst Mayr noted some 20 years ago on the peculiar phenomenon that human intelligence is, “if there are 30 million living species, and if the average life expectancy of a species is about 100,000 years, then one can postulate that there have been billions, perhaps as many as 50 billion species since the origin of life. Only one of these achieved the kind of intelligence needed to establish a civilization.”<sup>5</sup> And, not coincidentally, only one possesses the language faculty. An enquiry into the relationship between humour and political consciousness cannot dispense with an examination of its

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<sup>1</sup> 2016(a):255.

<sup>2</sup> On the Relations Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man, Vol 1. (1802; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.), as cited in Chomsky, 2016:84-85.

<sup>3</sup> Hauser, 2002; Bolhuis, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2013:96.

<sup>5</sup> Mayr, 1995.

underlying originator, for both are nothing but emanations of the quintessential human ability commonly called 'language'.

Though persuasion and dissuasion, propaganda and satire, are different, as some are often collective while others are more individual, they all involve the creation and distribution of thoughts, to affect opinions and stimulate action. Persuasion seeks to affect opinions and stimulate action. Political persuasion for instance seeks to capture voter preference and obtain a mark on a ballot, among other things; advertising seeks to capture consumer preference and stimulate the purchase of a good or service, *et cetera*. Dissuasion too seeks to affect opinions and stimulate action. Yet, given that dissuasion typically starts in the negative, as in "don't vote for them" or "don't purchase that", the action it seeks to stimulate frequently involves interrupting the course of another action. And when the majority of communications occur via commercial mass media, it is no surprise that dissuasion finds little room for expression and dissemination. After all, no newscast would ever tell its viewers "don't buy the products featured during our commercial break", and likewise no politician would ever campaign under the banner of "don't vote for me." All mass media content involves normative persuasion: "watch this show", "buy this product", "buy into this idea", "vote for us", etc. And the design of mass media content is not to simply to persuade once, but to introduce a new habit through which the activity comes to be normalized within a target population. Dissuasion and dissent, given that they interrupt the exchange of consensus, whether commercial or political, are thus often relegated to the margins in the mass media, if they find space at all.

Therefore, in the multi-mass-media age, the forces of persuasion are organized around the commercial imperative, while the forces of dissuasion often work in smaller operations or individually. And this is precisely the case with satirical stand-up comedy.

If stand-up comedy is examined carefully, from a birds-eye view, with a focus on the satire, the observer will surely notice a constant, unmistakable pattern: a restless, though intermittent, effort at dissuasion, which, however, occurs in a disorganized fashion, with comedians often performing alone and pursuing their careers individually. The same can be said with other actors involved in dissuasion: investigative journalists, critical scholars, activists, among others. All either act in groups too small to counter commercially organized persuasion effectively, or act individually, with effects that obviously vary, often depending on commercial success, ironically. But this is solely an impression. Its accuracy will depend on empirical and theoretical findings this research project aims to produce.

Yet, regardless of the different magnitudes involved in the confrontation, persuasion and dissuasion do face off in the arena of ideas. And ideas, no matter the intentions with which they are expressed, are emanations made possible by the language faculty. Culture too, understood in its widest sense as “human expression”<sup>1</sup>, is a product of the language faculty. Given that a central “property of culture is that it can give rise to a new level of evolution, [it] allows for the accumulation of good ideas, a fact that is central to human cultural progress.”<sup>2</sup> And as history often indicates, “good ideas” are fundamentally the result of conceptual confrontations.

In the last three years, the field of bio-linguistics has taken significant steps forward. Scholars working in paleoanthropology, linguistics, neuroscience, evolutionary biology and computer science<sup>3</sup> joined forces to respond to Hauser *et al.*’s 2002 call in the pages of *Science*: “Logically, the human uniqueness claim [of language] must be based on data indicating an absence of the trait in nonhuman animals and, to be taken seriously,

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<sup>1</sup> Healy, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Fitch *et al.*, 2010:800. See also Tomasello, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Tattersall, Noam Chomsky, Angela Friederici, Johan Bolhuis, Robert Berwick, among others.

requires a substantial body of relevant comparative data.”<sup>1</sup> In the following decade, researchers from disparate fields coalesced to offer an informed and lucid account of what language (likely) is, how it (might have) evolved, and in which context it (most plausibly) emerged. The interdisciplinary effort counts, among others, more than a dozen articles in the years 2014-2016, representing a substantial contribution to human knowledge. To date, no research effort in the field of humour and political consciousness has reviewed and contextualized these findings as they pertain to satire.

As a subset of language, satire must exhibit features that belong to it, which inform the process by which human cognition is able to generate mental impressions that can be defined as satirical. Satirical thought can be summarized as the application of recently observed data to contradictory held data, to make a point about a political aspect of humanity. It works, typically, by recruiting contradictions in everyday experience, conventional wisdom, etc. that is, data commonly taken for granted and integral to the general uncritical consensus.

Satire is initially a thought, which is only later expressed, and can become a veritable disposition. Much like the comic spirit, as a disposition, it is a compulsion of the mind. All humans possess a humorous ability, based on a shared neurological endowment that provides for the outburst of laughter in reaction to symbolic manipulation. Furthermore, there are no known cases of inability to laugh apart from pathology. To ease analysis, an optimal breakdown is as follows: laughter is the physiological event, which can be stimulated physically, via tickling for instance; or mentally, via the association and manipulation of concepts. When laughter is stimulated mentally it is called humour. When humour is packaged in narrative form with a

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<sup>1</sup> Hauser et al, 2002:1572.

storyline, it is called comedy. And when humour is packaged in narrative form with the intent of political critique, it is called satire. Andrew Stott describes satire as “the most directly political of comic forms.”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Core Properties

All humans laugh; therefore laughter is a genetically endowed human ability. Though the stimuli for laughter are cultural, and depend on cultural and historical contexts, the physical ability itself is universal. And humour, as one possible trigger of laughter, involves the creative manipulation of symbols provided by original conceptual associations. It thus engages properties that are fundamental to language, for language “has a creative character: it is typically innovative without bounds, appropriate to circumstances but not caused by them – a crucial distinction – and can engender thoughts in others that they recognize they could have expressed themselves.”<sup>2</sup> And the crucial property of language is that it evokes mental images. This property is forcefully exhibited in stand-up comedy, where the audience laughs once it “recognizes” the mental image evoked by the comedian. As Nobel laureate Francois Jacob observed, “the quality of language that makes it unique does not seem to be so much its role in communicating directives for action” [but rather] ‘its role in symbolizing, in evoking cognitive images,’ in ‘molding’ our notion of reality”<sup>3</sup>; because human beings

think symbolically (...) [as] we mentally dissect our exterior and interior worlds into a vocabulary of discrete symbols; and having done this, we can rearrange those symbols, according to rules, to imagine alternate versions of those worlds. As far as we know, no other organism in the world today manipulates information in this way. (...) As a result, there is a narrow but hugely significant gulf between the cognitive styles of human beings and those of apes—and indeed all other organisms.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2014:156.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 2016:7.

<sup>3</sup> As cited in Chomsky, 2007:23.

<sup>4</sup> Tattersall, 2016(a):255.

Human language is thus at least partially a species-specific property that allows for the expression of an unbounded array of hierarchically structured sentences.<sup>1</sup> However, the language faculty should not be equated with “communication.” Firstly, because all species “communicate;” secondly, because communication, which is externalization, is only one of the possible uses of language. When humans think, internally, they think in language. Recent bio-linguistic research by Ding *et al.* strongly suggests that the most important aspect of human language (“its unbounded combinatorial nature: smaller elements can be combined into larger structures on the basis of a grammatical system, resulting in a hierarchy of linguistic units, such as words, phrases and sentences”<sup>2</sup>) depends at least in part on a “a hierarchy of neural processing timescales [that] underlies grammar-based internal construction of hierarchical linguistic structure.”<sup>3</sup> The internal hierarchical constructions occur in language. When humans walk about and look around they instinctively recall the name of that which they see: “squirrel,” “green light,” “truck approaching,” “poor squirrel,” etc.

For this reason, some bio-linguists suggest that language should be understood as a “particular computational cognitive system, implemented neurally, (...) that has hierarchical syntactic structure at its core”<sup>4</sup>, and the system is designed primarily to be “an internal mental tool”<sup>5</sup>, “an instrument of internal thought.”<sup>6</sup> One of the properties of language is discrete infinity, that is, “the capacity for unbounded composition of various linguistic objects into complex structures.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, human language syntax is based on an associative mechanism, that “takes exactly two (syntactic) elements *a* and *b*

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<sup>1</sup> Bolhuis *et al.*, 2014:1. Hauser, *et al.* 2014:2. Berwick *et al.*, 2016:4. Ding *et al.* 2016:158.

<sup>2</sup> Ding *et al.* 2016:158.

<sup>3</sup> Ding *et al.* 2016:158.

<sup>4</sup> Bolhuis *et al.*, 2014:1.

<sup>5</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2016:4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Hauser, *et al.* 2014:2.



and puts them together to form the set {a, b}. [Bolhuis *et al.*] call this basic operation ‘merge’.”<sup>1</sup> An elementary example is *eat* and *cake* to form the set {eat, cake}. And one of the interesting properties of Merge is that it can apply to its own results, as in {{eat, cake} now}; that is, recursively, by making infinite use of finite means; infinite use of finite words to construct new sentences, infinite use of finite letters to construct new words, etc. Recursion “underlies this finite-infinite distinction [and] is important because it supplies part of an answer to the seemingly unbounded creativity of language [and] provides a means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations.”<sup>2</sup> However, a harder question revolves around the origin of syntactic elements, which serve as the atoms of computation for Merge. The “atoms of computation – call them “atomic concepts” – are word-like objects but not words. Words are constructed by the ancillary process of externalization, which does not feed the system of thought.”<sup>3</sup>

But for the purposes of this research, it is not necessary to delve into speculations concerning the origin of words themselves, a “still more challenging problem”<sup>4</sup> in the field of bio-linguistics. It is however undeniable that a basic property of language is an associative mental ability, that can take conceptual elements and string them together syntactically. Therefore, in this account, language appears to be based on a computational system implemented neurally,<sup>5</sup> that evolved primarily as an instrument of thought, and which is capable, theoretically, of producing infinite mental associations.

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<sup>1</sup> Bolhuis *et al.*, 2014:1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Everaert *et al.* 2015:731-732.

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, 2016:42.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> As Ryerson University Professor Dr. Jamin Pelkey notes, “some scholars consider language to be a species specific computational system, but the conclusion is far from stable and not necessarily representative of scholarly community consensus.” (Dissertation review, 18.5.2018)

Externalization in speech is only a “secondary,”<sup>1</sup> “ancillary aspect of language, peripheral to its core nature,”<sup>2</sup> and furthermore it is only one of the many ways to externalize internal thinking, in addition to, for instance, sign language and braille. In the technical literature, the ancillary quality of externalization is indicated by structure dependency in natural language, whereby linear order is only a feature of expressed language but is not “available to the system that computes the mapping to the conceptual-intentional system.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, according to bio-linguists, the communication purpose of language (externalization) would

only be a secondary property, making externalization (e.g., as speech or sign) an ancillary process, a reflection of properties of the sensory-motor system that might have nothing special to do with language in the restricted sense (...): uniquely human (species-specific) and uniquely linguistic (domain-specific).<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Emergence of Language

Advanced research has also provided a plausible context for the emergence of language. This context, elicited by the inferences that the available archaeological record permits, offers significant cues for the study of how the language faculty - and by derivation humour - produces symbolic events in the mind. Because insights into the emergence of language can explain *Homo sapiens'* ability to erect symbolic environments to grasp reality, to mold reality, and to mold notions of reality. This property, this research project posits, lays at the core of both mass propaganda and satire.

The most striking element in the record is the behavioural shift that occurred some 100 thousand years ago. Although our species first appeared as a “distinctive

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<sup>1</sup> Berwick *et al.* 2016:75.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 2015:101.

<sup>3</sup> Everaert, 2015: 740.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

anatomical entity in Africa at about 200 thousand years ago (...), [100 thousand years later it] began to show (...) sophisticated forward planning and more efficient environmental exploitation [made possible by] the new symbolic style of reasoning”.<sup>1</sup> Others have argued that the behavioural shift was caused by a “fortuitous mutation that promoted the fully modern brain [because] after this time (...) morphology remained relatively stable while behavioural (cultural) change accelerated rapidly. What could explain this better than a neural change that promoted the extraordinary modern human ability to innovate?”<sup>2</sup> Noam Chomsky agrees with this scenario, as “the emergence of language required some rewiring of the brain, presumably by a slight mutation - in an individual of course, not a group. Over generations, the capacity might have proliferated through a small hunter-gatherer group, so that there would be some point in devising modes of externalization.”<sup>3</sup> And given that our species was born in a technologically archaic context, “the tempo of change only began picking up after the point at which symbolic objects appeared.”<sup>4</sup> Then, within a

remarkably short space of time, art was invented, cities were born, and people had reached the moon. By this reckoning, the language faculty is an extremely recent acquisition in our lineage, and it was acquired not in the context of slow, gradual modification or pre-existing systems under natural selection but in a single, rapid, emergent event that built upon those prior systems but was not predicted by them.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, given that symbolic cognition likely arose during the anatomical reorganization that yielded the distinctive *Homo sapiens* species around 200 thousand years ago, this new cognitive potential

lay fallow for a short but significant lapse of time, during which humans with the new anatomical structure continued to behave and presumably reason in the old manner, accounting for the unremarkable

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<sup>1</sup> Tattersall, 2016:7.

<sup>2</sup> Klein, 2008:271-272.

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, 2015:102.

<sup>4</sup> Bolhuis et al., 2014:4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

archaeological record associated with the earliest *Homo sapiens*. Eventually, at around 100 thousand years ago, something happened to stimulate the recruitment of the new potential, much as ancestral birds rather tardily discovered that they could use their feathers to fly. That stimulus was necessarily a purely cultural one, and the most plausible candidate we have for it was the invention of language.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, when looking at the context in which language came about, we see a period of varying climactic conditions, a new, anatomically distinctive species is born, and thanks to a slight rewiring of the brain, the species possesses a new cognitive system that permits the processing of information in absolutely unique ways.

A comparison might be useful to understand just what seems to be at play here. If we look at animal behaviour, we will notice that animals lack, so to speak, the second internal voice that *Homo sapiens* clearly possesses. Animals undoubtedly have a sort of internal voice of instinct and impulse that commands and directs action, like “hungry” so “hunt”, “tired” so “rest”, “heat” so “reproduce”, “fear” so “scatter”, etc. However, once the various needs are met, that internal voice of instinct turns off, and cognitively the animal goes in stand-by mode, only to be reactivated when another need is felt. Humans are different in this respect, as Bertrand Russell noted in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Humans have what can be described as a “second internal voice” that is turned on continuously, even after basic needs are met, which would explain their restlessness.

[M]an differs from other animals in one very important respect, and that is that he has some desires which are, so to speak, *infinite*, which can never be fully gratified, and which would keep him *restless* even in Paradise. The boa constrictor, when he has had an adequate meal, *goes to sleep*, and does not wake *until* he *needs* another meal. Human beings, for the most part, are not like this.<sup>2</sup>

Adam Smith, in *Wealth of Nations*, made the same observation, noting that while the desire of food is limited by “the narrow capacity of the human stomach”, the “desire of

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<sup>1</sup> Tattersall, 2016:263.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 1950.

the conveniences and ornaments of building, dress, equipage, and household furniture, seems to have no limit or certain boundary.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, as Tattersall noted, possession of symbolic cognition and a language faculty to merge symbols together creates a condition of spiritual restlessness too, which he calls “existential dissatisfaction, and the knowledge of our ephemerality, which is unique, as far as we know, in the animal kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>

That said, there are perhaps two cognitive phenomena at play a priori, which allow for Merge: first, a mind continuously looped, that is, one that does not go into standby mode when basic needs are met; and second, a continuous loop onto which Merge can associate discrete items ad infinitum, that is, carried (so to speak) by the continuous cognitive loop. For ease of analysis, we can imagine modern human cognition as a sort of continuous Ferris wheel which yields structures of thought from every circulating cabin in a manner that is “automatic and mandatory”<sup>3</sup> as Susan Curtiss noted in her review in “Rich languages from poor inputs.”<sup>4</sup> And this is noticeable in everyday experience: humans cannot stop talking to themselves in their minds; the process is continuous, even during sleep. How this came about may remain a mystery. As Ian Tattersall observed, “the transition from a nonsymbolic, nonlinguistic cognitive state to a symbolic, linguistic condition is a virtually unimaginable one.”<sup>5</sup> The transition could have involved a jump from a cognitive state that has a “standby mode,” to a cognitive state in continuous alertness. From a simple, uninterrupted view of reality, to a sharp mosaic of distinct parts, with an ability to merge different distinct parts of the sharp mosaic together in novel ways. And finally, the community would be fully

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 1981:181.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from a 1on1 interview with Dr. Ian Tattersall at the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, USA. Friday, December 30th, 2016, @16:00-17:00.

<sup>3</sup> Curtiss, 2013:90.

<sup>4</sup> Piattelli-Palmarini *et al.*, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> 2009:587.

equipped with the means to externalize (communicate & share) their various ways of merging the different parts together (ideas), thereby testing the ideas in a continuous search for improvements that characterizes the “neophilic” spirit apparent from 50 [thousand years ago] onward. This neophilic spirit would eventually lay the basis for the “accumulation of good ideas” so “central to human cultural progress.”<sup>1</sup> It is this character of being able to conceptually atomize parts of the external and internal world, name them, and associate them, that is crucial. And *Homo sapiens*’ closest kin did not possess this cognitive ability: the Neanderthals in Europe, *Homo erectus* and *Homo floresiensis* in eastern Asia were wiped out, molecular evidence suggests, as *Homo sapiens* left Africa some 60 thousand years ago, in an “explosive expansion of the young species.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, “the prompt extinction of” *Homo sapiens*’ “closely-related resident populations inside and outside of Africa” was made possible by “the more sophisticated forward planning and more efficient environmental exploitation that the new symbolic style of reasoning permitted.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, language is effortless in the human species. And this character of being effortless is most apparent in language development in babies. According to Angela Friederici,<sup>4</sup> language is acquired

without much effort and seems to develop as the brain matures. (...) In the first days after birth, infants are able to discriminate between different phonemes and distinguish the sentence melody (prosody) of their mother tongue from that of other languages. By the age of 9 months (...) the child now understands the first words and starts to produce first words between 11 and 13 months, with a lexicon of about 50 to 75 items by the age of 16 months and a clear vocabulary spurt between the age of 18 and 24 months. Syntactic structures are acquired continuously in the second and third year of life, with first productions of two-word utterances at the age of 18 to 24 months, and later more-word utterances.

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<sup>1</sup> Fitch *et al.*, 2010:800.

<sup>2</sup> Tattersall, 2016(b):7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Director, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences. Leipzig, Germany.

The basic knowledge of the syntactic word order constraints is present around the age of 2.5 years.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, language springs naturally and effortlessly in *Homo sapiens*. Which is evidence that it has a genetic underpinning, much like bipedalism, opposable thumbs, relative hairlessness, and other traits that are unique to our species. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that language “can be contrived spontaneously by non-linguistic modern humans, as in the recent creation of a sign language by deaf Nicaraguan school children (Kegl, 2002).”<sup>2</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to note that most plausible candidates for inventing language, according to some experts, are children; that is, children in the context of play. Freud observed that “play with words and thoughts” is the basis of humour.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Language as Play

Language, some researchers assume, is likely to have emerged in children in the context of play and experimentation. Below is an excerpt from an interview with Dr. Ian Tattersall (IT), Curator Emeritus at the American Museum of Natural History, in New York City in January 2017.

AM: “symbolic cognition was there first, and later language released it. Then, when language releases it, you have essentially 2 brains or 3 brains with symbolic cognition, who are starting to talk to each other, and hence you have the explosion in the neophiliac spirit, in the appetite for change, in the accumulation of good ideas.”

IT: “and within 2 or 3 generations you have a whole society that’s doing it. You know, I’m sure that the first language-like manipulations of vocal symbols and mental symbols or the organization of symbols, I bet not every individual instantly learned it; (...) like the sweet potato washing example. Many, many years ago, in the 1950s I think, a Japanese primatologist was studying macaques on one of the islands in the Japanese archipelago. And these animals were pretty shy. They use to tell them to come down to the beach by feeding them sweet potatoes. And they would throw them on the beach. And because the beach was sandy and the sweet potatoes got gritty, after a while some of the younger

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<sup>1</sup> Friederici, 2006:941.

<sup>2</sup> Tattersall, 2009:587.

<sup>3</sup> Freud, 1960:157.

juveniles got the idea of going into the sea, carrying their sweet potatoes into the sea, to wash off the grit and eat them. And then the adolescents started to do it, and then some of the younger females started to do it, and then some of the younger adult males started to do it. And basically some of the oldest, crustiest males never did it, because they were too set in their ways. So, you can imagine language sort of spreading very much like this, but very rapidly just like sweet potato washing; within two or three generations everybody was doing it, but in the first generation there were individuals who didn't want anything to do with it."

AM: "And we see this today also, when the younger part of the population typically experiments with things before everyone else, and they are more receptive to innovations and the like."

IT: "Totally. Yeah, they assume the world is going to be a different place than the world that their parents are living in. And of course their parents don't like that."

AM: "So in your estimate, basically, when the [symbolic cognition] arose and language released it, it was possibly the kids who started to behave in this way, and basically started to emit sounds with meaning. "

IT: "They began to associate sounds with meanings and objects. And that could have been pretty rudimentary at first. But you can see it sort of gathering momentum in a creature that has the ability to make those mental associations. Because, obviously, it's the ability to form associations between the outputs of different areas of the brain, of all not just the cortex, that lies at the bottom of this. But if you have that ability I think you can go from the simple to the quite complex fairly rapidly. And again, as you saw with the Nicaraguan deaf children, it may have been [rudimentary] but it was basically structured, had all the essential complexities of language and it was right there, didn't take very long at all [to spontaneously develop]."<sup>1</sup>

No doubt, this is a humbling account of the origin of the mental faculty that makes the human species unique setting it apart from the over 50 billion species that have existed. Yet, the humbling accounts are often the ones that prove to be correct in the long run, as opposed to the glorifying ones; Evolution versus Creationism being a classic example. And furthermore, as Noam Chomsky noted, if Tattersall's account "is basically accurate, as the very limited empirical evidence indicates, then what emerged in the narrow window was an infinite power of 'associating the most diversified sounds and ideas,' in Darwin's words."<sup>2</sup>

That children may have played an important role in the emergence of language ties in with humour in so far as one of the earliest examples of spontaneous use of

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from a 1on1 interview with Dr. Ian Tattersall at the *American Museum of Natural History*, New York City, USA. Friday, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, @16:00-17:00.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 2016:4



humour appears in the context of child play with words. As Sigmund Freud observed at the turn of the previous century,

play – let us keep to that name – appears in children while they are learning to make use of words and to put thoughts together. This play probably obeys one of the instincts which compel children to practice their capacities. In doing so they come across pleasurable effects, which arise from a repetition of what is similar, a rediscovery of what is familiar, similarity of sound, etc., and which are to be explained as unsuspected economies in psychical expenditure. (...) Play with words and thoughts, motivated by certain pleasurable effects of economy, would thus be the first stage of jokes.<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore perfectly plausible that the cognitive properties inherent in humour also were invented, or recruited, by children in the context of play, and that the reward for successful symbolic manipulation was laughter.

## 5. Conclusion

This enquiry deals with a specific type of linguistic expression, stand-up satire, which, upon impression, is most notably used for dissuasion. As any expression, satirical ones too are built on what bio-linguists believe to be a basic computational mechanism that permits the expression of any thought, an unbounded array of thoughts, creatively. The computational mechanism required for the association of concepts would have emerged first in children, and then spread rapidly among the group until it became a fixed, species-specific property. The faculty of language permits expression of thoughts, of all thoughts, some of which, in turn, are applied materially and impact the environment, whether social or natural. In our contemporary society, the lion's share of produced expressions seeks to persuade others, politically or commercially. A small portion of produced externalizations serves the opposite purpose. However, it would be incorrect to attribute any logical or rational properties to

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, 1960:157.

the language faculty itself. Our brains have been 400 million years of vertebrate evolution in the making. And given that the language faculty “was clearly acquired recently, in an abrupt event that was entirely random with respect to adaptation (...) we human beings have not been programmed by eons of evolution to behave in specific ways.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is very likely that the “absence of long-term fine tuning of our cognitive systems in our evolutionary past helps to explain why our decision-making processes are typically so messy, and sheds light on why, for all of our amazing rational powers, our behaviours are so frequently irrational, self-destructive, and short-termist.”<sup>2</sup>

At this point it is possible to isolate the properties of language that inform satire and the present discussion. The language faculty allows its holders to, among other things: 1) atomize the world into symbols; 2) evoke cognitive images of the world through those symbols; 3) rearrange those symbols to imagine alternate versions of the world; 4) play with cognitive symbols to produce laughter (humour). These properties inform the epic confrontation between propaganda and satire that is so evident in the historical record. The very same faculty that allows for the expression of an infinite array of structured thoughts, provides for persuasion and dissuasion, for propaganda and satire, for conformity and acceptance and irreverence and dissent. Because any keen observer would be left with a particular impression: the most frequent target of satire is precisely how human life plays out, how human societies are run politically and economically, and in whose interests. The properties of the language faculty are exhibited in this example of SC<sup>2</sup>:

Folks, it's time to evolve ideas. You know evolution did not end with us growing thumbs. You do know that right? It didn't end there. We're at the

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<sup>1</sup> Tattersall, 2016(a):265-266.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

point now where we're going to have to evolve ideas. The reason the world is so fucked up is we're undergoing evolution. And the reason our institutions our traditional religions are all crumbling is because they're no longer relevant. They're no longer relevant. (...) How do you evolve ideas? I'll give you an example right here. By the way, there are more dick jokes coming, please relax.<sup>1</sup>

The above quote will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 9. In the interim, it suffices to highlight two significant elements in the excerpt: 1) the critique of an operative group belief – that “evolution is not merely physical”; 2) juxtaposed to political critique, “our institutions are all crumbling.”

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. 1997. Interval: 54:39-56:09.

## CHAPTER 3: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

*"Vast empires are in many respects unnatural:  
but particularly in this,  
that be they ever so well constituted,  
the affairs of many must,  
in such governments, turn upon very few."*  
Lord Shaftesbury<sup>1</sup>

*"our government (...) ought to be so constituted  
as to protect the minority of  
the opulent against the majority."*  
James Madison<sup>2</sup>

*"This thing is a pyramid,  
since time immemorial.  
Shit runs downhill,  
money goes up.  
It's that simple."*  
Tony Soprano<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Preview

Chapter 1 explained the subject of this research project: a systematic analysis of the aggregate political content of stand-up comedy – its satire – over the course of ten years. It also explained how the research project is original and offered arguments in support of it being a worthwhile intellectual pursuit. Chapter 2 addressed the foundations of persuasion and dissuasion, propaganda and satire, which, despite being oppositional forces share a common origin in the underlying human language faculty. This chapter will examine what the most rigorous and prestigious scholarship has to say about the nature of the political economy, which can be viewed simply as the system for life (where humans seek their livelihoods) in which *Homo sapiens* lives socially, that is, in community. *Homo sapiens* can earn a livelihood in two ways on this planet: by

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<sup>1</sup> 1773:113-114.

<sup>2</sup> *Secret Proceedings and Debates of the US Federal Constitutional Convention 1787*. Louisville, KY: Alston Mygatt, 1844: p.183.

<sup>3</sup> "For all Debts Public and Private". *The Sopranos*. Season 4, Episode 1. Written by David Chase and Allen Coulter. Originally aired on September 15, 2002.

earning income through property and/or by earning income through labour. Bertrand Russell, with his habitual concision, expressed this matter rather well:

what is work? Work is of two kinds: first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so. The first kind is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid. The second kind is capable of indefinite extension: there are not only those who give orders, but those who give advice as to what orders should be given. Usually two opposite kinds of advice are given simultaneously by two organized bodies of men; this is called politics. The skill required for this kind of work is not knowledge of the subjects as to which advice is given, but knowledge of the art of persuasive speaking and writing, i.e. of advertising.<sup>1</sup>

This quote captures the connections between language, work, and propaganda very well, in addition to being witty. Hence its relevance to the present chapter on political economy, understood as system by which and in which incomes are earned and livelihoods sought. However, jumping from language research to political economy might strike as too casual without the proper context; because, after all, what does the language faculty have to do with politics and the economy? Is there a connection between language and politics, that is, language and power? And why is it necessary to give an overview of the political economy in a study of the relationship between humour and political consciousness?

This chapter will answer these questions by looking at the cognitive potential released by the advent of symbolic *Homo sapiens*, and then proceeds in three steps to examine the nature of the political economy, at the micro, macro and global level. At the micro level, it will take an ethnic-economic approach, looking at the political economy and African Americans, starting from the slave political economy to the present. At the macro level, it will look at the national political economy in terms of the nexus between concentrations of economic power and the political realm, and its effects on income

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 2004:3.

inequality among the general population, irrespective of ethnic considerations. Both at the micro and macro levels, the discussion will focus on the United States, given that this project focuses in the main on American stand-up satire (although the findings apply to other advanced economies as well). Lastly, the chapter will tackle the political economy from a global perspective, examining where the centres of command and control are located and how the political economy is viewed from the very top of the wealth ladder.

As with every other chapter, this one too strings together contributions from different disciplines, because political economy is no marginal theme in SC<sup>2</sup>: all three levels run central to it and frame the context through which SC<sup>2</sup> manifests itself. The political content of stand-up satire is such because it engages with political economic issues. In order to appreciate the structural relationship between SC<sup>2</sup> and the political economic system, it is necessary to examine the latter. Fortunately, prestigious political-economic scholarship has offered substantial findings at all three levels of analysis (micro, macro, and global) and a brief review can situate SC<sup>2</sup> in its relational context.

## 2. Language as Competitive Advantage

In bio-linguistic literature, human language is defined as “a system of discrete infinity (...) grounded on a particular computational mechanism, realized neurally, that yields an infinite array of structured expressions.”<sup>1</sup> As a putative computational cognitive mechanism, human language has hierarchical syntactic structure at its core,<sup>2</sup> and syntax, in turn, “can be characterized via a single operation that takes exactly two (syntactic) elements a and b and puts them together to form the set {a, b}. We call this basic operation ‘merge’.”<sup>3</sup> According to scholarship in the field, there is good evidence

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<sup>1</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2013:90.

<sup>2</sup> Bolhuis *et al.*, 2014:1.

<sup>3</sup> Bolhuis *et al.*, 2014:1-2.

that “merge was indeed the key evolutionary innovation for the language faculty.”<sup>1</sup> This key innovation, some experts contend, gave *Homo sapiens* an advantage over the rest of Animalia; that is, over millions of other species.

On this point, there is a constant refrain in select scholarship that the acquisition of the faculty of language endowed *Homo sapiens* with a competitive advantage that later translated into an unrivalled control of nature. Here are five examples from the bio-linguistic literature, over the course of the last 10 years, which speak to the advantage that the acquisition of language conferred to *Homo sapiens*. These five examples are extracted from scientific articles authored by the following scholars (often jointly): Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Richard Klein, Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor of Anthropology and Biology at Stanford University; Johan J. Bolhuis, Cognitive Neurobiology Chair at the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands; Ian Tattersall, Curator Emeritus, American Museum of Natural History, New York City; Robert Berwick, Professor of Computational Linguistics and Computer Science and Engineering, jointly with Brain and Cognitive Sciences, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Angela Friederici, Director Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany. These five examples are by no means exhaustive, but speak to the competitive advantage conferred by possession of the symbolic faculty and inform the present discussion on the foundation of *Homo sapiens*’ political economic system:

1. “The core principle of language, unbounded Merge, must have arisen from some rewiring of the brain, presumably the effect of some small mutation. Such changes take place in an individual, not a group. The individual so endowed would have had *many advantages*: capacities for complex thought, planning, interpretation, and so on.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bolhuis *et al.*, 2014:2.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky: 2007:22.

2. "the modern innovative ability (...) provided the *competitive advantage* that allowed fully modern humans to replace their non-modern contemporaries."<sup>1</sup>
3. "Clearly, such a novel computational system could have led to a *large competitive advantage* among the early *H. sapiens* who possessed it, particularly when linked to possible pre-existing perceptual and motor mechanisms."<sup>2</sup>
4. "When the dust settled, we stood alone, the serendipitous beneficiaries of cognitive advances, cultural innovation and climate changes that allowed us to eliminate or outlast all hominin competition throughout the Old World in an astonishingly short time. Our *competitive edge* was almost certainly conferred by our acquisition of our unique mode of symbolic thought, which allows us to scheme and plan in unprecedented ways."<sup>3</sup>
5. "As an innovative trait, [language] would first appear in just a small number of copies (...). The individuals so endowed would have had *many advantages*: capacities for complex thought, planning, interpretation, and so on."<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the advantages conferred by the possession of the language faculty would consist of: ability for complex thought, planning and interpretation; better perceptual and motor skills; scheming in unprecedented ways; and the ability to displace competitor species. As with any advantage, it confers powers: the power to innovate, to defeat predators, to secure food, to procure shelter, and also to establish a civilization.<sup>5</sup> This power is conceptual. It erects symbolic constructions to grasp reality, to mold reality, and to mold notions of reality.<sup>6</sup> This power lays at the core of both mass propaganda and satire.

As Tattersall observed, if we look at the highlights of human development, we see that after long periods of stasis with little to no innovations, at one point there is a sudden change in the tempo of innovation.<sup>7</sup> 200 thousand years ago an anatomical

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<sup>1</sup> Klein: 2008:271.

<sup>2</sup> Bolhuis *et al.*: 2014:5.

<sup>3</sup> Tattersall: 2014(b): 59.

<sup>4</sup> Berwick *et al.* 2016:80.

<sup>5</sup> Mayr, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Chomsky, 2007:23.

<sup>7</sup> For an admirable review of the material record and the emergence of language as indicated by proxies (indirect archaeological evidence), see Tattersall, 2017.



event gave rise to the new species, as humans independently evolved many traits: “bipedalism, relative hairlessness, complex tool use”<sup>1</sup> and “opposable thumbs”<sup>2</sup> among others. Then, some 130 thousand years later, the behaviour of the species started to change. And starting 70 thousand years ago, this change, spurred by “new and unprecedented proclivities”<sup>3</sup> and evident in explicit symbolic artifacts,<sup>4</sup> suggests a cognitively new species, “one that clearly had a restless appetite for change.”<sup>5</sup> Because the increasing

pace of technological innovation (...) presage[ed] the neophiliac world in which we live today [meaning that] from being a rarity, change suddenly became routine. And (...) at this point (...) modern humans rapidly spread out of Africa and took over the world, displacing long-established Eurasian hominids in a way no other previous invader had ever managed to do. By 40 thousand years ago, artists in European caves were producing some of the most powerful art ever created, uncontested evidence of the modern sensibility; and then, within a remarkably short lapse of time, human beings were standing on the Moon.<sup>6</sup>

And the key juxtaposition here is between “took over the world, displacing long-established Eurasian hominids in a way no other previous invader had ever managed to do” and “powerful art (...) modern sensibility (...) standing on the Moon.” The point is that the same cognitive ability underlies both achievements. The former is, arguably, our species’ first major collective achievement: the genocide of our close relatives who were “eliminate[d] all (...) in little time;”<sup>7</sup> like *Homo neanderthalensis*, for instance.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the latter - art, kindness, innovation - is basically all that is to be cherished in civilization. All this reminds of Bertrand Russell’s reflection on “man’s greater command over Nature [that] has not been accomplished by greater command over his own

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<sup>1</sup> Fitch *et al.*, 2005:202.

<sup>2</sup> Wells, 2002:18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Tattersall, 2016(b):7.

<sup>4</sup> Tattersall, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Tattersall, 2014(a):204.

<sup>6</sup> Tattersall, 2016(b):3.

<sup>7</sup> Tattersall, 2014(b):54.

<sup>8</sup> Higham *et al.*, 2014.

passions. And if he does not acquire command over his own passions, whatever destruction is not achieved now is only postponed to a later date.”<sup>1</sup> The upside of language is intelligence; the downside is destruction. Like the sabre-toothed tiger, so successful it went extinct.<sup>2</sup> Russell wrote the appeal to intellectuals back in 1915, during World War I; that is, 30 years before the nuclear incineration of Japan, whose victims were mostly civilians, such as newborns, children, women, the elderly, the sick. The wanton, indiscriminate pulverization of defenseless people is unfortunately a recurrent theme ever since the rise of our distinctive species. Yet, crucially, the shift in behaviour of *Homo sapiens* “signals the most fateful cognitive change ever to occur in the [7 million] history of the hominids.”<sup>3</sup> And the emergence of language is considered by some experts<sup>4</sup> to have ushered in this massive shift in cognition and in competitive advantage, ie. in power: “The biological event that gave rise to *Homo sapiens* as a hugely distinctive anatomical entity, in Africa some 200 thousand years ago, had cascading effects,”<sup>5</sup> and “true language, via the emergence of syntax, was catastrophic event, occurring within the first few generations of *Homo sapiens*.”<sup>6</sup>

### 3. The Power Advantage

Viewed in this context, human language conferred (or released) the power to modify the environment to suit human needs, as with mastery of fire, the agricultural revolution, domestication of horses, invention of the wheel, establishment of villages and so on. And once a sedentary lifestyle replaced the earlier hunter-gatherer *modus*

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<sup>1</sup> 2005:17.

<sup>2</sup> Van Valkenburgh contends that the adaptations that made saber-toothed cats so successful also made them vulnerable to extinction: the “macro-evolutionary ratchet.” 2007:147. In a wholly consistent fashion, intelligence could be viewed as a successful short-term but lethal long-term mutation.

<sup>3</sup> Tattersall, 2017:6.

<sup>4</sup> Wells, 2002; Bickerton, 1995; Hinzen, 2012; Klein, 2009; Marean, 2014; Bolhuis et al., 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Tattersall, 2016(b):3.

<sup>6</sup> Bickerton, 1995:69.

*vivendi*, humans coalesced into communities, which in time grew to become societies, nations and civilizations. Communities of *Homo sapiens* always erect a particular system of symbolic constructions that mould the members' notions of reality. And if satire can be assumed to have the power to dissolve particular notions, it is necessary first to see how particular notions are influenced by power and wealth.

That the vast majority of human groupings, historically, have been organized hierarchically in some fashion or another, is abundantly evident in the historical record. In the literature, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as "social stratification," studied by Max Weber, Karl Marx, CW Mills, to name but a few. And it is logical that hierarchy has been studied scientifically mostly after the industrial revolution, because it made the effects of social stratification more evident and acute as the power and wealth unleashed by the industrial revolution grew exponentially, both externally, between *Homo sapiens* and the rest of Animalia, and internally, within the *Homo sapiens* species. As observed by Russell, "the landless class, which hardly existed on the Continent, was greatly augmented [after 1760], and supplied the human material essential to the rapid rise of British Industrialism. Most historians did not adequately realize the miseries which resulted from the altered position of the rural wage-earner until the publication, in 1911, of the *Village Labourer*, by J.L. and Barbara Hammond, a massive and horrifying indictment of upper-class greed."<sup>1</sup> As with every hierarchical system, it entails material consequences in the distribution of power and wealth in these societies, where, typically, the levers of power and the majority of wealth are concentrated in an elite minority of the resident population.

However, power and wealth, which translate to politics and economics, are not separate realms of human activity. Though they are often studied separately for

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 2010:55.

conceptual convenience, as with university programs in *Political Science* or *Economics*, they are not distinct, independent realms of human action. In reality - that is, in the world of facts - their relationship is far more intimate. As observed by Ha-Joon Chang, Professor of Political Economy at the University of Cambridge, UK, “there is no objective way to determine the boundary of the economy because the market itself is a political construct, as shown by the fact that it is illegal today in the rich countries to buy and sell a lot of things that used to be freely bought and sold – such as slaves and the labour service of children.”<sup>1</sup>

In the 1940s, Robert Lynd said much the same in his foreword to Robert Brady’s *Business as a System of Power*. Given that there was an “almost fantastic” disproportion between the actual economic control exercised by monopolistic trusts who engaged in market monopoly cartel behaviour, and the formal political power, by and large financed by the very same interests (much in the same way as the enslavers in the South backed congressmen in Washington in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) analyses that explicitly distinguished between business and politics as distinct realms of human activity were flawed from the start. For “having delivered itself over by accepting the definition of its welfare as synonymous with the welfare of its business system”<sup>2</sup> the state needs business. And in such circumstances, “Business is in politics and the state is in business.”<sup>3</sup> And nowhere is the interrelationship between politics and economics more evident than in labour, and at that, in unpaid labour and slave labour. Slave labour in particular is a suitable paragon whence to examine the nature of the political economy, particularly in the North American context, given that the subject of this research concerns, mostly, North American stand-up comedians.

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<sup>1</sup> Ha-Joon Chang, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Lynd, 1943:ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:ix-x.

#### 4. Micro Political Economy

To summarize the analytical rationale employed thus far: the political economy is the material foundation from which political economic ideology emanates. The ruling ideology, as a system of ideas designed to legitimize the status quo, is overwhelmingly propagated by the mainstream mass media and saturates society via the known process of hegemony. The outcome, in terms of majority opinion, is a general uncritical consensus, which, as this study will indicate, stand-up satire is primarily interested in challenging. All these elements – the political economy, ideology, propaganda & hegemony, and the general uncritical consensus – will be examined one by one, starting with the political economy in the present chapter. And given that one of the central political themes of US stand-up comedy is racism as the legacy of slavery,<sup>1</sup> examining the development of US political economy at a micro level can be done profitably by looking at the institution of slavery. This institution was erected by the political and economic fields working in concert to produce profits, growth and power: in one word, advantage. An advantage so great that it propelled the US from a land of conquest to world hegemon. Racism, in its manifold manifestations, is such a frequent theme in American stand-up comedy and in American culture at large that framing the political economy at the micro level by looking at what gave it its modern origin seems nothing short of mandatory.

As Edward Batpist - Professor of history at Cornell University - demonstrates, convincingly, in *The Half Was Never Told*,<sup>2</sup> the US economy and much of the West's wealth and privilege rely very heavily on the products of a century of horrifying slave labour camps. Commonly and euphemistically referred to as "cotton plantations", these

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the routines of Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Paul Mooney, Chris Rock, Eddie Griffin, Patrice O'Neal, and countless others.

<sup>2</sup> 2016.

torture labour camps produced the main commodity that fuelled the industrial revolution and the modern global economy. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cotton was the world's main traded good and cotton production was not just the fuel of the Industrial revolution, it was also the basis for the financial system, the merchant system, commerce, for England as well. The plantations were, in the words of Noam Chomsky, who reviewed Baptist book's startling findings, "brutal slave labour camps [in which] productivity increased more rapidly than in industry, with no technological advance, just the bullwhip; just by driving people harder and harder to the point of survival, they were able to increase productivity and profit."<sup>1</sup> The historical record, as documented by Baptist, demonstrates that systematically calculated torture powered the US and global political economy by yielding ever-greater quantities of cotton without any kind of mechanization. And in the process, the United States "went from being a minor European trading partner to becoming the world's largest economy."<sup>2</sup> The achievement was made possible by the invention of a particular labour regimen that white enslavers dubbed the "pushing system,"<sup>3</sup> whereby they measured work, implemented continuous surveillance of slaves "calibrating time and torture,"<sup>4</sup> and increasing the number of acres each "captive was supposed to cultivate."<sup>5</sup> That is, in order to extract more cotton picking, camp overseers across the Southern states implemented a torture regime, enforced with extreme violence, that consisted in, among other things, whipping up anyone "who fell behind"<sup>6</sup> their assigned daily quota. And with the pushing system in place across all cotton producing States, between 1790 and 1860, systematic torture "made possible a vast increase in the amount of cotton grown in the United States

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, 2015: 03:30-4:11.

<sup>2</sup> Baptist, 2016:xx.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 116.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

[though] at an immense human cost.”<sup>1</sup> The total productivity increase of slaves was 361% over half a century,<sup>2</sup> and cotton production jumped from 1.4 million pounds of cotton in 1800 to 2 billion pounds in 1860.<sup>3</sup> The increase, as Baptist notes, occurred in the absence of any technological innovation, and had significant consequences for the history of the world, as the gains from increased cotton productivity, mostly shipped to England, which had the most advanced cotton manufacturing plants, “created a huge pie, from which many people around the world took a slice”<sup>4</sup> and that made the planter-entrepreneurs “the richest class of white people in the United States.”<sup>5</sup> Chapters 4 and 7 of Baptist’s book offer a complete history of the horror produced in the slave labour camps, the systematic torture, the maiming of slaves of all ages, and the rape of women and children across all slave states, which inform the satirical content of stand-up comedy on the issue of racism and white supremacy.

But from an analytical point of view, for the purposes of this contextual analysis, the most significant aspect of the slave economy was that it immediately achieved political representation in Congress. Although the merchant classes in the northern states also reaped the financial benefits of the slave economy, the logic of slavery was one of necessary expansion, because the institution of slavery was ruled by very real practical economic imperatives. In order to maintain its profitability, slavery “had always required fresh lands (...) and the expectation of further growth of the plantation economy was essential to maintaining the value of the South’s enormous investment in human chattel.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, clever

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 121-122.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>6</sup> Frederickson, 1982:159.

political entrepreneurs, most notably Andrew Jackson (...) created a new interregional political alliance that yielded decades more of compromise that enabled the South to maintain its disproportionate power within the Federal Government. (...) The products generated from the possibilities of co-exploitation explain much of the nation's astonishing rise to power [and] a financial system that continuously catalyzed the development of US capitalism. (...) Dependence on cotton stretched far beyond the North American shores. A world greedy for a slice of the whipping-machine's super-profits had financed the occupation of the continent, and the forced migration of enslaved African Americans to the south-western cotton fields helped to make the modern world economy possible. (...) Slavery's expansion was the driving force in US history between the framing of the Constitution and the beginning of the Civil War. (...) Expansion's profits and power made Southerners willing to push for more expansion. (...) But southern power frightened other northern whites. (...) [And eventually most northerners] united in the Republican Party of the late 1850s behind the one policy position on which they could all agree: that slavery's expansion must be stopped.<sup>1</sup>

The intimate relationship between politics and economics, between power and wealth, is nowhere more evident than in the system that made a tiny minority of white men the wealthiest class in the world via the systematic torture of close to 4 million people over the course of a century, inside slave labour camps "that would have impressed the Nazis."<sup>2</sup>

But given that old themes persist under new guise, the slave economy depended in large part on an ideology of white supremacy that was more extreme and savage in the American South than in Apartheid South Africa. This has been demonstrated in one of the most important studies of race relations, by George Fredrickson, Edgar E. Robinson Professor of U.S. History at Stanford University, in 1982. In his comparative study of white supremacy in the US and South Africa, Fredrickson concludes that, for Southerners, racism was a "quasi-scientific doctrine"<sup>3</sup> used to establish status in society and preserve "servitude"<sup>4</sup> in a determined and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 413.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 2015: 04:15-4:20.

<sup>3</sup> 1982:154.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



sustained advocacy effort in favour of biological differences:<sup>1</sup> all blacks were naturally child-like creatures incapable of taking responsibility<sup>2</sup>, they were moral and intellectual inferiors,<sup>3</sup> people farther down the evolutionary scale.<sup>4</sup>

This ferocious type of white supremacy, which Frederickson calls “dominative racism”, followed from the institution of slavery itself, given that it was “an obvious source of personal wealth, privilege and prestige”<sup>5</sup> for a minority of propertied white males. And thus, an “uncompromising commitment to white supremacy was (...) a central and unifying component of the separate southern identity that crystallized on the eve of the Civil War”<sup>6</sup> but “in sharp contrast to the American South, [in South Africa] no articulate and organized pro-slavery movement emerged to challenge the basic assumption of the emancipators.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, in South Africa, the “prospect of slave emancipation did not, as in the South [of the US], arouse a spirit of die-hard resistance.”<sup>8</sup> After the Civil War however, things changed. The black suffrage policy of Republicans was in reality a “northern gamble aimed at establishing an enduring political and cultural hegemony over the South”<sup>9</sup> and the northern elite’s acceptance of segregationist policies later paved the way for reunion, which in effect was a “northern betrayal of the blacks who had been emancipated and promised full citizenship.”<sup>10</sup>

As is abundantly known, in the early 1900s southern state legislatures passed a series of laws requiring separation of races in public spaces. Called “Jim Crow” laws, the Supreme Court did not find that they violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and thus,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> 1982:161.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 189.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 161.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 162.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 164.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 191.

politically, African Americans were defeated: “Local registrars were empowered by [these laws] to apply a variety of tests to prospective voters – mostly involving literacy, ability to understand the constitution, and personal character or reputation – that enabled them to turn away all or most black voters.”<sup>1</sup> And after the Civil Rights movement, “the persistence of *de facto* segregation in the United States, particularly in the allocation of urban space and in education, makes it clear that equality and fraternity do not result automatically from the elimination of Jim Crow laws and practices.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, white supremacy racism and slavery continue to this day, though, again, in different guise. In her masterful *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander, Professor of Law at Ohio State University, concludes, convincingly, that what has changed in the US since the collapse of Jim Crow is just the rhetoric of discrimination, but not the substance. “In the era of colorblindness” Alexander argues,

it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don’t. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color “criminals” and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that is was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you’re labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination – employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service – are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America: we have merely redesigned it.<sup>3</sup>

As with slavery, one has to just read the “litany of scandals”<sup>4</sup> in recent years that have made the corruption of US college sports constant front-page news. Although it is hard to press the slavery analogy too far, given the lack of torture and rape which were central components - as Baptist demonstrated - of the slavery economy, observers of US

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 280.

<sup>3</sup> 2012:2.

<sup>4</sup> Compiled by Leo, 2014.

college sports have catalogued striking similarities.<sup>1</sup> The real scandal is “the very structure of college sports, wherein student-athletes [most of whom are African American] generate billions of dollars for universities, private companies [and coaches with 7 figure salaries] while earning nothing for themselves.”<sup>2</sup> In an exemplary piece of investigative journalism published by *The Atlantic*, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award winner Taylor Branch concludes that “to survey the scene – corporations and universities enriching themselves on the backs of uncompensated young [mostly black] men, whose status as “student-athletes” deprives them of the right to due process guaranteed by the Constitution—is to catch an unmistakable whiff of the plantation.”<sup>3</sup> Old themes persist under new guise. The institution of slavery was erected by the political and economic fields working in concert to produce wealth and power, amidst a general uncritical consensus that lasted some 250 years and whose residue to this day provides stand-up comedy with discernable political content.

## 5. Macro Political Economy

So much for the political economy’s treatment of its historical victims - which reminds of Russell’s observation that “there is no limit to the cruelties men will inflict for the sake of gain.”<sup>4</sup> But what does the rest of society look like irrespective of the ethnic considerations highlighted thus far? As regards blue collar jobs, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we only need to consult some of the greatest muckraking journalism of the times to get the idea: Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell, taken together,<sup>5</sup> indicated a rigged political economic system that dispensed with workers’ rights and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Branch, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Russell, 2010:193.

<sup>5</sup> In 1902 Ida Tarbell published *The History of the Standard Oil Company*; in 1904 Lincoln Steffens published *The Shame of the Cities*; in 1906 Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle*.

buttressed extreme wealth. In fact, if we look at both the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we see the same picture even in prestigious scholarship. As noted by Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize in Economics and Professor of Economics at Columbia University, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, “there was much concern about ‘monopoly capitalism.’ Rockefeller and Carnegie made their fortunes through monopolies. Today’s capitalism is different, and perhaps in some areas even more immune to anti-trust laws. (...) Much of the rents are derived by the use of political influence. (...) Some of the top fortunes today can be traced either to the exploitation of market power or to grants of rents from the government.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the question is the following: what does the scholarship have to say about the political economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries? In order to properly contextualize the political economy from a macro perspective, it is preferable to look at it from a national point of view, and zoom in on two economic indicators before other political developments are assessed. The most important insights in the economics literature explain two facts about the US economy (but they apply to Europe and Asia as well) that have been evident ever since the end of WW2: one is the progressive *financialization* of the economy; the other the spectacular rise in economic inequality in society.

In terms of the first fact about the US economy, that of financialization, much research has been carried out on the subject. Greta Krippner, Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, has traced the structural change of the US economy to the 1970s, a period that witnessed “the growing weight of finance in the American economy”<sup>2</sup> which, according to other scholars as well, “produced extreme wealth and income polarization.”<sup>3</sup> Even though the objectives of Krippner’s analysis are

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<sup>1</sup> Stiglitz, 2015:432.

<sup>2</sup> Krippner, 2005:174.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, 2002.

descriptive and conceptual in nature, rather than causal, the data she compiled show where the lion's share of profits in the economy are generated and captured. Endorsing an "accumulation-centred view of economic change – in which the focus is on where profits are generated in the economy"<sup>1</sup>, Krippner's data on the relative industry shares of corporate profits between 1950 and 2001 for manufacturing, financial services (such as finance, insurance and real estate – FIRE) indicates that "the picture of structural change in the economy"<sup>2</sup> sees the rise of FIRE to the detriment of manufacturing. Starting in the 1970s, FIRE's share of corporate profits rises dramatically and by 2000 "FIRE is the dominant sector of the economy."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the "growing weight of finance in the economy is reflected in the expansion of banks, brokerage houses, finance companies [as well as] in the behaviour of non-financial firms"<sup>4</sup>, like automobile manufacturers, which start offering lending and financing services to their customers.

The reason, Krippner explains, is straightforward: "[c]onfronted with labour militancy at home and increased international competition abroad, non-financial firms responded to falling returns on investment by withdrawing capital from production and diverting it to financial markets"<sup>5</sup> in addition to the simple off-shoring of production to low-cost jurisdictions, particularly in Asia. With the progressive hollowing out of the US manufacturing base (save notable exceptions, such as the defense industry, which has never been off-shored to other countries for strategic reasons) financial institutions grew their share of total profits and also their economic power by sitting at the centre of the economy. An examination of "interlock data reveals that banks are the most highly interlocked firms in the economy, meaning that shared directorships most often involve

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<sup>1</sup> Krippner, 2005:177.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

bank executives.”<sup>1</sup> The repercussions of these developments for society as a whole are significant. In her concluding remarks, Krippner observes that “it is not hard to envisage how processes associated with financialization might have eroded the ‘social pact’ between capital and labour that provided crucial support for the welfare state during much of the post-war period.”<sup>2</sup>

But given that “inequality is not, for the most part, the result of economic forces [because] it is the consequence of policies and a reflection of politics”<sup>3</sup> as noted by Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, is there perhaps a correlation between the rise of finance in the economy and the rise of inequality in society? After all, “the financial sector has grown to account for 8 percent of GDP, garnering for itself 40% of all corporate profits (...) with little to show for its activities in terms of economic performance, either in growth or stability.”<sup>4</sup> Firstly, economic inequality in society is by now a well-established fact. In their review article for *Science* magazine, Thomas Piketty<sup>5</sup> and Emmanuel Saez<sup>6</sup> find “large changes in the levels of inequality, both over time and across countries. This reflects the fact that economic trends are not acts of God, and that country-specific institutions and historical circumstances can lead to very different inequality outcomes.”<sup>7</sup> Some of the outcomes are startling. In the United States, the top decile income share in 1910 was lower than in Europe, but after the process of financialization begun, it “then rose to an unprecedented pace since the 1970s-1980s, and is now close to 50%. According to this measure, primary income concentration is currently higher

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>3</sup> Stiglitz, 2015:428.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 433.

<sup>5</sup> Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics.

<sup>6</sup> Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>7</sup> Piketty *et al.*, 2014:838.

than it has ever been in US history.”<sup>1</sup> Financialization, income inequality and government policies aimed at buttressing wealth are persistent themes in satirical stand-up comedy, as this study will demonstrate.

And what are the causal factors? In their article for the prestigious *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Alvaredo *et al.* look at correlations between changes in the top marginal income tax rates and changes in the top 1 percent income shares. And they find that “there is a strong correlation between the reductions in the top tax rates and the increases in top 1 percent pre-tax income shares.”<sup>2</sup> The authors conclude<sup>3</sup> that several factors play in raising income inequality, and chief among them changes in tax policy – that is political reforms – changes in the labour market – in terms of bargaining power after the off-shoring of production and the massive reduction in unionization rates in the private sector. It is important to keep in mind that the reduction in unionization in the economy also contributes to inequality, as unions’ main *raison d’être* is raising the standard of living of its members by bargaining collectively for higher salaries, benefits, and so on. According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, in 2016, the “union membership rate - the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions - was 10.7 percent”<sup>4</sup> compared to 20% in 1983. Interestingly, public-sector workers had a union membership rate (34.4 percent) more than five times higher than that of private-sector workers (6.4 percent)” and “among states, New York continued to have the highest union membership rate (23.6 percent), while South Carolina continued to have the lowest (1.6 percent).”<sup>5</sup> Which is not surprising. In fact, there is a broad consensus in the economic scholarship now that “the rise of top income

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 839.

<sup>2</sup> Alvaredo *et al.* 2013:7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

shares in the United States (...) is due for the most part to rising inequality of labour earnings.”<sup>1</sup> And the data lead experts to believe that there is no inherent reason for such high levels of inequality because “it is not a necessary feature of the market economy. It is politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not capitalism, which is at fault. Market and political forces have, of course, always been intertwined. Especially in America, where our politics is so money-driven, economic inequalities translate into political inequalities.”<sup>2</sup> Joseph Stiglitz and other eminent economists, such as Dean Baker<sup>3</sup>, argue that the main problem in advanced economies is the “lack of aggregate demand”<sup>4</sup> which is a consequence of inequality. The rationale is fairly intuitive: if the majority of people in society do not earn enough income, there is not enough aggregate demand for the economy to grow. What is required is change, “reforms in corporate governance and financial regulation and in taxation”<sup>5</sup> but unfortunately “the reforms that are actually undertaken are often just the opposite of what is needed.”<sup>6</sup>

Given that inequality is so evident, given that it injures the economy by reducing aggregate demand other than obviously increasing hardship among the general population, and given that it is so evidently the product of policies, that is, political choices, why would democratic societies end up increasing inequality? Are the majority of people are working less or working less efficiently? No. In fact, while “the average productivity of workers has doubled since 1970, wages for many workers have barely increased, and yet the incomes of the top 1 percent have soared, increasing by 170 percent.”<sup>7</sup> Not only, even in recent times the pattern is the same, as some 95% of the

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<sup>1</sup> Piketty, 2015:48.

<sup>2</sup> Stiglitz, 2015:445.

<sup>3</sup> 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Stiglitz, 2016:647.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Stiglitz, 2015: 427.



income gains after the Great Recession of 2009 went to the wealthiest 1%. As indicated by Emmanuel Saez at the University of California, Berkeley, “the top1% [of the population in terms of income] captured 95% of the income gains [of the entire country] in the first three years of the recovery.”<sup>1</sup> And moreover, as aforementioned, it is a well-established fact that politics shapes economics and economics shape politics. Because Government determines general production and employment, and general output and labor rates affect the bargaining power of different classes of employees. “Government policy structures financial markets, and the policy giving the industry special protections allows for some individuals to get enormously rich. (...) Pretending that distributional outcomes are just the workings of the market is convenient for any beneficiaries of this inequality.”<sup>2</sup>

As argued by Saez, much more inequality in society has been created by government policies which erased many “institutions developed during the New Deal and WWII - such as progressive tax policies, powerful unions, corporate provision of health and retirement benefits, and changing social norms regarding pay inequality.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, again, why would democracies enact policies that hurt the majority of the population and favour an elite minority? Perhaps because the political systems are not democracies in substance, but in name only. Perhaps because, as argued by the former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, Simon Johnson, “the finance industry has effectively captured [the US] government (...) a financial oligarchy that is blocking essential reform.”<sup>4</sup> Or perhaps because the US was never intended to be a democracy, from the start. Perhaps because of all three. It will be useful now to turn to

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<sup>1</sup> Saez, 2013: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Baker, 2016:217-218.

<sup>3</sup> Saez, 2013:5.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, 2009.

rigorous scholarship in the political science literature to examine the nature of the political sphere and its workings.

### 5.1 Contextualizing the Macro

For starters, the historical record does offer significant insights, at least in the case of the United States. Given that this project focuses in the main on American stand-up satire, and that the findings also apply to other advanced economies (as this chapter will later show) it is appropriate to look at the origins of American democracy.

American democracy started with the Constitutional Convention, held in Philadelphia in 1787. Its main aim was to create the framework of government, and in particular, the composition of the Senate. In the *Secret Proceedings and Debates of the US Federal Constitutional Convention*, the political views of participants were expressed rather candidly. James Madison, founding father of the United States who led, with others, the American Revolution against the British Crown and later became the 4<sup>th</sup> American President, had this to say about what the nascent US Government's main priority should be:

In England, at this day, if elections were open to all classes of people, the property of the landed proprietors would be insecure. An agrarian law would soon take place. If these observations be just, our [new] government ought to secure the permanent interests of the country against innovation [and] ought to be so constituted as *to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority*.<sup>1</sup>

Madison's preferences eventually prevailed, and not only was the Senate tasked to "be this body and to answer these purposes"<sup>2</sup> but also other powers of the Government were designed to further the ends of "protecting the minority of the opulent against the

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<sup>1</sup> *Secret Proceedings and Debates of the US Federal Constitutional Convention 1787*. Louisville, KY: Alston Mygatt, 1844: p.183.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

majority.” The historical roots of a representative government of this kind reach far back into the Middle Ages. Bertrand Russell observed that representative government, as an institution, became important because “for the first time [it] made it possible that the government of a large empire *should appear* to the governed to have been chosen by themselves.”<sup>1</sup> And the key phrase is “should appear.” That representative government was only a matter of appearance was clear to many observers. So much so, in fact, that in 1938 Bertrand Russell made an additional observation in his widely-read analysis of Power:

Those who have studied the working of the American Constitution know that the Supreme Court is part of the forces engaged in *the protection of the plutocracy*. But of the men who know this, some are on the side of the plutocracy, and therefore do nothing to weaken the traditional reverence for the Supreme Court, while others are discredited in the eyes of ordinary quiet citizens by being said to be subversive and Bolshevik.<sup>2</sup>

So, given the historical record, does the data support or refute “the appearance of democracy” as the “camouflage”<sup>3</sup> of plutocracy? Surveying the abundant literature on the topic it is apparent that there is no need to call up Marxist literature to illustrate the state of affairs. Rather, it is in “mainstream” academic scholarship that some inescapable conclusions can be found.

In *Polyarchy*, Robert Dahl, the leading US democratic theorist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale University, offered a nuanced analysis of the characteristics that are necessary for a political system to be classified as a democracy. A “key characteristic of a democracy” Dahl argues “is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 2004:112. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> 2005:52. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2004:132.

political equals.”<sup>1</sup> And in terms of this key characteristic, Dahl argued that the US political system fell short, and thus described it as a “polyarchy”, which is a “relatively (but incompletely) democratized regime (...) that has been substantially popularized and liberalized.”<sup>2</sup> And the reason for the different terminology is logical-empirical. “Some readers will doubtless resist the term polyarchy as an alternative to the word democracy, but it is important to maintain the distinction between democracy as an ideal system and the institutional arrangements that have come to be regarded as a kind of imperfect approximation of an ideal.”<sup>3</sup>

It is important to capture the essence of Dahl’s contribution to political science. As summarized by Ian Shapiro in *Foreign Affairs*, “in many ways, Dahl created the field of modern political science. To be sure, the scholarly study of politics goes back to at least the ancient Greeks. (...) [B]ut [Dahl] added something new to the armchair reflection leavened by illuminating anecdote that had characterized the enterprise for millennia: the systematic use of evidence to evaluate rigorously stated theoretical claims.”<sup>4</sup> In recent years, with the aid of new research methodologies (logistic regressions) and publicly available statistical data (particularly on policy preferences and income levels), scholars at prestigious institutions have been able to build upon Dahl’s contribution in order to measure the “key characteristic of democracy”.

Given that the “ability of citizens to influence public policy is the ‘bottom line’ of democratic government”<sup>5</sup>, Martin Gilens, Professor of Politics at Princeton University, decided to examine “the extent to which the preference/policy link is biased toward the

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<sup>1</sup> 1971:1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*,8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*,9:n4.

<sup>4</sup> Shapiro, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Gilens, 2005:778.

preferences of high-income Americans.”<sup>1</sup> The findings are striking: the preferences of rich Americans are reflected in government policy more than those of middle-class Americans,<sup>2</sup> while there is “a complete lack of government responsiveness to the preferences of the poor”<sup>3</sup>, which Gilens finds “disturbing.”<sup>4</sup> Basically, the policy preferences of wealthy Americans “remain a strong predictor [of] policy outcomes”<sup>5</sup> and therefore, Gilens concludes, “a government that is democratic in form but is in practice only responsive to its most affluent citizens is a democracy in name only.”<sup>6</sup> As argued by Noam Chomsky, the finds of this research are surprising, because the majority of people

have no influence on policy whatsoever. They’re effectively disenfranchised. As you move up the wealth/income ladder, you get a little bit more influence on policy. When you get to the top, which is maybe a tenth of one percent, people essentially get what they want, i.e. they determine the policy. So the proper term for that is not democracy; it’s plutocracy.<sup>7</sup>

## 5.2 Causality in the Macro

One of the possible reasons for this outcome is that wealthy Americans are highly active in politics. As argued by Benjamin Page *et al.* political activity and funding tends to correlate with individuals’ income: the richer the person, the greater their contributions to politicians. “But this means that their political ‘voice’ is louder than others’ voices. Financial contributions may represent an important mechanism by which wealthy Americans exert disproportionate political influence.”<sup>8</sup> On a host of issues, from Government spending priorities to Job and Income programs, Health Care and Retirement Pensions, Education Policy, Economic Regulation and Macroeconomic

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<sup>1</sup> Gilens, 2005:778.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 788.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 793.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 794.

<sup>7</sup> Chomsky, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Page *et al.*, 2013:54.

Policy, Inequality and Redistribution, they find “substantial differences in policy preferences”<sup>1</sup> between wealthy Americans and the general public. And in terms of policy outcomes, the divergences in policy preferences raise “a serious challenge to a core democratic value, i.e., the idea that government policymaking should be attentive to the interests”<sup>2</sup> of the majority of citizens.

But there is another question that relates to participation. Do the majority of Americans participate in elections, and if so, how do they participate? According to Walter Dean Burnham, Professor Emeritus of Politics at the University of Texas Austin, Americans are “sick to death of both Parties.”<sup>3</sup> And this conclusion stems from an analysis of 2014 county-by-county election data. Burnham *et al.* conclude that voting patterns in that election were similar to the turnout in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the right to vote was held exclusively by propertied white males, which is indicative of “democratic” participation. They write that

2014 was fundamentally a democratic debacle (...) Across the whole sweep of American history, the momentous dimensions of what has just happened stand out in bold relief. The drop off in voting turnout from the presidential election of 2012 to 2014 is the second largest of all time. (...) But this year the decline is broad and to levels that boggle the mind – rates of voting that recall the earliest days of the 19th century, before the Jacksonian Revolution swept away property suffrage and other devices that held down turnout.<sup>4</sup>

And even though polls confirmed that some 80% of Americans believe that “they don’t trust the government in Washington to do what’s right all or most of the time”<sup>5</sup> given the two-party system, most voted Republican despite the fact that more and more Americans “can no longer stomach voting for parties that only pretend to represent

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>3</sup> Burnham *et al.*, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Langer, 2014.

their interests.”<sup>1</sup> So whose interests do the parties represent when they are campaigning? Or more accurately, whose campaign contributions do parties seek in order to fund and run their nationwide political campaigns?

The topic of campaign contributions and political finance - how they are structured, and how they affect outcomes - has been extensively researched by Thomas Ferguson, Professor of Politics at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. In his analysis of the logic of money-driven political systems, Ferguson explains that virtually all the issues that “both elites and ordinary Americans think about (...) are critically important not only to voters, but to well-organized investor blocs, businesses, and industries. (...) [M]any of such groups invest massively in candidates”<sup>2</sup> and the overall effect is that “money-driven political systems shift the whole political spectrum around and comprehensively influence candidates’ electoral appeals.”<sup>3</sup> Because one major fact that is indicated by the data on political contributions is that the market for political parties is not voters; rather, “the real market for both parties is defined by major investors, who generally have good and clear reasons for investing to control the state. In a two-party system like that of the United States (...) blocs of major investors define the core of political parties and are responsible for most of the signals the party sends to the electorate;”<sup>4</sup> because without financial contributions, neither party could afford propaganda expenses.

Just to give an idea, in the 2016 presidential race alone, Hillary Clinton and her supporters spent a record \$1.2 billion for her (losing) presidential campaign.<sup>5</sup> And even though the election was won by Donald Trump, who had argued that there’s no reason

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<sup>1</sup> Burnham *et al.*, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, 1995:8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Ferguson, 1995:8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Ferguson, 1995:22.

<sup>5</sup> Allison *et al.*, 2016.

to raise \$1 billion dollars to win the election,<sup>1</sup> counting, as he was, on his already well-established star-celebrity status, data from the Federal Elections Commission indicate that 9 times out of 10, winning political candidates have outspent their opponents.<sup>2</sup> That is, candidates who “out-fundraised” their opponents were nine times more likely to win elections.<sup>3</sup> And who do they raise money from?

According to Lawrence Lessing, Roy L. Furman Professor of Law at Harvard University, less than 1% of Americans contribute 68% of all election funding, or more accurately, “less than 1/20th of 1% of America are the “relevant funders” of congressional campaigns. That means about 150,000 Americans (...) wield enormous power over [the] government.”<sup>4</sup> This minority of extreme wealth determines the “first election in every election cycle—the money election. Without them, few [candidates] believe they have any chance to win. And certainly, neither party believes it can achieve a majority without answering the special demands these “funders” make. Our Congress has thus become dependent upon these funders.”<sup>5</sup> Do wealthy investors get the policy preferences they pay for? According to Lessing, they get even more. Big businesses get hefty returns on their political investments, somewhere “between \$6 and \$220 for each \$1 ‘invested’ in lobbying and political campaigns.”<sup>6</sup> The influence of money in politics, as a corrupting force in politics, is yet another persistent theme in the satirical content of stand-up comedy, as this inquiry will demonstrate.

Thomas Ferguson’s investment theory of politics is generally supported by the data. Elections, as Ferguson argues, are just occasions in which “blocs of major investors

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<sup>1</sup> Bender *et al.*, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Lowery, 2014. Also see <http://letsfreecongress.org>

<sup>3</sup> McChesney, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> 2013:20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Lessing, 2011:117.



(...) coalesce to advance candidates representing their interests.”<sup>1</sup> Much like cotton entrepreneurs did in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century at the heights of the slave economy, as discussed before and reviewed by Baptist.<sup>2</sup> And much like merchants and manufacturers did earlier in the time of Adam Smith, who in 1776 observed that:

it cannot be very difficult to determine *who have been the contrivers* of this whole mercantile system; not the consumers, we may believe, whose interest has been entirely neglected; *but the producers, whose interest has been so carefully attended to*; and among this latter class our merchants and manufacturers have been by far the *principal architects*. In the mercantile regulations, which have been taken notice of in this chapter, the interest of our manufacturers has been *most peculiarly attended to*; and the interest, not so much of the consumers, as that of some other sets of producers, has been sacrificed to it.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, to summarize the findings in the political science scholarship, the political economic system is one in which a tiny subset of the population, the wealthiest elite, is able to disproportionately affect, in their own interests and not that of the general population, the system for life in which millions of people independently seek their own livelihoods. And therefore, when it comes to theories of politics, which theory is best supported by the available data?

According to Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, out of the four theoretical traditions in the study of American politics (Majoritarian Electoral Democracy, Economic-Elite Domination, Majoritarian Pluralism, and Biased Pluralism) multivariate analysis indicates that “economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US Government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no”<sup>4</sup> impact. Basically, the findings incontrovertibly indicate that “the majority does *not* rule.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, 1995:27.

<sup>2</sup> 2016.

<sup>3</sup> 2007:513.

<sup>4</sup> 2014:564.

<sup>5</sup> 2014:576; *emphasis* in original.

government serves “the minority of the opulent”<sup>1</sup> whose interests are “most peculiarly attended to.”<sup>2</sup> And given that the findings also apply to most advanced economies where the capacity to raise campaign financing is key to win elections, where targeting the richest donors becomes customary, the political outcomes run counter to the idea that we live in “democracies.” And this is evident in Canada as well despite a lesser degree of inequality, as discussed by Linda McQuaig *et al.* in *The Trouble with Billionaires*.<sup>3</sup> The idea that society is run by and run for the interests of a minority of wealthy people is a recurrent theme in stand-up satire, as the content-analysis chapter will show.

## 6. Global Political Economy

The state of affairs described above relates to the US. But are the findings applicable globally? Does the scholarship indicate systematic inequality at global levels as well? If so, is there also a minority of opulence at the global level? According to Stefania Vitali *et al.* a “common intuition among scholars and in the media sees the global economy as being dominated by a handful of powerful transnational corporations (TNCs). However, this has not been confirmed or rejected with explicit numbers.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, they set out to perform a quantitative investigation using “complex network analysis” to uncover how a close knit network of “firms may exert control over other firms via a web of direct and indirect ownership relations which extends over many countries.”<sup>5</sup> And in order to do so, they “uncover the worldwide structure of corporate control.”<sup>6</sup> In an admirable feat of global statistical analysis, Vitali *et al.* examine “the

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<sup>1</sup> James Madison in Secret Proceedings, 1844:183.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith, 1981:181.

<sup>3</sup> 2011:13.

<sup>4</sup> 2011:1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

international ownership network, along with the computation of the control held by each global player” only to find that

transnational corporations form a giant bow-tie structure and that a large portion of control flows to a small tightly-knit core of financial institutions. This core can be seen as an economic “super-entity” (...) [which] despite its small size, the core holds collectively a large fraction of the total network control. *In detail, nearly [40%] of the control over the economic value of TNCs in the world is held, via a complicated web of ownership relations, by a group of 147 TNCs in the core, which has almost full control over itself. The top holders within the core can thus be thought of as an economic “super-entity” in the global network of corporations. A relevant additional fact at this point is that ¾ of the core are financial intermediaries.*<sup>1</sup>

And what are the repercussions of this state of affairs at the global level for market competition? Since many transnationals have “overlapping domains of activity,” the fact that

they are connected by ownership relations could facilitate the formation of blocs, which would hamper market competition. Remarkably, the existence of such a core in the global market *was never documented before* and thus, so far, no scientific study demonstrates or excludes that this international “super-entity” has ever acted as a bloc. However, some examples suggest that this is not an unlikely scenario. For instance, previous studies have shown how even small cross-shareholding structures, at a national level, can affect market competition in sectors such as airline, automobile and steel, as well as the financial one.<sup>2</sup>

In the professional literature, the way in which economic super entities act as a bloc is often referred to as the “virtual senate”, where global multinationals can transfer massive amounts of capital outside particular countries if the policies that those government enact run counter to their interests.<sup>3</sup> In short, as observed by the Scottish novelist and social critic William McIlvanney, “multinationals now use the world like a monopoly board.”<sup>4</sup> And this view is also supported by the professional literature published by global investment banks such as Citigroup. According to their data, Kapur

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<sup>1</sup> Vitali *et al.* 2011:4.

<sup>2</sup> Vitali *et al.* 2011:5.

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> McIlvanney, [2013:07:20-07:25](#).

*et al.* observe that “the World is dividing into two blocs - the Plutonomy and the rest. The U.S., UK, and Canada are the key Plutonomies - economies powered by the wealthy (...) In plutonomies the rich absorb a disproportionate chunk of the economy and have a massive impact on reported aggregate numbers like savings rates, current account deficits, consumption levels.”<sup>1</sup> And since their data leads them to believe that the “plutonomy is here, is going to get stronger, its membership swelling from globalized enclaves in the emerging world”,<sup>2</sup> they predict that “plutonomy basket” of stocks should continue to do well. These toys for the wealthy have pricing power, and staying power. They are Giffen goods, more desirable and demanded the more expensive they are.”<sup>3</sup> As investment bankers, Kapur *et al.* advise that the “way to play plutonomy (...) is to buy shares in the companies that make the toys that the Plutonomists enjoy.”<sup>4</sup> The luxurious lives of the rich and famous is yet another persistent theme in the satirical content of stand-up comedy, as this inquiry will later demonstrate.

## 7. Conclusion

The system for life in which our species lives is indeed a peculiar one. The cognitive potential released by the advent of symbolically aware *Homo sapiens*, which gave the species an advantage over the rest of nature, can be plotted on a spectrum: on one end, as shown from the very beginning, is the ability of our species to exterminate all rivals; on the other, the possibility for the “accumulation of good ideas”<sup>5</sup> so central to progress, which eventually landed the species on the moon. This spectrum of effects is also consistent with political economic outcomes, which are, after all,

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<sup>1</sup> Kapur *et al.*, 2005:1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:1-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:25.

<sup>5</sup> Fitch *et al.*, 2010:800. See also Tomasello, 1999.

artificial. At all three levels of analysis, micro, macro and global, we find differences in wealth and power, that is, differences in advantages that produce very visible material consequences: huge disparities in wealth, that in turn, produce great riches one end, extracted at “an immense human cost”<sup>1</sup> on the other.

As argued by Robert Dahl, many “criticisms of capitalism advanced by socialists were essentially correct. Capitalism is persistently at odds with values of equity, fairness, political equality among all citizens, and democracy.”<sup>2</sup> And Dahl pressed the point about inequalities in wealth and incomes because

they reveal how far this country *falls short not only of an ideal* but of an actual condition of equality that was taken for granted by democrats like Jefferson and Madison in the early years of the Republic. But there is another important reason for particularly stressing incomes. When we attempt to compensate for gross inequalities in incomes by means other than providing income itself, the result is likely to be a patchwork of irritating regulations enforced by bureaucratic agencies.<sup>3</sup>

This theme of society falling short of an ideal of equality that is taken for granted is unequivocally central to the political content of stand-up comedy, as the data collected and analyzed in this research will indicate, and it has been pointed out in classic humour scholarship. Stephen Leacock, for instance, in describing the difference between British and American humour, put the contrast between propaganda and satire thus:

the humour that we call American is based on seeing things as they are, as apart from history, convention and prestige, and thus introducing sudden and *startling contrasts as between things as they are supposed to be* – revered institutions, accepted traditions, established conventions – and things as they are. Like many other things this humour came out of the West, beyond the plains. You had to get clear away from civilization to start it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baptist, 2016:122.

<sup>2</sup> Dahl, 1990:83.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:95.

<sup>4</sup> 1938:127; *Emphasis* added.

In societies saturated with prescribed ways of “seeing things,” prescribed by history, convention, prestige, basically, propaganda, the ability of seeing things “as they are” requires introducing sudden and startling contrasts, between the ideal and the real. Or expressed otherwise, by showing how much the real falls short of the ideal. But as with any ideal, to be shared it has to be disseminated, and when it is widely disseminated, it becomes an ideology. Therefore, the next chapter will look precisely at the political-economic ideology, which acts as a principal force in opinion making. Because when it comes to our symbolically aware species, opinions are fundamental. As famously argued by David Hume in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

nothing appears more surprising (...) than *the easiness with which the many are governed by the few*; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers.<sup>1</sup>

And the properties of the political economy are exhibited in this example of SC<sup>2</sup>:

when it comes to racism, do you know who the most racist people are for real, the real most racist people? Old black men. You find a brother over 60. I know you white people know an old black man. You go 'Willy at the job, he's so nice.' Willy hates your guts. There's nothing more racist than an old black man. You know why? 'Cause an old black man went through some real racism. He didn't go through that 'I-can't-get-a-cab' shit. He 'was' the cab. A white man just jump on his back: 'Main Street. Left, nigger. Left, nigger. Left, you fucking nigger!'<sup>2</sup>

The above quote will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 9. In the interim, it suffices to highlight two significant elements in the excerpt: 1) the critique of an operative group belief – that “racism lies in discrimination”; 2) juxtaposed to political critique, “that racism starts with torture.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hume, 1889:109-110. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 39:17-42:34

## CHAPTER 4: IDEOLOGY

*"All for ourselves and nothing for other people,  
seems, in every age of the world,  
to have been the vile maxim  
of the masters of mankind."*  
Adam Smith<sup>1</sup>

*"[O]ne of man's oldest exercises  
in moral philosophy,  
is the search for  
a superior moral justification  
for selfishness."*  
John Kenneth Galbraith<sup>2</sup>

*"Money is the only thing  
that defies the law of gravity:  
it flows up."*  
William McIlvanney<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Preview

Chapter 3 examined the political economy, and how political and economic forces are inextricably intertwined to produce the political economic reality which *Homo sapiens* inhabits, save for minor exceptions, such as scattered hunter-gatherer tribes in remoter parts of the world. In order to survive in the contemporary political economic system, the majority of people can earn subsistence in one of two ways: by earning an income off property or by earning income through labour. And this is no trivial detail. Political economy studies examine precisely the nexus between the political economic reality and how people, within that reality, seek their livelihoods. As Campbell *et al.* note, one of Adam Smith's standout achievements as a political economist was "the link which he succeeded in establishing between the form of economy prevailing (i.e. the mode of earning subsistence) and the source and distribution of power or dependence among the classes of men which make up a single

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<sup>1</sup> 1904: Book III, Ch.4, Par.10.

<sup>2</sup> "Stop the Madness," Interview with Rupert Cornwell, *Toronto Globe and Mail*. 6 July 2002.

<sup>3</sup> CBC Radio, *Writers & Company*, William McIlvanney Interviewed by Eleanor Wachtel. Aired 24.09.2007.

society.”<sup>1</sup> And Smith observed, “the basis for power is property, and (...) those who lack the means of subsistence can acquire it only through the exchange of personal service, thus becoming members of a group who ‘having no equivalent to give in return for their maintenance’ and must obey their lord ‘for the same reason that soldiers must obey the prince who pays them.”<sup>2</sup> But every system in which a multitude of individuals coexist in society requires a justification for its legitimacy, especially on questions of power and wealth and how they are allocated. And this is particularly true of human systems that determine subsistence of the species. Historically, they have always required a justification for their legitimacy. The justification for the legitimacy of the political economic system is found in political economic ideology. The reasons for the requirement of legitimacy were spelled out by David Hume some 400 years ago. In his *First Principles of Government*, Hume noted the docility with which the many submit to the authority of the few, and that, when the consent of the majority cannot be obtained through violence, consent through opinion is the only alternative. In fact,

[n]othing appears more surprising to those, who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find, that, as Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. *It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded*; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular.<sup>3</sup>

And this view, which is supported by a wealth of scholarship, particularly in propaganda studies (the subject of the next chapter), was also shared by Adam Smith, who noted that “in free countries (...) the safety of the government depends very much upon the

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell *et al.*, 1981:12-12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>3</sup> Hume, 1889:109-110.



*favourable judgment* which the people may form of its conduct.”<sup>1</sup> In our times, it is very much the same.

As Noam Chomsky observed, in the twentieth century Hume point has been updated and refined, but with an important addition: “control of thought is *more important* for governments that are free and popular than for despotic and military states [for] a despotic state can control its domestic enemy by force, but [in democratic states, propaganda is] required to prevent the ignorant masses from interfering.”<sup>2</sup> Given that, as Chapter 3 has shown, the aim of the “architects of the American political system (...) was decidedly *not* to translate the will of national majorities directly into public policy”<sup>3</sup> and that this statement generalizes because every society features a “minority of the opulent” (to use Madison’s phrase) and a majority of destitute, we are reminded once again of Adam Smith’s observation that “[c]ivil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all.”<sup>4</sup> But what exactly are the main tenets of the current political economic ideology? In order to answer this question, this chapter will examine the twin pillars of contemporary political economic ideology, democracy and capitalism, and take into account the scholarship<sup>5</sup> on ideological policies and the relationship between ideology and culture<sup>6</sup> on one hand, and ideology and education<sup>7</sup> on the other. It will therefore make the case for ideology as symbolic camouflage, and class consciousness<sup>8</sup> as awareness of that symbolic camouflage. An examination of ideology and its function in society is necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell *et al.* 1981:40.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Bartels, 2016:47.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell *et al.*, 1981:12.

<sup>5</sup> By, among others, Christopher Achen, Larry Bartels, Ha-Joon Chang, Gore Vidal, Nouriel Roubini, Robert Reich, Edward Herman, John Maynard Keynes.

<sup>6</sup> By, among others, Clifford Geertz, Peter Burke, James Carey, Stuart Hall.

<sup>7</sup> By Mandeville and Oscar Wilde.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, George Lukacs, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Bertrand Russell, and Edward Herman.

for two reasons: it is an important element in the context for the satirical comedy, and also an important element in its political economic content. Ideology is one of the key targets of stand-up satire and informs its relationship with political consciousness. And whereas this chapter will examine the formation of ideology, the next chapter will focus on its propagation.

## 2. The Twin Pillars of Political Economic Ideology

Contemporary political economic ideology rests on two conceptual pillars: democracy and capitalism. But capitalism is often used interchangeably with “free enterprise”, the “free market”, while the contemporary relationship between the State and the economy is usually defined as “neo-liberal”, an umbrella term used to describe policies aimed at increasing profits and economic growth. As laid out by the World Health Organization in an admirably efficient summary, the neo-liberal ideology “underpins and drives globalization” and is based on four principles: “economic growth is paramount: corporations and their agents need to be free to pursue whatever gives them an economic advantage; Free trade benefits all nations; Government spending creates inefficiency and waste; in the distribution of economic goods, individual responsibility replaces the concepts of public goods and community.”<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that in a world in which inequality is rampant and countries operate in different conditions based on different histories, often histories of exploitation, these principles are biased in favour of rich countries and their corporations, as the following discussion will highlight.

As with all ideological terms, both ‘democracy’ and ‘capitalism’ are imbued with a variety of meanings, and their everyday use often contrasts with their technical

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, 2004.

definition. In terms of democracy, the most common misconceptions are characterized as a “folk theory” by leading political scientists Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels. They note that a “realistic theory of democracy must be built, not on the French Enlightenment, on British Liberalism, or on American Progressivism, with their devotion to human rationality (...), but instead on the insights of the critics of these traditions, who recognized that human life is group life.”<sup>1</sup> This characterization follows through on the relationship laid out by Smith between the mode of earning subsistence and the allocation of power and wealth. Given that “Democracy is the justifying political ideology of our era”<sup>2</sup> Achen and Bartels warn, researchers should not forget that “the word ‘democracy’ is bound up with symbolism, belief, patriotism, and a quasi-religious commitment.”<sup>3</sup> In general, according to Achen *et al.*, the majority of people take the word “democracy” for granted, and reflexively believe that they live, in fact, live in a democratic society, while most of the scholarship provides substantial evidence to undermine this belief. In “the conventional view” Achen *et al.* argue, “democracy begins with the voters [and] makes the people the rulers, and legitimacy derives from their consent.”<sup>4</sup> But this view, while it has passed into everyday wisdom, is refuted by science, and thus “constitutes a kind of ‘folk theory’ of democracy, a set of accessible, appealing ideas assuring people that they live under an ethically defensible form of government that has their interests at heart.”<sup>5</sup>

Achen *et al.* believe the folk theory is mistaken because voters, fundamentally, either don’t know, or don’t care enough, about politics, to make informed choices. “The evidence,” they assert, “demonstrates that the great majority of citizens pay little

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<sup>1</sup> Achen *et al.*, 2016:18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> 2016:1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

attention to politics. At election time, they are swayed by how they feel about the ‘nature of the times’, especially the current state of the economy.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, citizens are also swayed by propaganda, omitted by Achen *et al.* but this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Citizens, Achen *et al.* observe, are primarily swayed “by political loyalties typically acquired in childhood.”<sup>2</sup> These loyalties, not the facts of political life and government policy, are the primary drivers of political behaviour. Election outcomes turn out to be largely random events from the viewpoint of contemporary democratic theory.”<sup>3</sup> Again, this is not the full picture. While it is true that ordinary people have many things to think about and take care of, which distracts their attention from “the facts of political life”, it is also true that they are the recipients of “vast and continuous”<sup>4</sup> propaganda efforts that influence their understanding and appreciation of politics.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the second pillar of the political economic ideology is similarly an often-misunderstood term. The free-market ideology stems from the idea that markets, in order to function properly, need to be independent of the political system and thus regulators should enact policies of “laissez faire” because, as the mantra goes, “the invisible hand” will take care of everything. As is widely known, the idea of an *invisible hand* originated with Adam Smith, who coined the phrase. But in the ideological sense, it was appropriated as a justification to limit state intervention in the economy to protect significant businesses’ interests, which is the opposite of what Adam Smith intended and as he used the phrase. According to Smith, the rich consume

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<sup>1</sup> It is well established that the political inclinations of adults are often acquired first in their early adolescent years, influenced by their family’s and their friends’ political orientations. See Achen *et al.*, 2016: Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> It is well established that the political inclinations of adults are often acquired first in their early adolescent years, influenced by their family’s and their friends’ political orientations. See Achen *et al.*, 2016: Bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Bernays, 2004:39.

<sup>5</sup> Examined next in Chapter 5, Section 2.

little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an *invisible hand* to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species.<sup>1</sup>

However, Smith was not naïve. Since “the desirable allocation was to be achieved through ‘the uniform, constant and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition’, the implication,” as Campbell notes, was obvious. “Government intervention had to be restrained, especially when it was possible to demonstrate, as [Smith did] in Book IV, that intervention was usually exercised on behalf of those vested interests which perverted the natural course”<sup>2</sup> of the economy for the benefit of the whole of society. Fast-forward to two centuries later and we find the same basic theme.

### 3. Ideological Policies

As argued by Han-Joon Chang, Cambridge University Professor of Economics, who summarized the findings of a good deal of political economic scholarship, the ideology of free-market capitalism boils down to support for big business at the expense of the general population. Big business’ interests are, just like in Adam Smith’s time, “most peculiarly attended to.”<sup>3</sup> And their interests are basically two, familiar to any

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 1981: 181.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell *et al.*, 1981: 44.

<sup>3</sup> In his closing paragraph to Chapter 8 of *Wealth of Nations* “Conclusion of the Mercantile System”, Smith writes: “It cannot be very difficult to determine who have been the contrivers of this whole mercantile system; not the consumers, we may believe, whose interest has been entirely neglected; but *the producers, whose interest has been so carefully attended to; and among this latter class our merchants and manufacturers have been by far the principal architects. In the mercantile regulations, which have been taken notice of in this chapter, the interest of our manufacturers has been most peculiarly attended to; and the interest, not so much of the consumers, as that of some other sets of producers, has been sacrificed to it.*”

management scholar: profit maximization and continuous growth. These two goals, however, are at odds with the interests of society as a whole: profits are obtained by keeping costs low, and maximized when labour costs are eliminated (the perfect system being slavery); while continuous growth in a planet of a finite size with finite resources, is, in the long run, impossible to sustain. Ha-Joon Chang observed that Gore Vidal was correct when he argued that the American political economic system is “free enterprise for the poor and socialism for the rich”<sup>1</sup> but more importantly, he was not alone in holding this opinion. Nouriel Roubini, Professor of economics at New York University, certainly not a Marxist, similarly observed that the political economic system in the US, and elsewhere, is one in which “profits are privatised and losses are socialised.”<sup>2</sup> Robert Reich, Chancellor’s Professor of Public Policy at the University of California Berkeley, defines the system as “socialized capitalism [yielding] private gains and public losses.”<sup>3</sup> And the origin of the contemporary system, as reviewed in Chapter 3, dates back to the 1970s with the *financialization* of the economy. Ha-Joon Chang, in summarizing 30 years of data and trends, observes that:

the rich have been increasingly protected from the market forces, while the poor have been more and more exposed to them. For the rich, the last few decades have been “heads I win, tails you lose.” (...) In contrast, poor people have been increasingly subject to market forces. In the name of increasing “labour market flexibility,” the poor have been increasingly deprived of their rights as workers. (...) In the area of consumption, increasing privatization and deregulation of industries supplying basic services on which the poor are relatively more reliant upon -- like water, electricity, public transport, postal services, basic health care and basic education -- have meant that the poor have seen a disproportionate increase in the exposure of their consumption to the logic of the market.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vidal, 2002:129.

<sup>2</sup> Roubini, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Reich, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Ha-Joon Chang, 2017.

According to Edward Herman, Professor Emeritus of Finance at the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania, the developments outlined by Ha-Joon Chang amount to “class warfare,” because ever since the 1970s, free capital mobility and the *financialization* of the economy have worked to “weaken democracy.”<sup>1</sup> Herman explains that one of the main ways in which domestic politics are constrained by capital is free capital mobility, which is the ability of private individuals, usually the wealthiest class, to move their funds across national boundaries in pursuit of higher returns, in the absence of policy regulations that restrict capital flight.

John Maynard Keynes for instance was adamantly opposed to capital mobility, and argued in favour of “capital controls”<sup>2</sup> because he was aware that if the wealthiest individuals can move money around freely, they would be able, in effect, to threaten a government of a country if it were to propose to implement policies against their interests; like legislation aimed at raising the minimum wage. John Kirshner, of Cornell University, reminds economists that Keynes was in favor of capital controls because of the danger posed by free capital mobility, whereby investors, “scanning the globe for the best rates of return, create pressures for conformity across countries’ macro policies. Nations that deviate from the international norm, even when pursuing policies appropriate for local needs, are ‘punished’ by capital flight.”<sup>3</sup> And therefore, what are the global political economic conditions in the post 1970 period? According to Edward Herman,

one of the major instruments of class warfare in the West is the increased ability of capital to use or threaten ‘delocalization’ and ‘outsourcing’ – that is, to move production in whole or part to the third world to take advantage of low wages, poor working conditions, and minimal environmental regulation. (...) Global capital benefits enormously from

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<sup>1</sup> Herman, 1995:113.

<sup>2</sup> Keynes, 1978: Vol. XXV, p.149.

<sup>3</sup> Kirshner, 1999:315-316.

this system in which it can bargain down all parties, at home and abroad. This is why income inequality (...) has been on the upswing globally.<sup>1</sup>

And domestically, the political sphere is not shielded by these developments, but can only succumb to them. "Elections may be occurring more widely, but even more consistently than in the past they now have material consequences only when they serve the dominant interest of the global market. When they fail to do this, there is a policy stale-mate, unless the newly elected leaders 'see the light' (ie. Sell-out) or until a new election brings 'realists to power'."<sup>2</sup> And all this shows that "democracy", even in the presence of informed, active and concerned majorities, is a highly ideological term, given that "the lack of respect for democratic processes where they threaten to serve ordinary citizens rather than the elite and the market could hardly be more obvious."<sup>3</sup>

The birds-eye view of the US and of the global political economic reality leaves little room for doubt on defining the ruling political economic ideology of our times, which corresponds to the maxim Adam Smith highlighted in 1776: "All for ourselves and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind."<sup>4</sup> And this results from a theory of power that has been confirmed everywhere *Homo sapiens* set foot: "the holders of power will always use their position to obtain special advantages for themselves; at the same time, they will in general wish to prevent chaos, and to ensure a certain efficiency in the system by which they profit."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, on the political front, what is ideologically referred to as "democracy", in reality functions like a plutocracy. On the economic front, what is ideologically referred to as "free enterprise" in reality functions like a network of oligopolies.

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<sup>1</sup> Herman, 1995:ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.111

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.118.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 1776: p.419 of the Glasgow edition. Also, 1904: Book III, Ch.4, Par.10.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, 2010:185.



Calling the economic system “free enterprise” or the “free market” or “capitalism”, from this point of view, masks the true nature of the system that perpetuates inequality; that is, it perpetuates the “opulence” of a minority against the non-opulent majority. Masking the true nature of the economic system is by no means a new phenomenon, as it dates back to the middle nineteenth century during the height of the industrial revolution. Even Bertrand Russell concluded, correctly, that in a system dominated by a minority of the opulent, even analysis and scholarship would be bent towards those very interests impeding impartial analysis: “most of the middle-class economists made themselves apologists for the employers, and defended abominations by means of fallacies which Marx expose[d] with well-deserved scorn.”<sup>1</sup> The profits generated by the system, that are evermore captured by a very small elite, are carefully examined and widely celebrated in every issue of *Fortune* magazine, in addition to the wider business press. Celebrating profits, endorsing a consumerist lifestyle, are the emanations of this political economic ideology. But what is the interplay between political economic ideology and culture more generally?

#### 4. Ideology and Culture

Political economic ideology has been, and continues to be, a key site of debate in cultural theory because of the overwhelming and disproportionate influence that political and economic factors exert on human society. Insofar as people are “social animals”, political and economic ideologies will continue to be central elements in human affairs. Aristotle was one of the first to observe the interplay between the ability for language, the advantage this ability yields over the rest of Animalia, and the “political” nature of humankind:

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 2010:193.

man is by nature a political animal (...) And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and *man alone of the animals possesses speech*. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another) but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful.<sup>1</sup>

But once mankind, under the natural “impulse to form a partnership”, gathers into societies, exchange of information sets in, and culture develops.

In the natural sciences, culture is typically referred to as “human expression”.<sup>2</sup> This phrase captures the breadth of the concept, but it is still insufficient. In classic sociology, we find a more nuanced definition of the term. In his chapter on *Thick Description*, Clifford Geertz notes that human expression is both a product of the human mind and behaviour, but also a mental map, or system, that humans construct to interpret and navigate reality. Geertz agreed with Max Weber that humans are animals “suspended in webs of significance [they themselves have] spun,” and took “culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”<sup>3</sup> This conception of culture is also shared by prestigious anthropological research, in which we find, in varying forms but with the same substance, that culture is “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by which people perpetuate, communicate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”<sup>4</sup>

This definition of culture as a “map of and for reality” was also endorsed by James Carey and Peter Burke. Even though James Carey examined the role of culture in the context of communication, and how a “cultural turn” could inform the study of

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a, Aristotle, 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Healy, 2001. “Culture is human expression.”

<sup>3</sup> Geertz, 1973:5.

<sup>4</sup> Geertz, 1973:89.

communication, he nonetheless noted that communication consists of symbolic systems that are representations of reality that guide social behaviours.<sup>1</sup> The symbolic systems are akin to mental maps, and “to live within the purview of different maps is to live within different realities. Consequently, maps not only constitute the activity known as mapmaking, they constitute nature itself.”<sup>2</sup> Communication therefore consists of symbols of reality and for reality and studying culture involves examining the social processes by which significant symbolic forms – the maps serving to structure and guide our lives – are created, learned, applied, transformed. Because “culture must first be seen as a set of practices, a mode of human activity, a process whereby reality is created, maintained and transformed.”<sup>3</sup> Along the same lines, Peter Burke defines culture as “a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms [performances, artefacts] in which they are expressed or embodied.”<sup>4</sup>

But despite its expansiveness, this formulation of culture, which encapsulates much of human expression and behaviour, still lacks a central element: dynamism. Given that societies are not static, but change, and given that humans are not equal, but differ in terms of abilities, skills, and ambitions, among other things, the societies in which culture takes place are neither egalitarian nor static by any means. The Chicago school of communication and the British school of communication added this missing dimension to the formulation of culture, one that speaks to its dynamism, by looking at the element of “struggle”.

Struggle is a dominant theme in the British tradition, manifestly so in the works of Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, and EP Thompson, perhaps because the issue of class has been an overt characteristic of British society for nearly 1000

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<sup>1</sup> Carey, 1989:15-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>4</sup> Burke, 2009: xiii.

years, at least since Magna Charta; that is, since 1215. Stuart Hall, among others, stressed that any study of culture must include the element of struggle, for culture is and has always been the site of struggle, resistance, appropriation and expropriation.<sup>1</sup> The dimension of struggle was a much-needed addition to the debate, because it opened other critical avenues and added “variability” to otherwise “static” conceptualizations of culture. Hall sees culture as a site of struggle, as “a battlefield.”<sup>2</sup> Hall explained that this is the case because capitalists had an interest in influencing the culture of popular classes, “because the constitution of a whole new social order around capital required a more or less continuous, if intermittently, process of re-education, in the broadest sense. And one of the principal sites of resistance to the forms through which this ‘reformation’ of the people was pursued lay in popular culture.”<sup>3</sup> But not only in popular culture, also in economic scholarship. As observed by Russell in his review of Marxism, most mainstream economists became apologists for the system managed by employers.<sup>4</sup> But the idea that capital had a stake in the culture of the masses was not necessarily new either. In fact, even before the industrial revolution we find conceptions of education as holding value only if it serves the interests of the “opulent minority.”

## 5. Ideology and Education

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Mandeville published *The Fable of the Bees* in which he outlined the British elite’s consensus on what public education should really consist of. Given that “the more Man’s knowledge increases in this State, the greater will be the variety of Labour required to make him easy,” Mandeville argued that it is “impossible that a Society can long subsist and suffer many of its Members to live in Idleness, and

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, 1981:227.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, 1998:451.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.442.

<sup>4</sup> Russell, 2010:193.

enjoy all the Ease and Pleasure they can invent, without having at the same time great multitudes of people that to make good this defect, will condescend to be quite the Reverse, and by use and patience inure their bodies to work for others and themselves besides.”<sup>1</sup>

Multitudes of people on one side, Members of Society on the other. Inurement and work on one side, Ease and Pleasure on the other. By “Members of Society” Mandeville meant the opulent minority, and by “the great multitudes of people” Mandeville meant the “labouring poor.” These two factions have opposite interests, and given that wealth and power rest firmly on one side, it is no surprise that “the holders of power will always use their position to obtain special advantages for themselves (...) [and] ensure a certain efficiency in the system by which they profit.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, as Mandeville notes, the multitude of laborious poor are necessary to “make the Society happy”:

in a Free Nation where slaves are not allowed of, the surest wealth consists in a multitude of Laborious Poor; for besides that they are the never failing nursery of fleets and armies, without them there could be no enjoyment, and no product of any country could be valuable. To make the Society<sup>3</sup> happy and people easy under the meanest circumstances, it is requisite *that great numbers of them should be ignorant as well as poor.* Knowledge both enlarges and multiplies our desires, and the fewer things a man wishes for, the more easily his necessities may be supplied.<sup>4</sup>

This is the exact same spirit, observed nearly two centuries years later, in which Lady Bracknell, in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, (in)famously argued in favour of, and not against, widespread ignorance. Lady Bracknell, speaking for elite opinion, explains that she cannot “approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The

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<sup>1</sup> Mandeville, 1723:326.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 2010:185.

<sup>3</sup> Society with a capital “S” means upper class society.

<sup>4</sup> Mandeville, 1723:328. *Emphasis added.*

whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square.”<sup>1</sup> And what exactly is the danger that Lady Bracknell fears? The same one identified by Mandeville:

When obsequiousness and mean services are required, we shall always observe that they are so cheerfully nor so heartily performed as from inferiors to superiors; *I mean inferiors not only in riches and quality, but likewise in knowledge and understanding.* A servant can have no unfeigned respect for his master, as soon as he has sense enough to find out that he serves a fool. When we are to learn or to obey we shall experience in ourselves, that the greater opinion we have of the wisdom and capacity of those that are either to teach or command us, the greater deference we pay to their laws and instructions. *No creatures submit contentedly to their equals,* and should a horse know as much as man, I should not desire to be his rider.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, in Mandeville’s opinion, which reflected elite opinion, education should not tamper with deference and submission, an argument that is in line with the political economic ideology outlined thus far. And to reiterate, these opinions were not confined to centuries ago. Even in the twentieth century, the idea that public education was designed in the interests of preserving status quo inequalities was expressed by other scholars, among them John Dewey and Bertrand Russell. The latter, in 1922, explained the many ways “in which education is designed, not to give true knowledge, but to make the people pliable to the will of their masters. [For] without an elaborate system of deceit in the elementary schools, it would be impossible to preserve the camouflage of democracy.”<sup>3</sup> The “camouflage of democracy” is just another way of describing the aim

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<sup>1</sup> Wilde, 1989:33.

<sup>2</sup> Mandeville, 1723:330-331. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>3</sup> 2004:132.

of political ideology. And the power of satire, this project posits, is to lift the camouflage, given that the “humour that we call American is based on seeing things as they are.”<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Class Consciousness

Political economic ideology can be appreciated in all of its historic dynamism in the interplay between pre-existing conditions that pit one class of people against another, who were both assigned their roles at birth. This is not to say that there is no possibility for deviation or personal success, because there are many examples of persons from humble beginnings, who through industry and frugality, rose to higher ranks. In fact, the history of US capitalism shows precisely that, particularly whenever new fields of profit open up: like petroleum exploration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and digital applications in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But a mere set of success stories, of individuals climbing the social ladder, does not suffice to claim that the political economic system is just and fair for all, though the ruling political economic ideology will insist it is so. As Stuart Hall observed, if “the consensus of the governed can be so shaped that it squares with the will of the powerful, then particular (class) interests can be represented as identical with the consensus will of the people. This however, requires the shaping, the education, and tutoring of consent: the media participate in the production of consent.”<sup>2</sup> Much in the same vein, George Lukacs argued that ideology is a projection of the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie,<sup>3</sup> which functions to prevent the proletariat from attaining consciousness of its revolutionary position. Ideology determines how people perceive the objective reality.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leacock, 1938:127.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, 1982:82-83.

<sup>3</sup> Lukacs, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Lukacs endorsed Marx's definition of ideology, because he agreed that the ruling class "is compelled, in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form; it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, when the interplay between political economic ideology and culture is observed, Marx finds that

the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.<sup>2</sup>

However, Marx's appeal was mainly to class antagonism, given what British capitalism was in the nineteenth century. As Bertrand Russell observed, although

in Great Britain, capitalism became less brutal after 1846, its cruelties continued in full force wherever it was conquering new territory; indeed, in the Belgian Congo it reached a pitch of atrocity far surpassing the worst evils of the mills and mines in the North of England. *There is no limit to the cruelties men will inflict for the sake of gain.* This is not a new fact produced by capitalism: Coeur de Lion's treatment of the Jews, Pizarro's treatment of the Incas, show the same cold-blooded cupidity as was shown by the employers who filled Marx with detestation.<sup>3</sup>

The same applies to all power structures worldwide and especially to the United States for the purposes of this inquiry: there is no limit to the cruelties men will inflict for the sake of gain. Therefore, there is nothing new in the relationship between elites and masses under capitalism. And when it comes to ideology, the same pattern is also evident in pre-capitalist times. There is, therefore, a clear historical continuum in the "camouflage" of democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, 1968: *Ruling Class & Ruling Ideas*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2010:193.



As Adam Smith noted in *Wealth of Nations*, wealth and power will always attempt to construct some rationale to legitimize their pursuits, given how “the clamour and sophistry of merchants and manufacturers easily persuade [the rest of society] that the private interest of a part, and of a subordinate part of the society, is the general interest of the whole.”<sup>1</sup> And in this way, that is, through sophistry and clamour on the part of elites, a general consensus is sustained. But the interest of elites rarely coincides with that of the majority of people. For this reason, Stuart Hall noted, great efforts are undertaken so that “the consensus of the governed can be so shaped that it squares with the will of the powerful.”<sup>2</sup> The majority, the laborious poor, would be aware and conscious of this difference, “had not the interested sophistry of merchants and manufacturers confounded the common sense of mankind. Their interest is, in this respect, directly opposite to that of the great body of the people.”<sup>3</sup> Again, as we see, old themes persist under new guise.

According to the ruling ideology, the interest of “the great body of the people” in our age should be that of consumerism. Given that “neoliberal ideology has provided the intellectual rationale for policies that have opened up the ownership of broadcasting stations and cable and satellite systems to private transnational investors”<sup>4</sup> the culture and ideology fostered through globalization put “lifestyle” themes and goods at the centre of life at the expense of political activism and critique. This focus on the so-called superficial things in life tends to “weaken any sense of community helpful to civic life. And as Robert McChesney notes, “the hallmark of the global media system is its relentless, ubiquitous commercialism.” Shopping channels, ‘infomercials,’ and product placement are booming in the global media system. McChesney adds that “it should

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<sup>1</sup> 1981:144.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, 1982:82-83

<sup>3</sup> Smith, 1776: p.494 of the Glasgow edition.

<sup>4</sup> Herman *et al.* 2014: xiv.

come as no surprise that account after account in the late 1990s documents the fascination, even the obsession, of the world's middle class youth with consumer brands and products.”<sup>1</sup>

Ideology theory singles out the mass media as one of the institutions, or *apparatuses*, involved in the spreading of ruling class ideas. In Althusser’s critique, we find that

ideological state apparatuses (religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade unions, communications, cultural) are of the private domain. Despite diversities and contradictions, the ideology by which they function is unified beneath the ruling ideology, the ideology of the ruling class (...).<sup>2</sup>

Ever since the electronic age, the crucial apparatuses are the “communications and cultural” ones, for in terms of reach and intensity, they wield the greatest power. As noted by C.W. Mills, “most of the ‘pictures in our heads’ we have gained from these” apparatuses, which “guide our very experiences [and set] our standards of credulity, our standards of reality.”<sup>3</sup> In the Gramscian tradition too we find that in order to study how the ideological structure of a dominant class is actually organized it is necessary to examine the material organization aimed at maintaining, defending, and developing the theoretical or ideological front.<sup>4</sup> The most dynamic part involved in this process, according to Gramsci, is the press: publishing houses, newspapers, periodicals. But also everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion: libraries, schools, associations, et cetera.<sup>5</sup> This too is a recurrent theme in the scholarship, and is also expressed in satirical stand-up comedy.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Althusser, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Mills, 1956:312.

<sup>4</sup> Gramsci, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Gramsci, 1992.

## 7. Conclusion

According to Althusser and Gramsci, among others, the dominant political economic ideology, coinciding with the interests of the ruling class, is normalized through the process of hegemony, which is the permeation throughout society of the values and ideas of the ruling class via the distribution of that ideology by various institutions. But what exactly are those values? And which institutions are the most substantial distributors of the contemporary political economic ideology? If the argument about the ruling political economic ideology of our times is supported by the evidence presented so far, then it is possible to agree with Noam Chomsky when he argues that if we take a birds-eye view of contemporary human affairs, and the so-called structure of life, individuals for the most part form their opinions under influence of broadcasted efforts at communication, which, by their very design, endorse a particular ideology:

the people in the PR industry aren't there for the fun of it, they're doing work, *they're trying to instil the right values*. In fact, they have a conception of what a democracy ought to be. It ought to be a system in which the specialized class are trained to do their work for the service of the masters, the people who own the society. And the rest of the population ought to be deprived of any form of organization because organization just causes trouble. They ought to be just sitting alone in front of the television set, and having drilled into their heads daily the message which says: *the only value in life is to have more commodities. Or to live like that rich middle class family you're watching. And to have nice values, like Harmony and Americanism and that's all there is in life.* (...) That's the ideal. And great efforts were made into trying to achieve that ideal. And there is a certain conception of democracy behind it.<sup>1</sup>

Herein lies the interplay between political economic ideology and culture, which requires the action of cultural institutions for ideological dissemination and propagation. In our age, the most important cultural institutions, that is, the ones which “express” and “disseminate” the most content, are the mass media, which are however,

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, 1992.

are not democratic institutions, but by now giant private multinational corporations. To examine how the ruling ideology is permeated throughout society via the mass media, via propaganda, and hence to review what the scholarship has to say about this matter, is the necessary next step. For, as this inquiry will show, stand-up satire targets the mass media with a frequency and intensity that cannot be properly accounted for otherwise. The properties of ideology are exhibited in this example of SC<sup>2</sup>:

But while individual Americans have become softer, America itself has only become stronger. I don't want to get too George M. Cohan here, but you gotta marvel at how in one short century the US went from being a backwater hick joke to a beacon of hope. You know, when we're not propping up fascist dictators, like Pinochet, Somoza, Noriega, Duvalier, Trujillo, and Marcos, we are a true symbol of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

The above quote will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 9. In the interim, it suffices to highlight two significant elements in the excerpt: 1) the critique of an operative group belief – that of “the United States as a symbol of freedom”; 2) juxtaposed to political critique, “propping up fascist dictators.”

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 0:38-2:09

## CHAPTER 5: PROPAGANDA

*"Public opinion is  
an extremely mutable thing."*  
Henrik Ibsen<sup>1</sup>

*"Propaganda is  
the management of collective attitudes  
by the manipulation of significant symbols."*  
Harold Lasswell<sup>2</sup>

*"Advertising may be described  
as the science of  
arresting the human intelligence  
long enough  
to get money from it."*  
Stephen Leacock<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Preview

Chapter 4 examined political economic ideology as the system of ideas that legitimizes the political economic reality in which people live their lives and earn subsistence. This chapter, as the previous ones, will build on the contributions examined thus far and focuses on the interplay between ideology and the mass media. In doing so, it will seek to answer the following questions: how does ideology factor in to the mass media's output? Does their output, their content, represent a constant challenge for the status quo, the political economic reality, with all of its manifest and demonstrated inequality? Or are the mass media simply communication tools in the hands of elites that use them overwhelmingly to propagate "ruling ideas", to marginalize dissent, and sustain the status quo? In order to answer these questions, this chapter will refer to the most rigorous and prestigious scholarship on the mass media and answer the questions posed at the outset by looking at institutional analyses of the mass media, that is, analyses that examine the mass media as institutions, which are of the private

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<sup>1</sup> Expressed by the character Dr. Stockman, in *An Enemy of the People*, by Henrik Ibsen. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999:p.20.

<sup>2</sup> Lasswell, 1927:627.

<sup>3</sup> 1924:123.

domain (with notable public media exceptions) and as such pursue business goals (profitability and growth) in order to operate in the current “free market”, capitalist system. As this study hypothesizes, the political content of stand-up satire is primarily involved in a symbolic contest with the general uncritical consensus, which is sustained, daily, by the mass media. Because if it is true that “day by day, week by week, newspapers, radio and television present us with a steady flow of words and images, information and ideas,”<sup>1</sup> as John B. Thompson put it, this steady flow evokes and sustains a particular “cognitive image” of the world. This cognitive image is a system of symbolic constructions that molds notions of reality. And if satire can be assumed to have the power to dissolve particular notions, it is necessary first to see how particular notions are influenced by power and wealth and disseminated throughout society.

## 2. Propaganda

Though the term ‘propaganda’ has fallen out of favour ever since the end of WWII given its overt use by the Nazi regime, it is still the most suitable to describe the aggregate function of the mass media, as opposed to other terms such as “advertising”, “public relations” which are modern euphemisms. In fact, the field of communication studies began as the field of propaganda studies, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the contributions of Edward Bernays,<sup>2</sup> Harold Lasswell<sup>3</sup> and Paul Lazarsfeld,<sup>4</sup> among others. To review what each of these pioneering scholars have opined about the function of the mass media in society is crucial in order to properly assess the relationship between mass media and ideology from a macro point of view, and the precise function taken on by the mass propaganda in contemporary society. The theoretical contributions on

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<sup>1</sup> Thompson, 1991: 163.

<sup>2</sup> 1952; 2004.

<sup>3</sup> 1927;1928;1935.

<sup>4</sup> 1941.

mass media and ideology that this chapter will cover, once the aforementioned three are coalesced into a consistent theoretical framework, are those offered by critical thinkers and theorists who have improved the scientific study of mass communications in advanced industrial societies.<sup>1</sup>

The word 'propaganda' was coined by Pope Gregory XV, in 1622, to describe the Catholic Church's effort to counter the spread of the Reformation and Protestantism in Europe. The task of fighting back against the 'heresies' in the Continent was assigned to a new ecclesiastical agency, called the Office for the Propagation of the Faith, whose leading principle was laid out by St. Augustine: "how can the [mind] love what it does not know?"<sup>2</sup> That is, how can people's minds love something, if they do not know about it in the first place? In light of the successes of Reformist "agitation", the Catholic Church decided to embark on a new challenge and let as many people as possible know what exactly their "minds" should "love." The new challenge consisted in propagating Catholicism in order to re-establish it as the one and only "true faith."<sup>3</sup> And the contemporary relationship between ideology and the mass media traces back to the first mass media event in history: the printing revolution.

As Benedict Anderson noted in *Imagined Communities*, "the Reformation (...) owed much of its success to print-capitalism. (...) When in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses to the chapel-door in Wittenburg, they were printed up in German translation and 'within 15 days [had been] seen in every part of the country.'<sup>4</sup> With the printing

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno; McLuhan; C.W. Mills; Packard; Fones-Wolf;; Carey; Bagdikian; Herman & Chomsky, among others.

<sup>2</sup> 2002:45.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Miller, 2004:10.

<sup>4</sup> 2006:39

revolution, for the first time, the world witnessed the rise of “a truly mass readership and a popular literature within everybody’s reach.”<sup>1</sup> And in this

titanic battle for men’s minds, Protestantism was always fundamentally on the offensive, precisely because it knew how to make use of the expanding vernacular print-market being created by capitalism, while the Counter-Reformation defended the citadel of Latin. [And] the coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism exploiting cheap popular editions, quickly created large new reading publics (...) and simultaneously mobilized them for politico-religious purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Anderson explains that the new mass medium of printing coupled with widespread distribution evoked an “imagined community” in the minds of many peoples, as the new print-language in the local vernacular created a “unified field of exchange and communication.” This unified field expressed itself in several vernaculars, a “huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes (...) gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged.”<sup>3</sup>

Again, as an extension of the language faculty, the mass media of printing holds the same basic property, that of evoking mental images,<sup>4</sup> only on a far greater scale. The “evoked mental image” was much larger and more complex than before, as the “convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.”<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between ideology and mass media rests on the fact that mass distribution of communications, regardless of the medium, evokes a “unified field” in

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>4</sup> Francois Jacob as cited in Chomsky, 2007:23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.46.



the minds of people. And therefore, to control the symbols that constitute this unified field is to control the public mind.

### 3. Propaganda Redux

In the twentieth century, the same principle espoused by St. Augustine guided the first systematic state propaganda effort designed to turn around public opinion on the issue of American involvement in WWI. The Committee on Public Information, assembled and spearheaded by George Creel in 1917, was consciously tasked to carry “the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe.”<sup>1</sup> The Committee’s main objective was to make “sure that a hundred million – the fathers the mothers, the children of America, alien born and native alike – understood well enough so that they would support one loan after another, would bear new burdens of taxation and send wave after wave of America’s young manhood to die in Flanders fields.”<sup>2</sup> That the logic of modern warfare required mass propaganda was clear to many observers early on. Bertrand Russell, for instance, explained that “as armed forces become increasingly dependent upon industrial workers for their munitions, it becomes increasingly necessary for Governments to secure the support of large sections of the population. This is a matter belonging to the technique of propaganda, in which it may be assumed that Governments will make rapid progress in the near future.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus the Committee created a systematic and sustained nationwide campaign that used every available medium: pamphlets “written by the country’s foremost publicists, scholars and historians;”<sup>4</sup> “spoken word (...) in mass-meetings in (...)

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<sup>1</sup> Creel, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.99.

<sup>3</sup> 2006:113.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.6.

communities (...) from coast to coast”<sup>1</sup> delivered by the “Four Minute Men [organization] with a volunteer service of 75,000 speakers, operating in 5,200 communities, and making a total of 755,190 speeches;”<sup>2</sup> “war exhibits & expositions;” “posters, window-cards” by American artists; “leading novelists, essayists (...) worked faithfully in the production of brilliant, comprehensive articles;” “motion picture(s) were carried to every community in the United States, [with films such as] ‘Pershing’s Crusaders,’ ‘America’s Answer’, and ‘Under Four Flags’.”<sup>3</sup> In a short amount of time, the US became saturated with interventionist propaganda against the “abominable Huns” and the effort successfully won “the fight for the mind”<sup>4</sup> of America, as demonstrated in opinion polls throughout the country.

It was from his experience with the Creel Commission that Edward Bernays, the father of the academic study of mass persuasion, wrote *Propaganda* in 1928. Bernays observed that “[t]here is (...) a vast and continuous effort going on to capture our minds in the interest of some policy or commodity or idea”<sup>5</sup> and justified this vast and continuous effort on the grounds that

the conscious and intelligent *manipulation* of organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government, which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, *our minds molded*, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.<sup>6</sup>

Bernays’ intention was scholarly as well as scientific, for his aim was to “explain the structure of the mechanism which controls the public mind, and to tell how it is manipulated by the special pleader who seeks to create public acceptance for a

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.99.

<sup>5</sup> Bernays, 2004:39.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.37; *Emphasis* added.

particular idea or commodity.”<sup>1</sup> After WWI, the methods for the “conscious manipulation of the opinions of the masses” were adopted by US businesses, for two reasons: firstly, in reaction to the successes of “muckracking journalism” which laid “a multitude of sins”<sup>2</sup> to the charge of big business, capitalists sought to turn around the public’s antagonism towards its “sins” instead of tackling the substance; secondly, having entered the age of mass production, business became increasingly aware that profits could only be generated if the “rhythm” of mass production could be maintained. Bernays in fact observed that

today, supply must actively seek to create its corresponding demand. A single factory, potentially capable of supplying a whole continent with its particular product, cannot afford to wait until the public asks for its product; it must maintain constant touch, through advertising and propaganda, with the vast public *in order to assure itself the continuous demand* which alone will make its costly plant profitable. This entails a vastly more complex system of distribution than formerly. *To make customers* is the new problem.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, he concluded, “even in a basic sense, business is becoming dependent on public opinion.”<sup>4</sup> The dependency is twofold: an economic dependency in order to guarantee continuous demand; and a political dependency to guarantee mass agreement with the industrial-democratic system.

Harold Lasswell, a pioneering scholar of modern propaganda, held that “there must be something in the structure of our modern society which renders the propaganda function peculiarly indispensable.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the concentration and inequality in wealth and power is the “something” that rendered propaganda “indispensable,” especially for the “minority of the opulent” in James Madison’s words. Following Hume’s first principle that “it is on opinion only that government is founded,”

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p.45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.84.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.84. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.85.

<sup>5</sup> Lasswell, 1928:261.

even Lasswell recognized that “collective action depends upon coercion or persuasion. It is safer for even the tyrant to depend upon persuasion, since he cannot perpetually remain upon the alert. Even the tyrant must sleep.”<sup>1</sup> If Lasswell had read Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, he would have noticed that a similar idea was expressed in the very first work of modern political science released in 1516. “There are two things a Prince must fear,” Machiavelli warned,

internal subversion by his subjects; and external aggression by foreign powers. Against the latter, his defence lies in being well armed and having good allies, and if he is well armed he will always have good allies. (...) [And] as far as his subjects are concerned (...) one of the most powerful safeguards a prince can have (...) is to avoid being hated by the populace.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the refrain is reminiscent of Saint Augustine, only expressed in negative terms: to avoid being hated by the populace is the equivalent of retaining their love or acquiescence. However, Lasswell did not recognize that modern propaganda, in its design and deployment, was wholly at variance with democratic values. This was forcibly the case when he stressed that

the public’s discovery of propaganda has led to a great deal of lamentation over it. Propaganda has become an epithet of contempt and hate, and the propagandists have sought protective coloration in such names as “public relations council,” “specialist in public education,” “public relations adviser.” Those who admit that the College of Propaganda at Rome once carried the light of the Gospel to the heathen say that the modern publicity department scatters darkness among the civilized.<sup>3</sup>

As a term, ‘propaganda’ was discarded in favour of the more euphemistically appropriate ‘public relations.’ Nazi Germany’s own appropriation of the term and of the activity in the pursuit of ends that are familiar universally rendered it unpalatable, especially in the context of continued and sustained use back home. It is no mystery that

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:259.

<sup>2</sup> 1999:59.

<sup>3</sup> 1928:260-261.

in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler himself attributed the victory of the United States to their superior “propaganda” techniques and observed that the task of propaganda “lies not in a scientific training of the individual, but rather in directing the masses towards certain facts, events, necessities, etc., the purpose being to move their importance into the masses’ field of vision.”<sup>1</sup> And Hitler put the matter in no equivocal terms: compared with German propaganda,

the war propaganda of the British and the Americans was psychologically right. By introducing the German as a barbarian and a Hun to its own people, it thus prepared the individual soldier for the terrors of war and helped guard him against disappointment. (...) *Propaganda’s task is* (...) not to evaluate the various rights, but far more *to stress exclusively the one that is to be represented by it*. It has not to search into truth as far as this is favourable to others (...) but it has rather to serve its own truth uninterruptedly.<sup>2</sup>

Ever since, the activity itself of propaganda was masked under a new agreed upon politically correct term: public relations.<sup>3</sup> But ethical considerations aside, Lasswell formulated the leading definition of Propaganda, which applies to political mass persuasion as well as commercial mass persuasion: propaganda is “the technique of controlling attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols;”<sup>4</sup> while the propagandist, who is tasked to manipulate symbols to control attitudes, has a duty to master “the modes of presentation which redefine meanings.”<sup>5</sup> Given the advent of mass industrial production, Lasswell concludes, “the propagandist is here to stay in modern society.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1941:275.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:234;236. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Bernays’ 1928 book was titled *Propaganda*, but his post-war 1945 book *Public Relations*.

<sup>4</sup> 1928: 264.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*,267.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 268.

Despite the fact that mass education, along with mass communication, has been and still is considered by many scholars one of the forces engaged in propaganda,<sup>1</sup> Lasswell distinguished education from propaganda in terms of the goals each respectively seeks to achieve in the target audience. While propaganda “inculcates love or hate”, education “develops skills”. Lasswell explained that

Propaganda may be defined as a technique of social control, or as a species of social movement. As technique, it is *the manipulation of collective attitudes by the use of significant symbols (words, pictures, tunes) rather than violence, bribery*. Propaganda differs from the technique of pedagogy in that propaganda is concerned with attitudes of love and hate, while pedagogy is devoted to the transmission of skill. *The use of significant symbols to inculcate love of family, country, God, democracy, and constitution is propaganda*; the use of significant symbols to develop skills in mathematics, logic, chemistry, or reading, is pedagogy. (...) The spread of controversial attitudes is propaganda.<sup>2</sup>

And much like the playwright Henrik Ibsen, who observed that “public opinion is an extremely mutable thing,”<sup>3</sup> Lasswell too, in light of empirical evidence, concluded that the public mind and society’s

*collective attitudes are amenable to many modes of alteration*. They may be shattered before an onslaught of violent intimidation or disintegrated by economic coercion. They may be reaffirmed in the muscular regimentation of drill. But their arrangement and rearrangement occurs principally under the impetus *of significant symbols*; and *the technique of using significant symbols for this purpose is propaganda*.<sup>4</sup>

And what are the significant symbols? Basically, the significant symbols are words, or word-like elements, that is, the atoms of language, whose primary function is to evoke images in the brain, as explained in the Chapter 2. And the elements which enjoy general consensus in a community, which have

a standard meaning in a group are called *significant symbols*. The elevated eyebrow, the clenched fist, the sharp voice, the pungent phrase, have

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Mandeville, through the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Oscar Wilde, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Bertrand Russell and Noam Chomsky, among others.

<sup>2</sup> Lasswell, 1935:189.

<sup>3</sup> Ibsen, 1999:p.20.

<sup>4</sup> Laswell, 1927:628. *Emphasis added*.

their *references established within the web of a particular culture*. Such significant symbols are paraphernalia employed in expressing the attitudes, and they are also capable of being employed to reaffirm or redefine attitudes. Thus, significant symbols have both an expressive and a propagandist function in public life.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between ideology and culture is reaffirmed once again in propaganda studies via the apt metaphor coined by Max Weber, that of culture being described as a “web” of significant meanings. And given that, as Bernays pointed out, in the age of mass production big businesses become dependent on the management of opinion by propaganda, the whole of society is consequently influenced by it. As the media of communication become more and more vehicles for the “inculcation of love” for particular “policies, commodities, or ideas”, what are the observable outcomes in society as a whole, from a birds-eye view? According to Paul Lazarsfeld, another pioneering scholar of propaganda and mass persuasion, in advanced industrial societies, the deployment of such a constant, unidirectional, stream of communications, is profoundly anti-democratic:

As to prevailing trends, everyone will agree that we live in a period of increasing centralization of ownership. Yet, although large economic organizations plan their production to the minutest detail, the distribution of their products is not planned systematically. Their success depends upon the outcome of a competition among a few large units which *must rally sizeable proportions of the population as their customers*. Thus promotion in every form becomes one of the main forces in contemporary society. The technique of manipulating large masses of people is developed in the business world and from there permeates our whole culture. In the end everything, be it good or bad, is promoted; we are living more and more in an “*advertising culture*.” This whole trend is accentuated still more by the fact that it has to disguise itself.<sup>2</sup>

Lazarsfeld was not alone in highlighting the anti-democratic character of the advertising culture brought about by big businesses in order to “rally sizeable proportions of the population as their customers.” This power to “rally sizeable proportions of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 627. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>2</sup> Lazarsfeld, 1941:9. *Emphasis added.*

population,” to “inculcate love” for policies, commodities, or ideas, is in fact the central and determining factor in the relationship between the mass media and ideology. In 1932, in his introduction to *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley offered a prescient warning about the coming age of technologically advanced mass propaganda:

Government by clubs and firing squads, by artificial famine, mass imprisonment and mass deportation, is not merely inhumane (nobody cares much about that nowadays); it is demonstrably inefficient – and in an age of advanced technology, inefficiency is the sin against the Holy Ghost. A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control *a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude. To make them love it is the task assigned, in present-day totalitarian states, to ministries of propaganda, newspaper editors and school-teachers.* But their methods are still crude and unscientific.<sup>1</sup>

Bertrand Russell too acknowledged that in technologically advanced societies, propaganda, “conducted by the means which advertisers have found successful, is now one of the recognized methods of government in all advanced countries, and is especially the method by which *democratic opinion is created.*”<sup>2</sup> And much like ownership of the means of production, which was concentrated in the hands of a wealthy minority, the means of propaganda too were not accessible to everyone, and therefore, there was no fair competition in the new “marketplace of ideas” brought about by modern mass communication technologies; such as the press, the radio and the cinema. In no uncertain terms, Russell concluded that there are two “evils” about propaganda as it deployed by Governments and Business: “one the one hand, its appeal is generally to irrational causes of belief rather than to serious argument; on the other hand, it gives an unfair advantage to those who can obtain most publicity, whether through wealth or through power.”<sup>3</sup> And it is precisely this second “evil” which is the

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<sup>1</sup> Huxley, 2007: xxiii. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>2</sup> 2004:137. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



most significant one, as it returns to the twin pillars of political economy: wealth and power. For, Russell argues, “the unfair advantage which it gives to the rich and powerful [undermines] equality of opportunity among opinions.”<sup>1</sup>

Russell concluded that “if there is to be real freedom of thought [there must be] equality of opportunity among opinions [that] can only be secured by elaborate laws directed to that end, which there is no reason to expect to see enacted.”<sup>2</sup> That Russell was correct in observing that there is “no reason” to expect media-equality laws enacted is inferred by the content examined in Chapter 3: laws are the prerogative of Parliaments (in the US, of Congress) which are highly interlinked with sectors of economic power and privilege, especially in terms of campaign funding. One recent example in Canada is the Bronfman-Trudeau case.<sup>3</sup> Propaganda, in its manifold manifestations, alters the symbolic environment for the political and commercial advantage of ruling elites. Satirical stand-up comedy, as this research project investigates, functions to attack the symbolic environment erected by propaganda.

#### 4. Psychic Manipulation

Following WWII, Robert Brady, professor of Political Economy at Columbia University, published some important observations regarding the specific function of propaganda as a new means of controlling the collective political economic attitudes in society. “The specific purpose” of propaganda in advanced industrial societies like the United States, Brady writes, “is always and universally that of consolidating the economic and political power of the upper social layers. And the content is designed to *inculcate public loyalty* to the same social layers whenever their authority or rights of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p.138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.138.

<sup>3</sup> See Cashore *et al.* 2017.

leadership are seriously questioned.”<sup>1</sup> And therefore, when observed from a birds-eye view, most propaganda efforts in the United States, “not only strives to ‘sell the public’ on the ‘enterprise system’ but also makes its appeal primarily to the symbolism and myths of ‘social harmony’ and ‘class collaboration’,”<sup>2</sup> which sustain the status quo. And all this ‘symbolic manipulation’ produces effects, the results of which are not “reconcilable with democratic institutions.”<sup>3</sup> The operative definition of propaganda used here is the leading one provided by eminent mass communication scholars: “the technique of controlling attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols.”<sup>4</sup>

In the postwar period, the “inculcation of love” for free enterprise in a population that had just escaped the horrors of the Great Depression was the leading propagandistic theme. Business had to ensure that the majority of voters believed that the free enterprise system – that is, the private ownership of the means of production – was the true “American way” and that efforts aimed at collective action, such as unionizing drives, were “agitations” that disrupted “social harmony”. V. O. Key, professor of Government at Harvard University, explained why business relied more and more on propaganda to “inculcate” the ruling ideology in the rest of the population:

Businessmen are a small minority highly vulnerable to political attack... they... have to depend on something other than their votes. *They have to use their wits – and their money – to generate a public opinion that acquiesces in the enjoyment by business of its status in the economic order...* to gain public favour business associations employ in large numbers public relations experts, those masters of the verbal magic that *transmutes private advantage into the public good ...* [and] continuing propaganda calculated to shape public attitudes favourably toward the business system.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brady, 1943:288. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.289.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.293.

<sup>4</sup> Lasswell, 1928:264.

<sup>5</sup> Key, 1958:103.

V.O. Key's observation is wholly reminiscent of Adam Smith, who in the same vein in his 1776 *Wealth of Nations* remarked that "*the clamour and sophistry of merchants and manufacturers easily persuade [the rest of society] that the private interest of a part, and of a subordinate part of the society, is the general interest of the whole*"<sup>1</sup> even though "*their interest is (...) directly opposite to that of the great body of the people.*"<sup>2</sup> Again, old themes persist under a new guise. And at this point, it is necessary to transition to the post-WWII period, and examine how the mass media are examined in subsequent critical scholarship, because in "the mass society of media markets, competition, if any, goes on between the manipulators with their mass media on the one hand, and the people receiving their propaganda on the other."<sup>3</sup>

In his landmark study of the power structure in modern society, famed sociologist C.W. Mills observed that

as the scale of institutions has become larger and more centralized, so has *the range and intensity of the opinion-makers efforts*. The means of opinion-making, in fact, have paralleled in range and efficiency the other institutions of greater scale that cradle the modern society of masses. Accordingly, in addition to their enlarged and centralized means of administration, exploitation and violence, *the modern elite have had placed within their grasp historically unique instruments of psychic management and manipulation*, which include universal compulsory education as well as the media of mass communication.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to note that Mills was not alone in holding this impression, and that at around the same time, even the famed Canadian media scholar, Marshall McLuhan, expressed an almost identical opinion. "Ours," McLuhan writes, "is the first age in which many thousands of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. To get inside in order to manipulate, exploit,

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 1827: Book I, p.54. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*: 201.

<sup>3</sup> Mills, 2000:305.

<sup>4</sup> 2000:310-311. *Emphasis added*.

control is the object now.”<sup>1</sup> It is the same accusation levelled by Vance Packard against systematic business manipulation in his *Hidden Persuaders*. “The most serious offence many of the depth manipulators commit,” Packard argued “is that they try to invade the privacy of our minds.”<sup>2</sup> And the “invasion of the privacy of minds” was not some side effect or unseen consequence; rather, it was consciously planned by big government and big business, each for their own purposes: political and economic.

In 1952, Edward Bernays indicated that corporate America “realized that the great public could now be harnessed to their cause as it had been harnessed during the war to the national cause, and the same methods could do the job.”<sup>3</sup> And the title of Packard’s book, *Hidden Persuaders*, is very much consistent with the views expressed by professionals in the trade, for “modern propaganda has witnessed the rapid growth of promoters who remain in the background and spread attitudes which they do not necessarily accept,” as Harold Lasswell pointed out in 1935.<sup>4</sup>

And the question, at this point, is one of evidence. Does the scholarship offer any evidence that the mass media have been used in this manner; that is, that these “historically unique instruments of psychic management and manipulation”<sup>5</sup> have been used to “to generate a public opinion that acquiesces in the enjoyment by business of its status in the economic order”<sup>6</sup>? The evidence is found in *Selling Free Enterprise*, by Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, professor of History at West Virginia University, and *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, by Alex Carey, professor of Industrial Psychology at the University of New South Wales, Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> McLuhan, 1995:21.

<sup>2</sup> 2007:240.

<sup>3</sup> 1959:87.

<sup>4</sup> Lasswell, 1935:189-190.

<sup>5</sup> Mills, 2000:305.

<sup>6</sup> Key, 1958:103.

## 5. The Battle for the Mind

In her masterful study of business propaganda between 1945 and 1960, Fones-Wolf compiles an extensive amount of factual documentation that indicates how American business associations, in the aftermath of WWII, spent billions of dollars in a coordinated and sustained nationwide campaign to shape the ideas and images that constituted American political culture. Since the Depression, labour unions had grown and expanded in the US also in no small part thanks to favourable legislative reforms ushered in by Roosevelt's administration. During the war effort, labour militancy challenged managerial authority on the shop-floors around the country.<sup>1</sup> "Thus," Fones-Wolf writes, "in 1945 the business community faced the twin challenges of a struggle for control in the workplace and the defense of the free enterprise system from the growing intrusiveness of the federal government"<sup>2</sup> and the gains won by organized labour. Opinion surveys conducted after WWII indicated that there was a "lack of confidence among the public in the free enterprise system."<sup>3</sup> Corporations then set about to turn public opinion.

The biggest propaganda spenders that promulgated "free enterprise ideology" counted, among others, the National Manufacturers Association, the American Economic Foundation, the Foundation for Economic Education, the Freedoms Foundation, Harding College, and "financial support came from the largest manufacturing corporations and combined firms with ultraconservative outlooks (the DuPont company, Sun Oil, and Republic Steel) and others such as Ford and U.S. Steel."<sup>4</sup> And even though, as Fones-Wolf notes, "assessing the impact of the business community's campaign to shape political culture is a difficult task", the effort to change

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<sup>1</sup> 1995:15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*38.

the “climate of opinion” involved the saturation of all mass media with communications whose common themes were “the importance of individual initiative and opportunity, the role of competition, and the necessity for profits;”<sup>1</sup> a political economic ideology that “flooded the newspapers and airways.”<sup>2</sup> Labour did not sit back during this period, but “the overwhelming advantages of wealth and power business brought to its campaign (...) made labour’s opposing efforts seem insignificant.”<sup>3</sup> In the 15 years following the war, American business associations’ propaganda in favour of capitalism was directed at the public at large, at workers inside factories and shop floors, in union halls, in communities, schools, and churches. And in the final chapter of her study, supported by a wealth of documentation and evidence, Fones-Wolf concludes that

the businessman’s intellectual reconquest of America (...) was a remarkable achievement.’ (...) The business community had two primary goals. First, it hoped to destroy or discredit the ideological underpinnings of New Deal liberalism. Second, it wanted to undermine the legitimacy and power of organized labour (...) [and] accomplished these goals through campaigns to sell Americans on the virtues of individualism as opposed to collectivism, freedom as opposed to state control, and on the centrality of the free enterprise system to the American way of life. (...) In 1960, National Industrial Conference Board President John S. Sinclair concluded that as a result of these efforts, business had probably ‘never enjoyed a more favourable climate of public opinion.’ (...) As a result, the political and cultural landscape of the postwar era was increasingly dominated by the images and ideas produced by a mobilized business leadership. This indeed marked the ‘intellectual reconquest of America’. (...) The images and ideas of business were pervasive, filling much of America’s cultural space *with a series of selectively distorted symbols* that made it difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to discover and articulate competing visions of the American polity. To this degree, at least, the ‘businessman’s intellectual reconquest of America’ succeeded.<sup>4</sup>

Again, the scholarship is remarkably consistent on this theme. The core activity of propaganda, as articulated by Lasswell among others, involves the manipulation of significant symbols. And in the cascading effort deployed by big business to alter the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 127.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 288. *Emphasis added.*

“climate of opinion,” the strategy was straightforward: to fill “America’s cultural space” with a constant stream of “selectively distorted symbols” in order to “shape public attitudes favourably toward the business system,”<sup>1</sup> as V.O. Key put it.

Through a similarly sustained propaganda effort that continued through the sixties and seventies, “a major political shift” was created, one that would “culminate in the election Ronald Reagan, the subsequent tax cuts for the wealthy, the elimination of regulation, and the severe cutbacks in social services.”<sup>2</sup> This sustained effort, which cost American business billions of dollars, was put in place not randomly or unconsciously, but rather, because “the business community has continued to recognize the powerful role of ideology in shaping America’s political economy.”<sup>3</sup> And again, the efforts in favour of ‘individualism’ and against ‘collectivism’ underline the elite’s commitment to the idea that “the people must refrain from seeking the extension of [political] equality to the economic sphere.”<sup>4</sup>

As observed by Lynd in 1943, “as Business has organized and has begun to state *cogently and lavishly* the case for its version of such an ‘ordered society’, the popular challenge expressed earlier in the campaign to curb big business by governmental action has become confused and blunted.”<sup>5</sup> In commenting on Fones-Wolf’s contribution to the study of propaganda, Noam Chomsky acknowledged that

the scale of efforts to win the battle for men’s minds is enormous. *I thought I knew something about this*, but when I read Elizabeth Fones-Wolf’s book, I was pretty shocked just to see the scale of the efforts and frenzied dedication to winning this everlasting battle. It’s really impressive. Although if you think of the stakes, it’s not too surprising.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Key, 1958:103.

<sup>2</sup> Fones-Wolf, 1995:289.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 288.

<sup>4</sup> Lynd, 1943:viii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* xi.

<sup>6</sup> Chomsky, 2003:235. *Emphasis* added. It’s interesting to note that a media scholar of Chomsky’s calibre would acknowledge that he thought he knew something about systematic propaganda *until* he read Dr. Fones-Wolf’s book.

Contrary to what could be expected, Fones-Wolf's findings are not unique in the scholarly literature, and her contribution does fit in rather well with other analyses of the relationship between ideology and the mass media. Remarkable congruities are found in research by: Alex Carey, Professor of industrial psychology at the University of New South Wales; Thomas Ferguson, Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts Boston; Ben Bagdikian, Professor of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley; and Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky's classic *Manufacturing Consent*. Capturing what is essential in their contributions regarding the relationship of ideology and the mass media will situate the discussion within a larger and more significant theoretical framework.

In *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, Alex Carey suggests that "the twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy."<sup>1</sup> Domestic propaganda, Carey argues, is propaganda directed not outwards, against some external enemy, but directed "inwards to control and deflect the purposes of the domestic electorate in a democratic country in the interests of privileged segments of that society."<sup>2</sup> And the logic is straightforward, especially in our contemporary times, despite the fact that it runs contrary to commonly held assumptions about propaganda being a tool used in despotic, totalitarian societies alone. Propaganda, Carey contends, plays a much more "important role (...) in technologically advanced democratic societies, where the maintenance of the existing power and privileges are vulnerable to popular opinion. In contrast, under authoritarian regimes power and privilege are not open and

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<sup>1</sup> 1997:19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 11.



vulnerable to dissenting public opinion.”<sup>1</sup> Again, reminiscent of Machiavelli’s caution about the internal threat that The Prince must safeguard himself from, he must secure “the goodwill of the people;”<sup>2</sup> or in modern terms, by influencing the “climate of opinion”<sup>3</sup> in order to “gain public favour.”<sup>4</sup> And given that public opinion is “the ultimate power in social affairs,”<sup>5</sup> it is not only consistent with the evidence available in the literature, but also rational to expect that businesses in democratic societies “use propaganda, both inside and outside the corporation as an effective weapon for managing governments and public opinion.”<sup>6</sup> In the process, regardless of the particular aims of propaganda – commercial, like ensuring constant demand for products or services; or political, like ensuring adherence to the capitalist system and abhorrence of alternative systems – businesses have been able to “subordinate the expression of democratic aspirations and the interests of larger public purposes to their own narrow corporate purposes.”<sup>7</sup>

In support of Fones-Wolf’s findings and causal connections, Carey too demonstrates that the “shift” from unsystematic efforts at mass persuasion for political-economic purposes to systematic and sustained efforts occurred as soon as WWII ended.

In the 1930s and 1940s there was a widely recognized shift in focus of battle between American corporations and unions from direct violence and picket-line confrontation to a competition for public opinion via the mass media. The change in battleground gave immense advantage to the corporations, whose overwhelming resources, both in funds and in public relation talent, were thereafter targeted on degrading the public standing of unions, and hence the vital legislative support available to them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p.12.

<sup>2</sup> 1999:60.

<sup>3</sup> Fones-Wolf, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Key, 1958:103.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, B. 2004:109-110. Russell, B. *Power: A New Social Analysis*, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Carey, 1997:18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Carey, 1997:20.

And the mass media, private enterprises themselves, and thus compelled both by the economic logic of filling the airwaves and bottom line necessity of selling advertising space, had an ideological affinity with those very same clients. They therefore largely obliged. Even *Forbes* magazine, that is, the pseudo-official house organ of wealth and privilege, noted in 1949 that “the daily output of propaganda and publicity (...) has become an important force in American life. Nearly half of the contents of the best newspapers is derived from publicity releases; nearly all the contents of the lesser papers (...) are directly or indirectly the work of PR departments.”<sup>1</sup> This is *Forbes* magazine, not some Marxist leaflet, acknowledging two factual aspects: the first, that almost half of news content is not by intrepid journalists ‘on the beat’ constantly on the hunt for news, but ‘publicity releases’ meaning PR/Advertising, basically commercial propaganda; secondly, that propaganda is a ‘force’, that, as Lazarsfeld described, creates an “advertising culture” whereby people act more and more like “pawns upon a chessboard” losing their spontaneity.<sup>2</sup> This type of endorsement for domestic propaganda by *Forbes* magazine, and the justifications for ‘democratic propaganda’ afforded by the likes of Edward Bernays and Harold Lasswell, indicates “a complacency wholly at variance with democratic values, but in tune with the interests of private enterprise.”<sup>3</sup> It is doubtful whether the editors of *Forbes* or *Fortune* recall one of Smith’s most famous maxims on what is wrong with human nature, that is, “the disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful (...) is the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:69.

<sup>2</sup> 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Carey, 1997:13.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 2011:58.

Nonetheless, Carey concluded that these efforts, though plain in sight but largely left unexamined, represented yet another propaganda achievement. Especially when one considers “the success of business propaganda in persuading us, for so long, that we are free from propaganda” which, by any measure, “is one of the most significant propaganda achievements of the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup> And for this reason, Professor Robert Dahl of Yale University doubted the legitimacy of calling the political system a “democracy” given the systematic deployment of propaganda. “How much,” Dahl asked “of the generally favourable attitude of Americans towards business [and the consequent] absence of any well-defined alternative can be attributed to deliberate efforts to manipulate attitudes?”<sup>2</sup> And even though his own research did not reference Fones-Wolf’s findings, Dahl concluded that “if one assumes that political preferences are simply plugged into the system by leaders (business or other) in order to extract what they want from the system, then the model of plebiscitary democracy is substantially equivalent to the model of totalitarian rule.”<sup>3</sup>

Carey’s carefully documented research indicated that American corporate ideology originated in the early part of the twentieth century, that it was disseminated throughout society, and also in academia, with the Hawthorne studies and the principles of the Chicago School of economics more generally. But that corporate propaganda was able to saturate society as a whole is apparent also in the evidence that Carey brings to bear on cultural mass events, such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. The festivity was originally called “Americanization Day”, a joint propaganda event created and organized by the CIA in concert with various business associations. It was designed to “inculcate love” of the “American way” of business, and inspire enmity towards the Industrial Workers of the

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<sup>1</sup> 1997:21.

<sup>2</sup> Dahl, 1959:37. Also in Carey, 1997:84.

<sup>3</sup> Dahl, 1959:38. Also in Carey, 1997:36.

World international labour union in newly arrived immigrants who were suspected of allegiance to their old rather than their new country. Americanization Day was later renamed "Independence Day" by the National Americanization Committee, and has been celebrated thus ever since. Though most might believe that it is a day in celebration of independence from England, it is actually a concocted event, born of "a blatant industrial and partisan view fused with an intolerance of the immigrant and the values of national security"<sup>1</sup> which would be cemented in "the annual ritual of what became Independence Day. Such was the breadth and scope of this propaganda campaign."<sup>2</sup>

#### 6. A System for Mass Propaganda

In an entirely consistent fashion, Thomas Ferguson, Professor of Politics at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, observed that such massive propaganda efforts "almost guarantee that some positive correlations will exist between public policies and mass opinion in most historical periods;"<sup>3</sup> and especially in the postwar period, in which "an army of handsomely remunerated 'public relations consultants' has taken field, from Edward Bernays (an American nephew of Sigmund Freud) to Ivy Lee (the man who told John D. Rockefeller to hand out dimes to children)."<sup>4</sup> The constant outpouring of promotional material "consists of variations on a single theme: that often it is easier, and in the long run, cheaper, to change mass opinion than to brush it aside."<sup>5</sup> And in terms of the behaviour of the mass media, and the cumulative effect of all this propaganda, it is possible, Ferguson notes, to entirely "dismiss the still-fashionable

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<sup>1</sup> Carey, 1997:48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Ferguson, 1995:390.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

notion that the media have ‘few political effects.’<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of his investment theory of politics, which was examined in the third chapter, “none of this is surprising,” because in the US as well as in most advanced industrial societies, the majority of the major mass media

are privately controlled and a wave of pressure for deregulation is leading to the erosion of the few state-supported systems that still exist. As a consequence, one can generalize the investment theory’s ‘principle of non-competition’ across all investor blocs within the party system into a ‘black hole’ maxim applicable to the public sphere as a whole under ‘free enterprise’: just as large profit-maximizing investors in parties do not pay to undermine themselves, major media (i.e., those big enough to have potentially significant effects on public opinion) controlled by large profit-maximizing investors do not encourage the dissemination of news and analyses that are likely to lead to popular indignation and, perhaps, government action hostile to the interests of large investors, themselves included.<sup>2</sup>

And this view, expressed in 1995, is entirely consistent with the one offered by Bertrand Russell some 30 years earlier. In assessing the output of modern mass media, Russell pointed out that, regardless of voluntary censorship or propaganda, the objective is one of increasing the uniformity of opinions:<sup>3</sup>

[m]odern inventions and modern technique have had a powerful influence in *promoting uniformity of opinion* and making men less individual than they used to be. (...) In the modern world there are three great sources of uniformity in addition to education: these are the Press, the cinema, and the radio. The press has become an agent of uniformity as a result of technical and financial causes: the larger the circulation of a newspaper, the higher the rate it can charge for its advertisements and the lower the cost of printing per copy. (...) For all these reasons, of which advertisements are the chief, big newspapers tend to defeat small ones. (...) Thus for reasons which are ultimately technical and scientific, the newspapers have become *an influence tending to uniformity and increasing the rarity of unusual opinions*.<sup>4</sup>

If the critical tradition of mass media studies is taken into account, consistent analyses continue to be found. For the logic of private enterprise is the same in every sector of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p.400.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 1962:192-193. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

the economy, and to suppose that commercial mass media could somehow refrain from pursuing their institutional imperatives is precisely the kind of error of judgment that would be common in a system dominated by corporate propaganda.

In the most authoritative study of the US mass media, which went through seven editions,<sup>1</sup> Ben Bagdikian of the University of California, Berkeley, finds that when it comes to information, the US population is “served, along with assorted other small local and national media, by 1468 daily newspapers, 6000 different magazines, 10000 radio stations, 2700 television and cable stations, and 26000 book publishers.”<sup>2</sup> And although contemporary media “reach more Americans than ever before, they are controlled by the smallest number of owners than ever before. In 1983 there were fifty dominant media corporations; today there are five. These five corporations decide what most citizens will – or will not - learn.”<sup>3</sup> From an economic point of view, the dominant media firms form an ‘oligopoly’ and engage in numerous cartel-like relations thanks, among other things, to a high number of “interlocking members on their boards of directors.”<sup>4</sup> But whereas in other sectors of industry, oligopoly may or may not directly affect the lives of citizens, when it comes to information, media oligopolies “leaves the majority of [people] with artificially narrowed choices in their media”<sup>5</sup> because the result of limited competition is “that thousands of media outlets carry highly duplicative content”<sup>6</sup> which maximizes corporate profits. And the economic logic is straightforward: the media have costs, like the cost of creating news content (newsrooms salaries) or purchasing content (TV shows); and they have revenues (advertising). Therefore, if, as any private commercial business, they pursue their

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<sup>1</sup> 2014:284.

<sup>2</sup> 2004:16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.6.

institutional imperative of maximizing profits, duplicative content reduces the cost of new content to zero, while advertising revenue stays constant. And therefore, the “narrow choices the dominant media firms offer the country are not the result of a conspiracy,”<sup>1</sup> but the logical result of their institutional, profit-maximizing imperatives, in the context of broadcasting regulations that permitted the concentration of media ownership to escalate in the 1990s, particularly with the 1996 Telecommunications Act.<sup>2</sup> And given that when it comes to mass media, *content* and *output* mean news, entertainment, and political slogans, the overall effect of this cartel-behaviour the top 5 mass media conglomerates engage in is to “prefer stories and programs that can be used everywhere and anywhere”<sup>3</sup> despite the regional differences and varying demands that audiences may have from Miami to Alaska. As Bagdikian points out, “media products are unique in one vital respect. They do not manufacture nuts and bolts: they manufacture a social and political world.”<sup>4</sup> And when it comes to their political and social influence, Bagdikian observes, it is not surprising that the “duplicative content” these five conglomerates disseminate end up promoting “bombastic, far-right political positions.”<sup>5</sup>

And this is not to say that other points of view are absent. However, on the whole,

the major news media fail to deal systematically with the variety of compelling social needs of the entire population. Those needs remain hidden crises, obscured in the daily flood of other kinds of news. Yet the weight of most reputable surveys shows that, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, most Americans were deeply concerned with systematic lack of funds for their children’s education, access to healthcare, the growing crisis in unemployment, homelessness, and steady deterioration of city and state finances.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p.7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.21.

Yet, these issues, that is, issues that the majority of the population care about and would like the political system to address,

are reported but then they are dropped, though national stories about a distant kidnapped child can continue on front pages and television news for weeks. There is nothing harmful and often some good in persistent stories about individual human tragedies. But in the national news agenda, there is no such media persistence with problems that affect millions.<sup>1</sup>

And this aspect is not unique to the United States. Any observer will notice that any mainstream media newscast in the US, much like its counterparts in the UK, covers 'hard news' but portrays news as a "series of disconnected events"<sup>2</sup> as Curran *et al.* noted in their landmark *Power Without Responsibility*. It is from this point of view that Matt Taibbi, political columnist for *Rolling Stone* magazine, remarked, correctly, that

[w]hat we call right-wing and liberal media in this country are really just two different strategies of the same kind of nihilistic lizard-brain sensationalism. The ideal CNN story is a baby thrown down a well, while the ideal Fox story is probably a baby thrown down a well by a Muslim terrorist or an ACORN activist. Both companies offer the same service, it's just that the Fox version is a little kinkier. When you make the news into this kind of consumer business, pretty soon audiences lose the ability to distinguish between what they think they're doing, informing themselves, and what they're actually doing, shopping.<sup>3</sup>

The end result, according to Bagdikian, is that the "imbalance between issues important to corporate hierarchies and those most urgent to the population at large is obscured by the neutralist tone of modern news. (...) Today the imbalance is in what is chosen – or not chosen – for print or broadcast."<sup>4</sup> The series of disconnected events, interrupted by messages by sponsors, can thus hardly achieve its goal of informing viewers in any meaningful sense.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p.20.

<sup>2</sup> 2010:11.

<sup>3</sup> Taibbi, 2015: [link](#).

<sup>4</sup> Bagdikian, 2004:25.



In an entirely consistent fashion, Robert McChesney, Professor of Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has documented in *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, how the mass media, after the wave of mergers in the late 80s and early 90s, have become a “significant antidemocratic force” in the United States, as “the major beneficiaries of the so-called Information Age are wealthy investors, advertisers, and a handful of enormous media, computer, and telecommunications corporations”<sup>1</sup> and certainly not audiences and the general population who rely on the media for information. McChesney also refutes several myths about the mass media, such as the idea that the market compels media firms to “give the people what they want”, while in fact, the media constrain the range of information that makes it into people’s homes.<sup>2</sup>

The argument that the commercial mass media constrain the range of information and opinion they supply their audiences with is supported by abundant evidence. In *Necessary Illusions*, MIT Professor Emeritus Noam Chomsky has documented the US media’s biased treatment of foreign affairs, and pointed out that “the major media — particularly, the elite media that set the agenda that others generally follow — are corporations 'selling' privileged audiences to other businesses. It would hardly come as a surprise if the picture of the world they present were to reflect the perspectives and interests of the sellers, the buyers, and the product.”<sup>3</sup> And this is very much in line with Edward Herman’s *Propaganda Model* of the media. In reviewing the *Propaganda Model*, Herman, Professor Emeritus of Finance at the University of Pennsylvania, assesses the mass media as follows:

the dominant media are firmly imbedded in the market system. They are profit-seeking businesses, owned by very wealthy people (or other

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<sup>1</sup> McChesney, 2015:10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> 1989:8.

companies); they are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities, and who *want their ads to appear in a supportive selling environment*. The media are also dependent on government and major business firms as information sources, and both efficiency and political considerations, and frequently overlapping interests, cause a certain degree of solidarity to prevail among the government, major media, and other corporate businesses. Government and large non-media business firms are also best positioned (and sufficiently wealthy) to be able to pressure the media with threats of withdrawal of advertising or TV licenses, libel suits, and other direct and indirect modes of attack. (...) These factors are linked together, reflecting the multi-levelled capability of powerful business and government entities and collectives (e.g., the Business Roundtable; U.S. Chamber of Commerce; industry lobbies and front groups) to exert *power over the flow of information*.<sup>1</sup>

From an empirical point of view, the task of measuring effects is almost insurmountable, given the variety of forces at play and the range of intensity of their efforts. As Thomas Ferguson - Professor of Politics at the University of Massachusetts, Boston – succinctly put it, “the cumulative effect of all these [propaganda] influences defies straightforward quantitative summary. But, in general, there is no reason either empirically or theoretically to believe that the media do anything but exacerbate [people’s] problems in obtaining and evaluating reliable information.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in advanced industrial societies, a few facts are apparent: a viable system for mass propaganda is in place, the broadcasting of programmed content to mass audiences is designed for commercial revenue; the efforts at mass propaganda are evident in terms of mass persuasion; the task of propaganda is clear and the practice has produced significant cognitive results in history, from the Counter-Reformation to the latest commercial fad.

## 7. Conclusion

At the outset, this chapter posed the following questions: how does ideology factor in the mass media’s output? Does their output, their content, represent a constant

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<sup>1</sup> Herman, 1996:116-117. *Emphasis added*.

<sup>2</sup> 1995:400.

challenge for the status quo, the political economic reality, with all of its manifest and demonstrated inequality? Or are the mass media simply communication tools in the hands of elites that use them overwhelmingly to propagate “ruling ideas”, to marginalize dissent, and sustain the status quo? Given the primacy of opinion in social affairs, which has been recognized by David Hume, Adam Smith, and Bertrand Russell among many others, the mass media and ideology are inextricably entwined in advanced industrial societies. As commercial organizations, the mass media pursue business goals: profitability and growth. They pursue these goals through sales, and the products they sell are audiences. The mass media generate revenue by selling audiences to advertisers, and in order to guarantee a constant stream of revenues, provide programming that is consistent (or at least that does not interfere) with the goals of advertisers, the funders of the system. As noted by Edward Herman, advertisers require a “supportive selling environment.”<sup>1</sup> And for commercial media, which are profit-seeking businesses “firmly embedded in the market system,”<sup>2</sup> it is imperative not to alienate their sources of revenues.

Furthermore, in democratic societies, where changes in public opinion can lead to changes in the distribution of political and economic power, the need to “manage” public opinion takes centre stage, as acknowledged by the pioneers of modern propaganda, Edward Bernays and Harold Lasswell. And in support of this rationale, the scholarship informs us that “as industrial power grew after 1900, a conscious policy of managing public attitudes to retain that power came to be adopted.”<sup>3</sup> As aforementioned, Alex Carey was one of the first scholars to point out that “propaganda is likely to play at least as important a part in democratic societies (where the existing

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Carey, 1997:78-79.

distribution of power and privilege is vulnerable to quite limited changes in popular opinion) as in authoritarian societies (where it is not)."<sup>1</sup> One of the founders of modern propaganda studies concurred on this very point. In the late twenties, Lasswell argued that with the coupling of universal suffrage and the disparities in wealth and privilege, the "minority of the opulent"<sup>2</sup> (in James Madison's words) would have to resort to propaganda in order to avert the danger posed by "populist demands," such as agrarian law in the 1800s and better incomes in our times. "For the few who would rule the many under democratic conditions, there is no choice but persuasion."<sup>3</sup> A point Lasswell made most appropriately in the pages of *International Journal of Ethics*.

It is in light of this state of affairs that Professor Harwood Childs concluded that "Americans are the most propagandized people of any nation."<sup>4</sup> And therefore, given this discussion, and given what the scholarship indicates about the political economic reality, the ruling ideology, and the way in which the mass media, overwhelmingly, function in support of the status quo, the consequential question regards the outcome of this state of affairs in society as a whole. What would a rational person expect to be the outcome in terms of people's beliefs, convictions, and understandings about the reality in which they live? If the majority of symbols by which people make sense of their lives are manipulated systematically by the main distributors of communications in society (the mass media), then what is the general outcome? According to Theodore Adorno, the result is a "general uncritical consensus" about the status quo. The "general uncritical consensus," as hypothesized by this research project, is the main target of the political content of stand-up comedy, which moves this inquiry to Part II, on the Contest

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:21.

<sup>2</sup> *Secret Proceedings and Debates of the US Federal Constitutional Convention 1787*. Louisville, KY: Alston Mygatt, 1844:183.

<sup>3</sup> Lasswell, 1928:259.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Carey, 1997:14.

of SC<sup>2</sup>, the contest between the general critical consensus and the artillery of dissensus.

The properties of propaganda are exhibited in this example of SC<sup>2</sup>:

‘Cause you do know folks, living in this country, you're bound to know, that every time you're exposed to advertising you realize once again that America's leading industry, America's most profitable business is still the manufacture packaging, distribution and marketing of bullshit. High quality, grade 'A', prime cut, pure American bullshit. And the sad part is, is that most people seem to have been indoctrinated to believe that bullshit only comes from certain places, certain sources: advertising, politics, salesmen. Not true. Bullshit is everywhere. Bullshit is rampant. Parents are full of shit, teachers are full of shit, clergymen are full of shit and law enforcement people are full of shit.<sup>1</sup>

The above quote will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 9. In the interim, it suffices to highlight two significant elements in the excerpt: 1) the critique of an operative group belief – that propaganda is limited; 2) juxtaposed to political critique, that the United States most profitable business is systematic propaganda.

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 47:29-49:04

## **PART II**

### **THE CONTEST OF $SC^2$**

## CHAPTER 6: THE GENERAL UNCRITICAL CONSENSUS

*"Every man, wherever he goes,  
is encompassed by  
a cloud of comforting convictions,  
which move with him  
like flies on a summer day."*  
Bertrand Russell<sup>1</sup>

*"[P]ublic relations, the manufacturing of 'goodwill' per se,  
[brings] to bear a general uncritical consensus."*  
Theodore Adorno<sup>2</sup>

*"The spectacle (...) escapes people's activity (...)  
eludes their practical reconsideration and correction."*  
Guy Debord<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Preview

Chapter 5 examined the relationship between ideology and the mass media. The scholarship and the findings indicate, repeatedly, that far from being agents of critique and dissent, the mainstream mass media, in terms of general output, overwhelmingly disseminate communications that are supportive of the status quo, both commercially and politically. Surely, there are differences within the spectrum of the disseminated content, between small alternative media outlets on one end and major mass media conglomerates with the widest reach on the other. Commercially too, there are differences between the advertised products. But there is no advertising against advertising per se. Likewise, politically, there are differences between the propagandized platforms and affiliations, but there is little to no sustained dissemination of systemic critiques against the political duopoly per se. As explained by Elizabeth Fones-Wolf<sup>4</sup> and Alex Cary<sup>5</sup> in their respective studies, the "historically

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<sup>1</sup> 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno, 2001:100.

<sup>3</sup> 1967: Thesis 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 5.

unique instruments of psychic manipulation”<sup>1</sup> that the mass media are, have been employed, quite consciously, to create and sustain “a favourable climate of opinion”<sup>2</sup> in society, with two main objectives: “to identify the free-enterprise system in popular consciousness with every cherished value and to identify interventionist governments and strong unions with tyranny, oppression and even subversion.”<sup>3</sup> And therefore, a small elite is able to dominate the political and economic spheres of society in their own interests, with outcomes such as the rising degree of inequality in society<sup>4</sup> and the growing political marginalization of the majority of the population, whose policy preferences are routinely discarded in favour of ones supported by elites.<sup>5</sup> Inequality in advanced industrial societies, such as the US, is indicated by the fraction of total growth in the economy captured by top 1% incomes, which stood at 95% in 2009-2012,<sup>6</sup> as demonstrated by Emmanuel Saez, Professor of Economics at UC Berkeley. Systematic inequality is a recurring feature of the satirical content of stand-up comedy. An example is the following:

You know I flew here. How come the first class people, they can just get on whenever they want? I’ve always hated that. [Announcing] ‘First Class people board at your leisure. Take your time first class people. Hmm... smooch, smooch, smooch. Coach people, no wait, sit, sit scuzz, wait little piggys.’ So when you do get on, the first class people they’re already sitting there. They’re all sprawled out in their big thrones. ‘Bring me the head of a pig. And a goblet of something cool and refreshing. Anyone have a fiddle? Make someone from coach fiddle for me.’ (...) You’re not even allowed to use their bathrooms. [Announcement] ‘The bathrooms upfront are for our first class passengers. The coach bathrooms are located at Newark airport, Concourse C, Concourse C, ladies and gentlemen.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mills, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Fones-Wolf, 1995:32.

<sup>3</sup> Carey, 1997:18.

<sup>4</sup> Saez, 2013. See Chapter 2I for comprehensive documentation.

<sup>5</sup> Gilens, 2005; Ferguson, 1995. See Chapter 2I.

<sup>6</sup> Saez, 2014: 10.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Regan. *I Walked On The Moon*. 26 August 2004. Interval: 37:19-38:40.



This chapter will build upon the previous ones and examine the general effect brought about by such a system, in which a multitude of communications are continuously disseminated, saturating the airwaves and the papers hour by hour and day by day. Is there a scholarly consensus on the general effect brought about by the fact that “day by day, week by week, newspapers, radio and television present us with a steady flow of words and images, information and ideas, concerning events which take place beyond our immediate social milieu,”<sup>1</sup> as John B. Thompson put it? Because the evidence strongly suggests that Edward Bernays was correct when he pointed out that every day there is a “vast and continuous effort going on to capture our minds”<sup>2</sup> in the interests of some policy, commodity or idea. However, turning to effects can be uncharted terrain, insofar as no known empirical studies have demonstrated that the overall effect of the mass media moves millions of individuals in the same way: it doesn’t, otherwise critique would not be possible. In fact, as observed by Russell in relation to advertising,<sup>3</sup> mass effects and individual effects are separate conceptual categories. When it comes to mass media, the effects are mass effects, which are distinguished from individual effects in a myriad of ways. From a scientific point of view, Russell argues, advertisements have a “great merit, which is that their effects, so far as is known through the receipts of the advertisers, are mass effects, not effects upon individuals, so that the data acquired are data as to mass psychology. For the purposes of studying society rather than individuals, advertisements are therefore invaluable.”<sup>4</sup>

The same rationale applies to the whole mass media output, informative or otherwise, as explained by University of Massachusetts Professor of Politics, Thomas Ferguson: “the cumulative effect of all these [propaganda] influences defies

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<sup>1</sup> Thompson, 1991: 163.

<sup>2</sup> Bernays, 2005:39.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 1962:187-189.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

straightforward quantitative summary. But, in general, there is no reason either empirically or theoretically to believe that the media do anything but exacerbate [people's] problems in obtaining and evaluating reliable information."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this chapter will proceed to examine general mass media effects as a backdrop to the relationship between political consciousness and satirical humour, which more and more appears to be a symbolic contest, a contest between mass persuasion and dissuasion. The examination will review and organise the theories offered by leading communication scholars in a congruous conceptual whole. The review begins with print media effects, and the imagined communities and public spheres evoked in the minds of general readerships.<sup>2</sup> It then proceeds with a closer look at general effects as outcomes of economic imperatives inherent in mass society<sup>3</sup> and political imperatives,<sup>4</sup> while mass cognitive outcomes are assessed in a remarkably consistent fashion in critical media theory.<sup>5</sup> Finally, this chapter ends with previews satirical theory,<sup>6</sup> thus bringing the discussion to Chapter 7, on satire's socio-institutional role as the Artillery of Dissensus.

## 2. Mass Cognition

In terms of general effects, the mass media do have impacts. As Benedict Anderson and Jurgen Habermas observed, the impact is a socio-cognitive one. It is cognitive because the mass media's primary field of play is the mind. It is a social impact because it affects society as a whole. In the case of print media, its emergence evoked an

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<sup>1</sup> 1995:400.

<sup>2</sup> As argued by the following scholars: Benedict Anderson, Jurgen Habermas and Elizabeth Eisenstein.

<sup>3</sup> As highlighted by V.O. Key, Murray Edelman, Walter Lippman, Marshall McLuhan, Edward Bernays and Paul Lazarsfeld.

<sup>4</sup> As captured mainly by C.W. Mills, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, and Ben Bagdikian.

<sup>5</sup> Adorno's *Culture Industry* is theoretically equivalent to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. While Robert McChesney's media effects hypothesis is also consistent with Thomas Ferguson and Alex Carey's analyses.

<sup>6</sup> Erasmus and Lord Shaftesbury's preambles to satire theory proper.

“imagined community”<sup>1</sup> in the minds of people within a particular language group, and brought about a “public sphere”<sup>2</sup> by virtue of disseminating “community relevant” information. This information, as discussed, is of various types: commercial, political, economic, entertainment, *et cetera*. The basic premise that serves as a foundation for both theorists, Anderson and Habermas, is that the mass medium of print, by virtue of its dissemination of linguistically uniform information, creates unified cognitive fields of shared information that expand those created by spoken language and hand-written manuscripts. But the mass medium of print had another effect, examined by Elizabeth Eisenstein in an explicit and systematic fashion.<sup>3</sup> In the *Printing Revolution*, Eisenstein details just how “access to a greater abundance or variety of written records *affected ways of learning, thinking and perceiving* among literate elites (....) and how laws, languages or mental constructs were *affected by more [standardized] uniform texts*.”<sup>4</sup> In Eisenstein’s estimate, the mass effects brought about by printing in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century amounted to nothing less than a “revolution.” And the reasons are intuitive: manuscripts were more expensive to produce and reproduce; the required skills and knowledge to produce and reproduce them were typically accessible only to rather privileged minorities; the language was Latin, not vernacular, and in a context of mass illiteracy this effectively made manuscripts alien to the public; the calligraphy was not standardized.

The printing revolution had an impact across four dimensions. Printed books were cheaper to produce and reproduce. The required skills and knowledge to work movable types were accessible to a wider range of people (which it explains the rapid proliferation of print technology adoption throughout Europe post-Gutenberg). The

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Habermas, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Eisenstein, 1983:4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

language of print was vernacular, thus accessible to masses. Standard reliable movable types replaced irregular and arbitrary calligraphy. The impact enabled the spread of literacy in vernaculars. It allowed people in particular vernacular groups to identify themselves within a single linguistic group. It made it easier to share and accumulate knowledge. It is no coincidence that the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution occurred only after a standardized system of widespread information sharing was put in place; that is, only after the Printing Revolution. Clearly, the Printing Revolution also had political impacts for revolutions always against the backdrop of existing conditions. Anderson points out that one of the major effects brought about by the advent of print was the rise of national consciousness, and nationalism, which is propaganda.<sup>1</sup>

So much for pre-modern mass media effects. Fast-forward to the twentieth century, the literature offers interesting perspectives regarding the more complex and advanced stream of “words and images,” sustained by print, television, radio media, and its political-economic effects. Harvard Professor V.O. Key and Murray Edelman, to name two, were able to formulate the repercussions in clear and accessible terms. Key observed that in advanced societies, where political affairs are filtered through the mass media, politics is a game that is played on “*the impressions* of the march of affairs that exist *in the minds of the voters* [.... and] their exposure to communications produce enormous variation in their perceptions of events.”<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, Edelman stressed that “language, its symbols, are created by man. Words and things, observable conditions and unobservable evocations, shape each other”<sup>3</sup> and that “it is *language about political events* rather than the events themselves that everyone experiences. For

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> As cited in Achen *et al.* 2016:106. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>3</sup> Edelman, 1971:85.

most people, most of the time, *politics is a series of pictures in the mind, placed there by television news, newspapers, magazines.*"<sup>1</sup> These observations have older roots. In the early 1920s, during the initial growth of modern mass-mediated propaganda, Walter Lippmann observed that "the only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his *mental image* of that event,"<sup>2</sup> and concluded, in a manner that is reminiscent of McLuhan's later conceptualization of "media ecology,"<sup>3</sup> that the mass media's principle mass effect is the "insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To this pseudo-environment his behavior is a response."<sup>4</sup> And in order to navigate the "real world" Lippmann suggests, people need to be aware of the pseudo-environment, because

the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to *reconstruct it on a simpler model* before we can manage with it. To traverse the world men must have maps of the world. Their persistent difficulty is to secure maps on which their own need, or someone else's need, has [a great degree of fidelity].<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, more often than not, the "maps" and "simpler models" people are provided with do not serve their own needs, and have a very small degree of fidelity. The mental images of any remote event are not provided by neutral, dispassionate, objective, *super partes* agencies that have no direct interest in the information they disseminate about events. On the contrary, the "impressions of the march of affairs that exist in the minds of the voters" and "the series of pictures" in their minds are produced,

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<sup>1</sup> Edelman, 1985:5.

<sup>2</sup> 1922:13.

<sup>3</sup> For an admirable summary of McLuhan's media ecology theory, see Logan (University of Toronto, Professor Emeritus), 2010:35.

<sup>4</sup> Lippmann, 1922:15.

<sup>5</sup> Lippmann, 1922:16.

by and large, by large private multimedia conglomerates<sup>1</sup> whose profits depend on advertising, which in turn depends on editorial policies and content that guarantee a hospitable advertiser-friendly environment. It follows that the aggregate output of the mass media will not be some impartial, neutral flow of “words and images”, but words and images framed in a particular way to “capture” the “public’s conscience,”<sup>2</sup> in the interest of some “policy, commodity or idea”<sup>3</sup>, as Bernays put it. And the reason is straightforward: “the way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do.”<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Mass Content

Mass communication scholarship has reckoned with the fact that starting in the twentieth century, the mass media, as a primary vehicle for advertising, participate not only in the delivery of persuasive messages, but also in the intentional “production of consumers”, by evoking desires for products that are not inherently or previously an emanation of individuals’ spontaneous desires. The production of consumers - that is, the intentional evocation of desires in audiences in order to compel consumption - has been a key characteristic of the mass media, as stressed both by Edward Bernays and by Paul Lazarsfeld. But producing consumers is not done inside a factory. Producing consumers involves managing their attitudes by manipulating significant symbols; that is, it involves altering the symbolic environment by stressing what is and is not important. As Bernays explained, in modern mass societies corporations cannot wait for

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed by Bagdikian, 2004. See Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> 2005:84.

<sup>3</sup> 2005:39.

<sup>4</sup> Lippmann, 1922:25. Side note: therefore, it follows that if the most frequently disseminated image of life is one in which people ought to go to school, then find a job in order to secure income, in order to purchase commodities, and yield to the general way of going about life, then this image will determine what the mass effects will be, with exceptions at the individual level, but not at the general mass level. In our contemporary society, this is the “imagined community” we belong to; consumerist, individualistic, career-oriented, and so forth.

the public to want their products, so they have to use propaganda because “to *make customers* is the new problem.”<sup>1</sup>

“Making customers” is not some impartial, purely practical activity. It also has a political dimension that was identified early on by Paul Lazarsfeld. Much like Bernays, Lazarsfeld observed that modern economic organizations, corporations, have an economic imperative that they must meet in order to “stay in business,” given their size. Corporations, Lazarsfeld points out, need to “*rally sizeable proportions of the population as their customers*. Thus *promotion in every form becomes one of the main forces in society. (...) We live in an advertising culture. (...) our times are engulfed by a multitude of promotional patterns [and] human beings, as a result, behave more and more like pawns upon a chessboard*, losing spontaneity and dignity.”<sup>2</sup> For this reason, which follows a purely economic logic, ever since the advent of modern mass media, “in a basic sense, business [has] becom[e] dependent on public opinion.”<sup>3</sup> The dependency though is not on any general type of public opinion, but one that in a certain sense acquiesces to its role as an eager consumer for whatever products are placed in the market by those very businesses, and eager voter for one of the two major political parties participating in elections. Given what the scholarship indicates about the political economy, the ruling ideology, and mass media behaviour, what would a rational observer expect to be the outcome in society as a whole? To be sure, in the contemporary world the outcome depends, largely, on the fact that masses themselves depend on large organizations for almost everything they consume. As observed by Russell in the 1960s, but still applicable today, any individual

in his buying and selling (...) depends upon immense organizations which are usually international; his reading is provided by the great

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<sup>1</sup> Bernays, 2005:84. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> Lazarsfeld, 1941:10. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>3</sup> Bernays, 2005:85.

newspapers, his amusements by Hollywood, the education of his children by the State, his capital, in part at least, by a bank, his political opinions by his Party, his safety and many of his amenities by the Government to which he pays taxes. *Thus in all his most important activities he has ceased to be a separate unit and has become dependent upon some social organization.* As scientific technique advances, the most profitable size for most organizations increases.<sup>1</sup>

Along the same lines, C.W. Mills indicated that as economic organizations grow they are compelled to intensify their mass communication efforts in the interests of “policies, commodities or ideas”<sup>2</sup> that, in short, need to be sold. Mills observed that as the “scale of institutions has become larger and more centralized, so has *the range and intensity of the opinion-makers efforts.*”<sup>3</sup> And given that opinion is crucial, as David Hume, Adam Smith and Jacques Rousseau observed long ago,<sup>4</sup> it is no surprise that in democratic societies, where opinion can have effects both at the ballot box and in the department store, there are massive efforts at controlling public opinion, especially political economic opinions, that is, opinions on the distribution of power and wealth.

As demonstrated by Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, the scale of the efforts by concentrations of private capital to “win the battle” for people's minds and hearts was, and still is, enormous. The “frenzied dedication”<sup>5</sup> on the part of businesses to win the everlasting battle for public opinion is not surprising either, given what's at stake: namely massive rents and profits that go into securing the lives of Fortune 500 shareholders around the world. In light of the scholarship that demonstrates the large scale efforts to influence the climate of opinion,<sup>6</sup> it is logical that in contemporary mass-mediated societies, columns, airwaves, and screens (and by extension the “public

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 1962:195-198. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>2</sup> Bernays, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Mills, 2000:310-311. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Chomsky, 2003:235.

<sup>6</sup> Reviewed in Chapter 5. Notable contributions are those by Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy*, Edward Herman *et al.*, *Manufacturing Consent*; Vance Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, CW Mills (*Power Elite*), among others.



sphere”) would be first and foremost occupied by messaging crafted for and paid by concentrations of private capital; whether in the form of advertisements or paid editorials, television shows replete with product placements and characters that are just in general uncritical.

From a mass cognitive point of view, the avalanche of all daily mass communications occupies "mental space", that is, socio-cognitive space. And in the absence of critical judgment, all the information any individual receives can only be processed in an unorganized fashion. The “mental space” that *Homo sapiens* walks about with is often carried unawares, that is, uncritically. And as Bertrand Russell pointed out in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, it is as if “every [person], wherever [they] go, is encompassed by a cloud of comforting convictions, which move with [them] like flies on a summer day.”<sup>1</sup> In the absence of critical information, the cloud of messy flies, that is, the overwhelming majority of information just gets accepted uncritically. And the content circulated by mass media in society, as aforementioned, is not impartial or designed in the interest of the receiving public. Criticism is often absent because it either contrasts with a favorable “selling environment” or simply clashes with the interests of advertisers and funders.

Much like criticism of the Catholic Church was expressly forbidden during its temporal reign, likewise in contemporary society, advertisers – that is, corporations who place paid messaging saturating the mass media – do not tolerate impactful criticism of themselves nor of the system that grants it its privileges. In Ben Bagdikian’s words: “the taboo against criticism of the system of contemporary enterprise, in its subtle way, was almost as complete within mainstream journalism and broadcast programming in the United States as criticism of communism was explicitly in the

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<sup>1</sup> Nobel Lecture. *What Desires are Politically Important?* 10 December 1950.

Soviet Union.”<sup>1</sup> And even when it comes to shows and programs, “no network produces a program without considering whether sponsors will like it. Prospective shows usually are discussed with major advertisers, who look at plans or tentative scenes and reject, approve, or suggest changes.”<sup>2</sup>

Clearly then, the most important vehicles for the dissemination of information and knowledge are not impartial. And without the proper information, understanding is effectively blocked, unless gargantuan research efforts are undertaken systematically at the individual level. But it is unreasonable to expect the majority of the population, working over 40 hours per week, with busy lives and set priorities, to have the time and energy necessary to carry out the kind of research required to effectively come to grips with the reality in which they toil. As Achen & Bartels argue in *Democracy for Realists*,

*the folk theory of democracy celebrates the wisdom of popular judgments by informed and engaged citizens. The reality is quite different. Human beings are busy with their lives. Most have school or a job consuming many hours of the day. They also have meals to prepare, homes to clean, and bills to pay. They may have children to raise or elderly parents to care for. They may also be coping with unemployment, business reverses, illness, addictions, divorce, or other personal or family troubles. For most, leisure time is at a premium. Sorting out which presidential candidate has the right foreign policy toward Asia is not a high priority for them. Without shirking more immediate and more important obligations, people cannot engage in much well-informed, thoughtful political deliberation, nor should they.*<sup>3</sup>

And the researchers who do provide a critical edge, which could be disseminated by the mass media, seldom enter into the arena of debate and rarely become “household” names in terms of widespread recognition. Therefore, effectively, the majority of information that is circulated in society by the mass media, who depend on advertising dollars to remain in business, is typically devoid of any type of adversarial criticism.

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<sup>1</sup> Bagdikian, 2004:236.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.238.

<sup>3</sup> Achen *et al.*, 2016:9-10. *Emphasis added.*

Dissent and critique are carried by marginal media, alternative outlets, but not by mainstream mass media that are national in scope and have nationwide audiences. The question therefore is on expected general outcomes: what would a rational observer expect to be the outcome of such a state of affairs?

#### 4. The General Uncritical Consensus

Fortunately, sociological scholarship does offer perspectives on this matter. In his *Culture Industry Reconsidered*, Theodore Adorno explored the effects such a system would bring about.<sup>1</sup> In trying to assess the state of twentieth century culture, that is, culture in the age of mass production and mass dissemination, Adorno wraps the whole mass media system under the rubric “Culture Industry”, because all the information conveyed boils down to human expression in its manifold manifestations (entertainment, news, advertising, etc.)<sup>2</sup> and because the main disseminators of human expression are large economic organizations, whose institutional aim is to generate revenues. The “culture industry” then is not some impartial institution involved in the dissemination of generic culture. In advanced industrial societies, Adorno argues, the culture industry is primarily involved in manipulating desires, because “*products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan (...). The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above.*”<sup>3</sup> The crucial factor is the commercial imperative.

Cultural commodities are “governed” by their realization “as value”, which is precisely what we would expect in a commercial industry where the objective is the

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno, 2001:98-106.

<sup>2</sup> See Healy, *Op. Cit.* Chapter I and II.

<sup>3</sup> Adorno, 2001:98-99.

bottom line: revenues and profits. And given the constant outpouring of communications designed to create consumers and to capture the public's mind in the interest of some policy, commodity or idea, the state of affairs in society, Adorno concludes, is as follows:

the culture industry turns into public relations, the manufacturing of 'goodwill' per se, without regard for particular forms or saleable objects. Brought to bear is a *general uncritical consensus*.<sup>1</sup>

The phrase "the culture industry turns into public relations" captures the inevitable outcome of a commercially dominated system whose ultimate objective is profitability. The mass media, in their manifold manifestations, need audiences. Their audiences are then sold to advertisers, whose funds they need in order to stay in business. And the audiences are privileged ones, because they must be in the financial position to purchase the advertised commodities in the first place. Given that the sources of the revenues the mass media generate are advertisers, naturally, they wish to place their ads in advertising friendly environments. This has been the case since the middle 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in Great Britain, where, as University of London Professor James Curran notes, working class newspapers were "deprived of the same level of subsidy"<sup>2</sup> of advertising as the "quality press," which "not only reflects the values and interests of its middle-class readers, it [also] gives them force, clarity and coherence [and] plays an important ideological role in amplifying and renewing the dominant political consensus."<sup>3</sup>

The economic imperatives of the mass media, translated on a general societal scale, have enormous impacts. And the "general uncritical consensus" is by no means a phenomenon that Adorno alone singled out. The phrase captures the essence of the

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno, 2001:100.

<sup>2</sup> Curran, 1978:230.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

general outcome in society. And the forces involved in the generation of the uncritical consensus are mass communication technologies operative 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, all year round. Their early cumulative effect was examined by Russell in *Modern Homogeneity*, where he condemned the “similarity of outlook in all parts of the United States”<sup>1</sup> which he found striking. And while uniformity in clothing would be no “grave matter (...) *uniformity in matters of thought and opinion is much more dangerous. It is, however, a quite inevitable result of modern inventions*” because industrial production is cheaper when it is “unified and on a large scale than when it is divided into a number of small units. This applies quite as much to the production of opinions as to the production of pins. *The principal sources of opinion in the present day are the schools, the Churches, the Press, the Cinema and the Radio.*”<sup>2</sup>

The Cinema, in particular, is one mass medium that Adorno, Russell and Leacock singled out for its power to homogenize opinions and bring about a state of general uncritical consensus. Film, Adorno suggests, is the “central sector of the culture industry,” and “its ideology above all makes use of the star system, borrowed from individualistic art and its commercial exploitation. The more dehumanized its methods of operation and content, the more diligently and successfully the culture industry propagates supposedly great personalities and operates with heartthrobs.”<sup>3</sup> This point is echoed by stand-up comedian Patrice O’Neal, who compared the mass media to the beast, and Hollywood to the “belly of the beast”:

[Showbusiness] is the beast. And it eats everybody and shits them out. And here’s what’s funny about the beast: there’s a never-ending line of people who want to get in the mouth, and get chewed up, and shit out. It’s because when you get in the belly, you get \$2 million dollars a week. And when you get shit out, you have the option to go get back in line and wait to go get back in the beast. And get eaten, and shit out. And we line up. (...) That’s

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<sup>1</sup> 2006:130.

<sup>2</sup> 2006:130-133.

<sup>3</sup> Adorno, 2001:100-101.

why I love Charlie Sheen so much. He was in the belly. When you're making \$2 million a week doing anything, you are in the absolute belly. And for that fucker to betray his position in the belly to actually give the beast indigestion was spectacular.<sup>1</sup>

Along the same lines, Russell stated that the most important propaganda agency in the world is Hollywood, for the "great majority of young people in almost all civilized countries *derive their ideas of love, of honour, or the way to make money, and of the importance of good clothes, from the evenings spent in seeing what Hollywood thinks good for them.*"<sup>2</sup> And Russell doubted whether all the schools and churches combined could have as much influence as the cinema "upon the opinions of the young *in regard to such intimate matters as love and marriage and money-making.* The producers of Hollywood are *the high-priests of a new religion.* (...) The cinema therefore plays a useful part in *safeguarding the rich from the envy of the poor.*"<sup>3</sup> And here we see the connection between propaganda and the general uncritical consensus in the service of inequality, the status quo, posited as the main target of the satirical content of stand-up comedy. On this point, humour scholar Stephen Leacock too observed the standardizing, levelling tendencies of modern mass society through modern mass media. "The moving picture," Leacock argued,

has fully taken over the convention. The muse Cinematographia is the sunken sister of the arts, beautiful but wicked. She will do anything for money. Hence she mixes up tears and laughter as a barmaid mixes a gin fizz: all she wants to know is not what the public wants or needs, but what the public will pay for. (...) In the old days when art was the art of a single man – who made up a song or painted a picture and needed only a bit of paper, or not even that, all was different. Art for art's sake could follow its own prompting. But the huge machine apparatus of the 'pictures' and the 'radio' are an utterly different case.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patrice O'Neal. In, Farley, B. *Brutally Honest: Fan Made Documentary*. 2012. Interval: 31:00-31:33 & 32:48-33:11.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 1964:194-195. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 1964:194-195. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>4</sup> 1938:52.

The apparatus of modern mass media are a different case because of the advanced technologies involved and the sums required to operate them in a commercially viable manner within a business dominated society. And they are also different in terms of reach. Therefore, we could expect them to be used quite consciously in a propagandistic manner, right up to the present. In the case of Hollywood, there is substantial rigorous scholarship on the influence exercised by the Pentagon on war movies. Secker *et al.* have demonstrated that, in effect, Hollywood “promotes war”<sup>1</sup> on behalf of the US Military-Industrial complex, comprising the Pentagon, CIA NSA and the various private contractors involved in military affairs, from munition-makers and weapons manufacturers to private militias. Official documents have detailed how “US military intelligence agencies influenced over 1,800 movies and TV shows,” revealing “the vast scale of US government control in Hollywood, including the ability to manipulate scripts or even prevent films too critical of the Pentagon from being made—not to mention influencing some of the most popular film franchises in recent years.”<sup>2</sup> The main point is that in contemporary advanced societies, the public is constantly exposed to content that is propagandistic. And this constant exposure produces the general uncritical consensus.

Earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bertrand Russell concluded that the discovery that masses can be manipulated, principally by the new techniques of propaganda devised in the early part of the twentieth century, was a cause for worry, for “there is as much difference between a collection of mentally free citizens and a community moulded by modern methods of propaganda as there is between a heap of raw materials and a battleship. (...) By instilling nonsense [propaganda] it unifies populations and generates

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<sup>1</sup> Secker *et al.* 2017(a) 2017(b) 2017(c); Redmond, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

collective enthusiasm.”<sup>1</sup> And that is what the sphere of general uncritical consensus primarily consists of: artificially induced irrational beliefs and attitudes. Cyclical bursts of collective enthusiasm and moral panics are prime examples. Collective enthusiasm for matters which upon critical reflection deserve little to any is abundantly evident anywhere anyone looks. Sports are another example. Fundamentally, there is no rational reason for any person to cheer for a team whose success will not bring any material benefits to that person; or for anyone to “care about” this or that group of athletes. The same applies to the music industry.

The adoration and adulation of mainstream musicians (pop, rock, r&b, etc.) in the mainstream media is mirrored by the compulsive consumerism of fanatics, which is fundamental from a commercial point of view: fans of X will purchase commodities representing X or endorsed by X. Likewise in politics, there is no rational reason for any average voter to cheer for this or that candidate with euphoric intensity given that once in office candidates pursue priorities that differ from their campaign platform and their disseminated promises (often diametrically opposed), as top-tier research demonstrates conclusively.<sup>2</sup>

The same argument applies to episodes mass hysteria, which reach peaks of rabid intensity only to quickly dissipate in the short term. In fact, moral panics follow a similar logic to outbursts of collective enthusiasm. A prime example is the highly publicized bird-flu scare of 2005. The US government stockpiled billions of dollars’ worth of Tamiflu vaccines<sup>3</sup> in response to the media induced panic. Roche, the

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 2009:93.

<sup>2</sup> As reviewed in Chapter 2I and IV. Policy outcomes reflect the preferences of a minority of the wealthy (Gilens, 2005) and elections are occasions in which sectors of the economy coalesce behind this or that candidate to have their preferred policies enacted (Ferguson, 1995). *Op. Cit.* in Chapters III and IV.

<sup>3</sup> Schwartz, 2005.



manufacturer, saw profits from Tamiflu jump fivefold to \$1 billion in 2005 alone.<sup>1</sup> But as reported in *Nature*, researchers demonstrated that Tamiflu does not prevent pandemics,<sup>2</sup> and despite counter-criticism offered by industry sponsored specialists, the findings “bring into question the decision by governments in the mid-2000s to stockpile the drugs against the threat of a pandemic of the H5N1 avian-flu virus”<sup>3</sup> which resulted in “money thrown down the drain,”<sup>4</sup> according to a University of Oxford flu expert. But it was not money thrown down any ordinary drain, for the people “clearly proven to be benefitting from the flu medication are its manufacturers”<sup>5</sup> and pharmaceutical investors. In case after case, any event that is mass-mediated is turned into a *spectacle*, with thousands of spectators and a minority of participants. Spectators are supposed to react in some consumerist fashion, either by purchasing the commodity or endorsing the idea, while participants, the actors, evoke those mass consumerist impulses, often in expectation of substantial rewards.

## 5. The Society of Spectators

The division between spectators and participants in mass society has old roots. In Ancient Rome, it was indicated by Juvenal in the famous phrase “*panem et circenses*”, bread and circuses, both provided by the State to sooth and distract the public.<sup>6</sup> In the twentieth century, the dichotomy is between “agents and bystanders” in Walter Lippman’s phrase. The public is not to participate in decision-making.<sup>7</sup> Its role is to be a spectator of action, for it is not capable of making “important” decisions, and its role

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Van Noorden, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Brownlee *et al.* 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Juvenal, Satire X, as quoted in Toner, J.P. *Leisure and Ancient Rome*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1995:69.

<sup>7</sup> 1930:63.

should be limited to ratifying policy proposals offered by “agents.”<sup>1</sup> Lippman explains that the theory of democracy has a fallacy because the majority of people are, simply put, inept. Socialist critiques of capitalist democracies have, at their roots, “the mystical fallacy of democracy, that the people, all of them, are competent (...) it is a false ideal (...) in the sense that it is bad for a fat man to try to be a ballet dancer.”<sup>2</sup> And therefore, Lippmann argued, the public should only be an “occasional”<sup>3</sup> participator in the affairs of society. And it is only reasonable to expect that spectators, especially in advanced industrial societies, will get a very good show.

As the scholarship points out, contemporary society is saturated by an advertising culture,<sup>4</sup> in which the majority of information is designed to promote commodities or ideas, to generate enthusiasm for products, for events, for candidates, or conversely to demonize rivals, enemies, critics. In short, the mass-media arouse fervent fanaticism in their spectators, in two directions: in support or in opposition; love or hate, as Harold Lasswell noted describing the function of propaganda in democratic societies.<sup>5</sup> The fervent fanaticism can be equated with a new kind of artificial consciousness: manufactured consumerism; manufactured desires for products or services that are not spontaneous emanations of needs, but stimulated by conscious propaganda.

As Adorno put it, while the culture industry develops “the consciousness of its consumers” it also reflects “the spirit which dominates today. Whoever ignores its influence out of scepticism *for what it stuffs into people* would be naïve.”<sup>6</sup> Because the overall impression is that people are not only, “as the saying goes, falling for the

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<sup>1</sup> 1930:73.

<sup>2</sup> 1930:38-39.

<sup>3</sup> 1930:62.

<sup>4</sup> Lazarsfeld, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Reviewed in Chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> 2001:102. *Emphasis added.*

swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them.”<sup>1</sup> Adorno concluded that the overall effect of the culture industry is one of “anti-enlightenment (...) mass deception [which] impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves. These however, would be the precondition for a democratic society.”<sup>2</sup> As the previous chapter and the present one argue, Adorno was not alone in pointing out the “deception” resulting from the constant outpouring of communications by the mass media in advanced societies.

At this point, two further observations are in order, one regarding spectators, the other regarding the spectacle. In terms of spectators, it is not only the case that they know little about the world around them as Lippmann observed, which disqualifies them (in his opinion) from participating in decision-making; it is also to the advantage of the holders of political and economic power that they remain ignorant of the world around them. As explained succinctly by Russell, “to those who control publicity, credulity is an advantage, while to the individual a power of critical judgment is likely to be beneficial; consequently the State does not aim at producing a scientific habit of mind, except in a small minority of experts, who are well paid, and therefore, as a rule, supporters of the *status quo*.”<sup>3</sup> And while this chapter looks at the general uncritical credulity, the next one will focus on the power of critical judgment in stand-up satire.

On the other hand, the spectacle itself, the “march of affairs” evoked in the minds of people, is fundamentally driven by the profit motive rather than any type of unbiased, neutral information-giving for information’s sake. As discussed by Robert McChesney,

the hallmark of this [mass media] system [is] its emphasis upon maximizing profit by any means necessary, which [means] popular

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<sup>1</sup> 2001:103.

<sup>2</sup> 2001:106.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 1962:190.

entertainment programming, usually provided by advertising agencies. (...) The hallmark of the global media system is *its relentless, ubiquitous commercialism*. (...) Advertising not only dominates media, it is beginning to be used on telephone and paging systems. In this *commercially saturated environment* (...) it should be no surprise that account after account in the late 1990s documents *the fascination, even the obsession, of the world's middle-class youth with consumer brands and products*.<sup>1</sup>

This state of affairs is wholly reminiscent of Lazarsfeld's warning that people, more and more, seem to be behaving like "pawns upon a chessboard."<sup>2</sup> Naturally, Lippmann's "pseudo-environment", or McLuhan's "media ecology" of the new consumerist consciousness, are variants of Guy Debord's "society of the spectacle." And to be sure, Debord's theoretical contribution falls perfectly in line with the scholarship reviewed thus far.

## 6. The Society of the Spectacle

As Debord himself acknowledged in the preface to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Society of the Spectacle* [SOS], he wrote the book "with the deliberate intention of doing harm to spectacular society."<sup>3</sup> His 221 theses, organized in 9 rather solemn chapters, are reminiscent of Martin Luther's 95 on *The Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, and perhaps Debord hoped to create a similar schism in what he likened to a new global religion: late capitalist mass consumer society and its spectacle of itself, its "immense" commercial iconography. And by any measure, SOS is similarly iconoclastic in its critique of the *spectacle*. In advanced industrial societies "dominated by modern conditions of production", Debord argues in his opening paragraph, "life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles."<sup>4</sup> And he offers thirteen key definitions<sup>1</sup> of the Spectacle

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<sup>1</sup> McChesney, 2015:108-109. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> Lazarsfeld, 1941:10.

<sup>3</sup> 1992.

<sup>4</sup> 2002:6.

scattered throughout his text, what its nature is and what its function is. In the interests of concision, it could be useful to take a birds-eye view of these thirteen definitions and summarize them.

Debord posits that the spectacle, in essence, consists of the immense, constant-presence of unilateral audio-visual mass communication in late capitalist consumer society, manifested in news, advertising, entertainment, which are controlled by the administrators of the system, private corporations. All these communications perpetuate a worldview that equates goods with commodities and people with consumers; incidentally not equating masses with producers nor activists (that is, actors), which is in line with Lippman's observation. And the constant promotion of commodities and ideas (reminiscent of Lazarsfeld's *advertising culture*) produces a general state of unconsciousness in which consumers become consumers of illusions – purchasing products that are advertised a certain way, or subscribing to ideas framed in a certain way – which furthers the interests of the administrators of the system: corporations. Given that the constant outpouring of communications is essentially unilateral – the mass media address masses without a critical mass feedback loop<sup>2</sup> – it is the “opposite of dialogue.” Communication and comprehension are monopolized, and the dominant worldview, mindless consumerism, “escapes people's activity [and] eludes their practical reconsideration and correction.”<sup>3</sup> With community and critical awareness disintegrated, masses are kept in a state of unconsciousness. Basically, the aggregate effect brought about in the society of the spectacle is Adorno's “general

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<sup>1</sup> Offered in the following theses numbers: 3,4,5,8,18,20,21,23,24,25,26,44,47.

<sup>2</sup> Individuals can write letters of complaint or support, but by and large, there is no comparable mass audience feedback to mass media output.

<sup>3</sup> Debord, 1967: Thesis 18.

uncritical consensus”.<sup>1</sup> In light of this more manageable and accessible definition, it is now possible to place Debord within a tradition of critical scholarship that goes beyond Marxist theory, as it encompasses foundational mass communication studies as well.

In Debord’s theory of the mass media we find all of the scholarly analyses mentioned thus far; and most importantly, the contributions that pertain to the general “mass” effects brought about by the mass media system. When Debord asserts that the Spectacle, “in all of its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — represents the dominant model of life [affirming] choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied in that production,” and that the worldview it produces “force(s) people to equate goods with commodities” he is echoing critiques found in Lazarsfeld and McChesney.<sup>2</sup> When Debord explains that the Spectacle evokes a “state of unconsciousness” that keeps the masses “asleep,” and in this sleep the reality of the system “escapes” and “eludes” people’s “practical reconsideration and correction” thus disintegrating “all community and all critical awareness,” he is echoing Lazarsfeld, Adorno and McLuhan.<sup>3</sup> From a bird’s eye view, the aggregate mass effect of the modern system of communication - the “pseudo-environment” it creates, the “media ecology” which it artificially evokes in the minds of the masses - instead of critiquing the status quo, generates a “general uncritical consensus”<sup>4</sup> about it, a sort of “business as usual” approach, whereby a “minority of the opulent”<sup>5</sup> control the forces of production and disseminate messages in a “vast and continuous effort (...) to capture [the majority’s] minds in the interest of

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<sup>1</sup> This summary is a synthesis of the definitions of *Spectacle* Debord outlined in the following theses numbers: 3,4,5,8,18,20,21,23,24,25,26,44,47.

<sup>2</sup> 1941; 2015.

<sup>3</sup> 1941; 2001; 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Adorno, 2001:99.

<sup>5</sup> James Madison in *Secret Proceedings*, 1844:183.

some policy or commodity or idea.”<sup>1</sup> The basic idea is to “keep the economy going,” with products going out, and consumers turning in.

## 7. The Society of Uniformity

The symbolic environment created by the mass media (watch this, buy this, vote for this, etc.) inevitably rests on the language faculty. Television, Radio, Print, Posters are all consumed via the language faculty. And the species who do not possess the language faculty (the rest of Animalia) do not consume/understand mass media content, and are therefore unsusceptible to it.<sup>2</sup> The mental state of *Homo sapiens* is a peculiar one, because it is also one that instinctively seeks explanations for the external world. And in the absence of good explanations for reality, *Homo sapiens* will be satisfied with the poor ones that are either available or disseminated most often. As Bertrand Russell observed: “man is a credulous animal, and must believe *something*; in the absence of good grounds for belief, he will be satisfied with bad ones.”<sup>3</sup> History testifies this inclination: humans are not born sceptical, and the scientific attitude of doubt took off only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, that is, after 200 thousand years of existence of the species, during which all sorts of absurdities have been believed, and all sorts of cruelties have been inflicted on the basis of those beliefs. Erasmus explained this conceptual-cognitive problem succinctly in *Praise of Folly*, suggesting that “the happiness of men (...) only depends upon opinion. For so great is the obscurity and variety of human affairs that nothing can be clearly known [and] the mind of man *is so framed* that it is *rather taken with the false colors than truth*.”<sup>4</sup> The mass media, in their output, do not redress this “defect”, but compound it, in the interests of commerce and

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<sup>1</sup> Bernays, 2004:39.

<sup>2</sup> As detailed in Chapter 2, Sections 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> 2009(b):64.

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus, 2003:36. *Emphasis* added.

the status quo. At this point, it is necessary to review how mass beliefs are interrelated with the state of general uncritical consensus brought about by the mass media system.

As famously argued by Russell in his Nobel Prize lecture, individuals, in their daily lives, are “encompassed by a cloud of comforting convictions” that move with them “like flies on a summer day.”<sup>1</sup> And these convictions, Russell explained, spring from various inputs: “what we were told in youth by parents and school-teachers, *what powerful organizations tell us in order to make us act as they wish*, what either embodies or allays our fears, what ministers to our self-esteem, and so on.”<sup>2</sup> The part that concerns this inquiry is precisely the second source of beliefs: the messages constantly disseminated by powerful organizations in order to make people act as they, the power centres, wish. And given that the education system in the western world teaches the youth to read but does not teach them the ability “to weigh evidence or form an independent opinion,”<sup>3</sup> in the rest of their lives they are unable to confront the daily outpouring of absurdities circulated by the mass media in order to drive demand for products and adherence to a passive ideological worldview. Once the youth graduate from schools and begin to set about their adult lives, they are

*assailed, throughout the rest of their lives, by statements designed to make them believe all sorts of absurd propositions, such as that Blank’s pills cure all ills, that Spitzbergen is warm and fertile, and that Germans eat corpses. The art of propaganda, as practiced by modern politicians and governments, is derived from the art of advertisement.*<sup>4</sup>

This point was taken up by, among others, Nobel Laureate Bob Dylan in *It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)*: “Advertising signs they con you into thinking you’re the one. That

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 1950. Link to lecture [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 2009:30.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2004:137

<sup>4</sup> Russell, 2004:137.



can do what's never been done. That can win what's never been won. Meantime life outside goes on all around you.”<sup>1</sup>

As Marshall McLuhan pointed out in an entirely consistent fashion, the twentieth century was the first age in which corporations systematically entered the “collective public mind. To get inside in order to *manipulate, exploit, control is the object now. (...)* To keep everybody in *the helpless state engendered by prolonged mental rutting* is the effect of many ads and much entertainment alike.”<sup>2</sup> And what is the helpless state engendered by prolonged mental rutting? According to Chomsky, the outcome is precisely the one pointed out by Adorno, Debord, Lazarsfeld and McLuhan: people are “just sitting alone in front of the television set [that] drill[s] into their heads daily the message which says *the only value in life is to have more commodities, or to live like that rich middle class family you're watching and to have nice values like harmony and Americanism and that's all there is in life.*”<sup>3</sup> There is a general uncritical acceptance of “policies, commodities and ideas” disseminated by the mass media. And for these reasons, among others, Russell concluded that “modern propagandists have learnt from advertisers, who led the way in the technique of producing *irrational belief.*”<sup>4</sup>

Societies that are ruled hierarchically, with a minority at the top that holds power and privileges, and a majority of people at the bottom who “rent” their labour in exchange for salaries and wages, will inevitably drive uniformity, because widespread difference would be destabilizing, both politically and economically. That uniformity could be inculcated forcibly in society at large was noticed long ago, during the Enlightenment, and notably by Lord Shaftesbury. The following passage highlights the

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<sup>1</sup> Dylan, 1965: [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> McLuhan, 1995:21.

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Russell, B. 2004:247. *Emphasis* added.

link between inequality in the economic sphere and the drive for uniformity among the population:

There was a time when men were accountable only for their actions and behaviours. Their opinions were left to themselves. They had liberty to differ in these, as in their faces. (...) But in the process of time, it was thought decent *to mend men's countenances*, and *render their intellectual complexions uniform and of a sort*. (...) in this extraordinary conjuncture 'twas agreed that there was only one certain and true dress, one single peculiar air, to which it was necessary all people should *conform*. (...) *Imagine now what the effect of this must needs be; when men become persecuted thus on every side about their air and feature, and were put to their shifts how to adjust and compose their mein [sic], according to the right mode*; where a thousand models, a thousand patterns of dress were current, and altered every now and then upon occasion, according to fashion and the humour of the times. Judge whether men's *countenances* were not like to grow *constrained* and the natural visage of mankind, by this habit, *distorted, convulsed*, and rendered hardly knowable.<sup>1</sup>

Shaftesbury stressed the very real pressures towards conformity and uniformity that inevitably have psychological ramifications as society “renders [people’s] intellectual complexions uniform and of a sort”. People’s expressions become “constrained” and their natural inclinations “distorted, convulsed”. Humour scholar Stephen Leacock also noted this theme of modern social life forcing uniformity among people’s “intellectual complexions” roughly two hundred years later. In pondering how “great is the suppression of the individual under the urban industrialism of today,” Leacock turned his focus on the “standardizing, levelling tendencies that smooth us out and make us all the same.”<sup>2</sup> And no passage in the scholarly literature covered thus far better captures the bridge between propaganda, the general uncritical consensus, and satire acting as the artillery of dissensus:

Modern life, in raising the level of the mass, lowers individual eminence. Mass production bring with it mass thinking. Mass economic life compels *a new kind of cohesion in which the individual is forced and fitted into a pattern*. He can't have any liberty because there is nothing to choose:

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<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:84.

<sup>2</sup> 1938:61.

unless everybody choses the same, nobody gets anything. *The human mind, or rather the human outlook, is already accommodating itself to this idea: people accept social regimentation, expect to be told what to do and what to be and how to be it. The very scope of our mechanical invention makes us all the more sheeplike.* In the morning all the sheep listen to a shepherd broadcasting prayers, news and weather; in the afternoon all the sheep look over the fence at a ball game (cricket, base, or foot); in the evening all the sheep listen to a lullaby. To what extent humanity can undergo this superimposed layer of sameness without change, is surely an open question: they may change to something better or worse, but hardly remain the same.<sup>1</sup>

Leacock wrote this passage in the 1930s, precisely at the time when new techniques of mass propaganda were being implemented across advanced industrial societies, primarily in the US and also in Germany. And the general effect brought about by the blanket saturation of such societies with broadcasted communications is a “uniformity of life,” which, Leacock suggests,

interposes a medium of similarity of dress, habits, amusements and reading which tends to obscure ‘character.’ But at least as yet ‘character’ is there underneath. *What sameness and uniformity and mass ideas and mass audition of mass events and mass amusement, soon to be increased by television where everybody sees everybody, will ultimately do to human kind we don’t know.* But the process is only beginning. Things will last our time.<sup>2</sup>

By ‘character,’ Leacock means individuality, difference: “Character springs like a plant and individuality blooms like a rose: and forthwith there are gay people, brave people, and queer people – room for everybody to be something; not the crushed dead-level uniformity of the metropolis.”<sup>3</sup> And this difference progressively dims in the midst of a general uncritical consensus.

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<sup>1</sup> 1938:61-62.

<sup>2</sup> 1938:63.

<sup>3</sup> 1938:62.

## 8. Conclusion

Following the principle of the preservation of power advantage,<sup>1</sup> those who benefit from the uniforming tendencies of mass society, particularly industries that are compelled by economic imperatives to continuously sell the same products or variations of the same products, to a mass of consumers “integrated from above,” as Adorno put it, will wish to see those tendencies maintained. And the industries that benefit from the status quo naturally will have the most interests in preserving “the system by which they profit”<sup>2</sup> and will be most active in defending and legitimizing it. In contemporary mass mediated consumerist societies, the commercial mass media in all their manifestations continuously disseminate persuasive messages “in the interests of policies, commodities, and ideas”, but certainly not in the interest of consumers. The constant day-by-day stream of “words and images” inevitably create pressures which “persecute” people “on every side” so they may “conform” to purchase certain products and subscribe to certain ideas. This mass persuasion is not designed in the interests of the receivers, of the spectators, of the consumers of media, but of the producers, who pay top dollars to have their messages disseminated in a multitude of ways: advertising, product placements, endorsements, advertorials, infomercials, etc. A recent report on the economic impact of advertising in the US has confirmed that “businesses spend billions of dollars on advertising. In 2014 alone, an estimated \$297 billion was spent on advertising across all industries and media types. Direct sales due to advertising were \$2.4 trillion, in 2014. This means that, on average, companies enjoy \$8 dollars of sales for every dollar they spend on advertising.”<sup>3</sup> And furthermore, in terms of overall

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV. Russell, B. 2010:185. “The holders of power will always use their position to obtain special advantages for themselves (...) [and] ensure a certain efficiency in the system by which they profit.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 2010:185.

<sup>3</sup> Levesque *et al.*, 2015:10.

impact on the economy, the report estimates that “advertising activity represented \$3.4 trillion (or 19%) of the \$18.2 trillion in US GDP in 2014.”<sup>1</sup>

The reasons for the magnitude of advertising spending are straightforward: “[t]he U.S. economy is heavily affected by the health of the consumer sector, which represents about 68 percent of the economy. Based on this measure, the United States has the highest dependence on personal consumption relative to other large advanced economies (see graph below).”<sup>2</sup> The consumer sector needs to be constantly stimulated, because corporations “*cannot afford to wait until the public asks for [their] product; [they] must maintain constant touch, through advertising and propaganda, with the vast public, in order to assure [themselves] the continuous demand* which alone will make its costly plant profitable.”<sup>3</sup> Generally then, the overwhelming majority of the messages that are disseminated daily are not designed and distributed to liberate readers, listeners and watchers, those on the receiving end of Debord’s “essentially unilateral communications”; but to advance the interest of the senders and the producers, that is, to induce the receivers, audiences, to purchase and to agree. General credulity, as Russell observed, is an advantage to those who control propaganda,<sup>4</sup> while critical judgment is not.

In 1927, Harold Lasswell argued that in modern democracies characterized by vast inequalities in wealth and power, but also by universal suffrage, elites needed “to bamboozle and seduce in the name of the public good [and] dictate to the majority.”<sup>5</sup> In 1961, American historian and 12<sup>th</sup> Librarian of Congress, Daniel Boorstin, observed that the constant outpouring of unidirectional persuasive messaging in the interests of

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<sup>1</sup> Levesque *et al.*, 2015:11.

<sup>2</sup> Polsinelli, 2015:2. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> Bernays, *Op. Cit.* p.103.

<sup>4</sup> Russell, 1962:190.

<sup>5</sup> 1971:4-5.

commodities or ideas turned Americans into “the most illusioned people on earth.”<sup>1</sup> However, in his opinion, the financiers and producers of illusions were not to blame: “having read a good deal about the villains who are said to be responsible for our perplexity,” Boorstin explains, like “the hidden persuaders, the organization men, Madison Avenue, Washington bureaucracy, the eggheads, the anti-intellectuals, the power elite, etc., etc., etc. – I am unimpressed by their villainy.”<sup>2</sup> Why? Because these are false villains. “The hardest, most discomforting discovery is that each of us must emancipate himself”<sup>3</sup> because “each of us individually provides the market and the demand for the illusions which flood our experience.”<sup>4</sup>

Three decades later, Thomas Ferguson, Professor Emeritus of Political Economy at the University of Massachusetts Boston, wondered what the outcome would be in a society in which the dissemination of political information is controlled by a handful of media conglomerates. He concluded that scholars can, beyond any reasonable doubt,

*dismiss the still-fashionable notion that the media have ‘few political effects, [as] some studies suggest that the voters most susceptible to media influence are usually those who know the least, which, interestingly for money-driven political systems, turns out to be precisely those who watch the most TV. (...) the major media (i.e., those big enough to have potentially significant effects on public opinion) controlled by large profit-maximizing investors do not encourage the dissemination of news and analyses that are likely to lead to popular indignation and, perhaps, government action hostile to the interests of all large investors, themselves included. (...) As a consequence, all sorts of subsidized misinformation will be circulating in the press, even in regard to major public issues that appear to be ‘well-covered.’ In the political equivalent of Gresham’s law, bad information repeated by most of the major media may even drive out good information, and – via ‘Asch effects,’ ‘spirals of silence,’ or simple fear of ridicule – sow additional public confusion.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1961:240.

<sup>2</sup> Boorstin, 1961:iii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*: 260.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: 3.

<sup>5</sup> 1995:400-401. *Emphasis added.*

As a slew of critical scholarship<sup>1</sup> and media monitoring<sup>2</sup> demonstrates conclusively, most of the information that is disseminated on a daily basis by the major media is either in support of some commodity or idea, that is, advertising, or devoid of systemic critical analyses. Whatever is not supportive of the “selling environment” built into the structure of commercial media is therefore simply left out or censored.<sup>3</sup> Hence the difficulty for the majority of the working population to think critically unless the opportunity is presented to extricate themselves from the general uncritical consensus. As the mass media system unilaterally directs its audience to “buy into this or that”, with the “cloud of comforting convictions” that the majority are encompassed with “like flies on a summer day” grows into a substantial common psychic-environment. An artificial one at that, built around the interests of the political economy and thus distant from the needs and issues that the majority of the population faces on a daily basis.

In such an environment, it is difficult, from an aggregate point of view, for citizens to fulfil the democratic ideal of being informed participants making informed decisions. As Achen & Bartels point out, while the “*folk theory* of democracy celebrates the wisdom of popular judgments by informed and engaged citizens,” the reality is “quite different. Human beings are busy with their lives [and] *cannot engage in much well-informed, thoughtful political deliberation*, nor should they.”<sup>4</sup> Though it might strike as elitist to argue that people “should not” engage in much well-informed, thoughtful political deliberation, Achen & Bartels omit the important fact that there is a “vast and continuous effort going on” on a daily basis, lavishly recompensed in the multi-billion dollar mass media system, that prevents the very kind of critical deliberation necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed in Chapter 5, Sections 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see the media monitoring analyses published daily by FAIR-Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, and Media Matters for America, among others.

<sup>3</sup> For a catalogue of media censorship studies, see Chapter 5, Sections 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> Achen *et al.*, 2016:9-10. *Emphasis* added.

in a properly functioning contemporary democracy. They also omit that informed, critical deliberation is a threat to power systems, both political and economic, because general credulity is to the advantage of powerful elites. As Adorno would have it, the mass effect of the “culture industry” generates a state of “general uncritical consensus”<sup>1</sup>; one that, as Debord observed, “escapes people’s activity [and] eludes their practical reconsideration and correction.”<sup>2</sup> This state of affairs was sharply critiqued by Alex Carey, who concluded, after reviewing the history of systematic and sustained propaganda, that

the common man, instead of emerging triumphant, has never been so *confused, mystified and baffled*; his most intimate conceptions of himself, of his needs, and indeed the very nature of human nature, *have been subject to skilled manipulation and constriction in the interests of corporate efficiency and profit*.<sup>3</sup>

And if the twentieth century was characterized, via the spread of universal suffrage and individual rights, by the growth of democracy, it was also marked by “the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy.”<sup>4</sup> It is this framework, of a general uncritical consensus that is artificially erected and sustained in the interests of a “minority of the opulent”, that begs the following question: in institutional terms, is there a comparable force in society constantly devoted to disbelieving, demystifying, critiquing, challenging, dissenting, debunking – in sum, of dissuading spectators from the daily avalanche persuasive communications they are subjected to? Who takes on this challenge in contemporary advanced societies? Is there an effort against uniformity, conformity and the general uncritical consensus? Because if scholars keep with Boorstin’s perspective, there would be no need to look given that “though we may suffer from mass illusions,

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<sup>1</sup> 2001:99.

<sup>2</sup> Debord, 1967: Thesis 18.

<sup>3</sup> 1997:11.

<sup>4</sup> 1997:18.



there is no formula for mass disenchantment. By the law of pseudo-events, all efforts at mass disenchantment themselves only embroider our illusions.”<sup>1</sup>

The next chapter disagrees with Boorstin’s claim that “there is no formula for mass disenchantment” and posits stand-up satire as a fourth development of substantial political importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries: stand-up satire as a means of symbolic struggle against the general uncritical consensus brought about by systematic and sustained propaganda. If, as Lasswell observed, propaganda involves the manipulation of relevant symbols<sup>2</sup> and their systematic and sustained dissemination, stand-up satire can be hypothesized as an internal cognitive activity, externalized through spoken language, that aims to dissolve those artificially construed symbolic manipulations. Which brings this inquiry to the next chapter, to provide the theoretical framework necessary to argue that stand-up satire involves a specific cognitive-symbolic activity, a by-product of the language faculty itself, dedicated to the “practical reconsideration and correction”<sup>3</sup> of the multitude of distorted symbols that populate the sphere of general uncritical consensus; hence described as “the artillery of dissensus”.

The properties of the general uncritical consensus are exhibited in this example of SC<sup>2</sup>:

There’s a reason education sucks. And it’s the same reason it will never, ever, ever be fixed. Because the owners, the owners of this country, don’t want that. I’m talking about the real owners now, the big owners. (...) The big wealthy business interests that control things and make all the important decisions. (...) Well, we know what they want. They want more for themselves and less for everybody else. But I’ll tell you what they don’t want: they don’t want a population of citizens capable of critical thinking. They don’t want well-informed, well-educated people capable of critical thinking. They’re not interested in that. That doesn’t help them. That’s against their interests. That’s right. They don’t want people who are smart enough to sit around a kitchen table and think about how badly they’re getting fucked by a system that threw them overboard 30 fucking years ago. They don’t want that. (...) It’s a Big Club, and you ain’t in it. You and I are not in the Big Club. By the way, it’s the same big club they use to

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<sup>1</sup> Boorstin, 1961:260.

<sup>2</sup> Lasswell, 1927:627.

<sup>3</sup> Debord, 1967: Thesis 18.

beat you over the head with all day long when they tell you what to believe. All day long beating you over the head with their media, telling you what to believe, what to think, and what to buy. (...) And nobody seems to notice. Nobody seems to care. That's what the owners count on. The fact that Americans will probably remain wilfully ignorant of the big red, white and blue dick that's being jammed up their assholes every day. Because the owners of this country know the truth. It's called 'The American Dream'. Because you have to be asleep to believe it.<sup>1</sup>

The above quote will not be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 9 because it lays outside the 1990-1999 scope. However, here too the juxtaposition can be noted between an operative group belief and political critique: 1) the ideology of opportunity for individual success captured in the phrase 'The American Dream'; 2) that elites' interests in the United States are opposed to those of the population.

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Life is Worth Losing*. 2005. [Link](#).

## CHAPTER 7: THE ARTILLERY OF DISSENSUS

*"As you do from a singular vein of wit,  
very much dissent from  
the common herd of mankind."*  
Erasmus<sup>1</sup>

*"[A joke] shatters respect for  
institutions and truths  
in which the hearer has believed."*  
Sigmund Freud<sup>2</sup>

*"But the results of failure in politeness,  
however bad from the point of view  
of a social occasion,  
are admirable from the point of view of  
dispelling myths."*  
Bertrand Russell<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Preview

Why satire? So far, this study has examined five realms of scholarly inquiry: the language faculty; the political economy; ideology; propaganda; the general uncritical consensus, that is, mass media effects. The examination has demonstrated that the scholarly literature offers numerous congruities in all five realms: the findings in each realm support the findings in the next, culminating in a picture of social life that is not only consistent theoretically, but also supported empirically. To summarize, in five points: 1) the language faculty endows *Homo sapiens* with a concrete cognitive advantage over the rest of Animalia. This advantage, based on symbolic cognition which is wholly exceptional biologically,<sup>4</sup> has manifested itself materially, and forcefully, over the course of the last 10 thousand years ever since the agricultural revolution, which enabled the rise of civilizations. 2) Every civilization has been organized hierarchically,

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<sup>1</sup> 1876:xvi-xvii.

<sup>2</sup> 1960:163.

<sup>3</sup> 2004:17.

<sup>4</sup> Explored in Chapter 2, Sections 2-3.

a process known as social stratification,<sup>1</sup> with power and wealth typically concentrated in an elite minority<sup>2</sup> of the overall civilization. 3) The reigning political economy, which determines the allocation of power and wealth and the modes of subsistence of the members of the civilization, is characterized by a ruling ideology,<sup>3</sup> highly legitimizing of the status quo. 4) In modern societies, where communications are dominated by a small number of large mass media firms that rely on advertising revenue for income and profitability, that are owned or linked to other concentrations of power and wealth,<sup>4</sup> the ruling ideology is circulated and disseminated persistently, and normalized via the known process of hegemony. 5) In such societies, where inequalities are a defining and omnipresent feature, the constant diffusion of unilateral communications produce substantial mass effects: given the resources employed, both financial and symbolic, the mass effect (which differs from individual effects) is one of a general uncritical consensus<sup>5</sup> about the status quo, whereby the majority uncritically accept the overarching worldview that is broadcasted and disseminated in society.

This uncritical acceptance is not due to any cognitive disadvantage on the part of the majority. The issue is that the majority of the working population does not have the necessary time and resources to critically engage with the reality they live in and fend off the deluge of contents broadcasted and disseminated daily in their environment.<sup>6</sup> As reviewed in Chapter 6, the majority of the working population simply does not have the necessary time and resources to consider and reconsider the information disseminated to them on a daily basis. As noted by Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, “for most [people], leisure time is at a premium. Sorting out which presidential candidate has the

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<sup>1</sup> Saunders, 1990; Toye, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Explored in Chapter 3, Section 2.

<sup>3</sup> Explored in Chapter 4, Section 3.

<sup>4</sup> Explored in Chapter 5, Sections 2-4.

<sup>5</sup> Explored in Chapter 6 as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> See Achen *et al.* 2016.

right foreign policy toward Asia is not a high priority for them. Without shirking more immediate and more important obligations, people *cannot engage in much well-informed, thoughtful political deliberation.*"<sup>1</sup> Couple this with the continuous "day by day, week by week (...) steady flow of words and images,"<sup>2</sup> as John B. Thompson put it, it is no wonder that this daily spectacle "escapes people's activity, (...) eludes their practical reconsideration and correction."<sup>3</sup> The majority of this daily flow of words and images, in terms of volumes, is designed for commercial persuasion, which reinforces consumer culture, and political persuasion, in favour of one of two political alternatives (or one of three in Canada for instance).

In general, although there are certainly other forces working towards conformity in society (such as the school system, the churches, etc.) that fall within Althusser's "ideological apparatuses" framework, scholars agree<sup>4</sup> that the modern mass media (in all their various manifestations – radio, tv, print, cinema, etc.) are by far the most important forces in the dissemination of persuasive communications in contemporary advanced societies. In the US, where the majority of the circulated information is persuasive, that is, designed to make audiences purchase a commodity or subscribe to an idea or policy, dissent is marginalized. Public discourse leaves little room for similarly sustained circulation of critical, debunking, and demystifying points of view, which are seldom disseminated with the same frequent obstinacy as propaganda, whether commercial or political.

In advanced societies, the circulation of ideas is key. As explained by Robert Dahl, Sterling Professor of Political Science Emeritus at Yale University and the leading democratic theorist of the twentieth century, the main political beliefs of any majority of

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<sup>1</sup> Achen *et al.*, 2016:9-10. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, 1990: 163.

<sup>3</sup> Debord, 1967: Thesis 18.

<sup>4</sup> Reviewed in Chapters 5&6.

people will depend crucially on their circulation. If any political scientist examines “what factors influence the content of the political beliefs”<sup>1</sup> people acquire, one “obvious determinant is the extent to which [people] are exposed to a particular outlook, which depends in turn on a number of things.”<sup>2</sup> Dahl points out that the “chance of being exposed to a particular idea depends, of course, on whether the idea is present in one’s own environment. Two necessary conditions are, clearly, that the idea has been formulated and that it has been diffused to the individual’s environment.”<sup>3</sup> It thus follows that if certain political ideas are marginalized in terms of their diffusion via the mass media, they will not be constantly “present” in the mainstream “environment,” and therefore exposure to those ideas will be limited. Therefore, the central hypothesis that guides this inquiry is the following:

H1 | *that a major indicator suggesting the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus is the satirical content of stand-up comedy itself, which manifests itself in relation to it.*

While H1 will be tested with a longitudinal content analysis of the satirical content of US stand-up comedy between 1990 and 1999, this chapter will review the main theories on humour, comedy and satire, showing congruities in the scholarship that point to satire as a type of cognitive activity designed precisely to tackle and challenge generally and uncritically accepted ideas and beliefs. This chapter will also examine the theories of satirical humour offered by practitioners themselves, to assess whether there in fact exists a congruity between the views of theorists on one end, and the view of satirists on the other, on the relationship between satire and political consciousness. In order to confirm the validity of testing H1, a second hypothesis will be tested in this chapter:

H2 | *that stand-up satire functions as the artillery of critique against the general uncritical consensus.*

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<sup>1</sup> 1971:169.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The phrase the “artillery of critique” is borrowed from Harold Innis’s *Bias of Communication*. Following a masterful synthesis of the role that various types of media played in the political economy of empires, Innis argued that “with the outbreak of revolution, newspapers became the artillery of ideas.”<sup>1</sup> H2 is expressed as a metaphor, precisely because as a dichotomy it can capture whether the scholarship confirms or refutes the relationship. Therefore, to test H2, this chapter will examine whether there are: a) congruities between various perspectives offered in humour and satire scholarship, and what dimensions they cover; b) congruities between the scholarship on satire and the scholarship on propaganda and the general uncritical consensus, and what dimensions they cover; c) congruities between the scholarship on satire, the scholarship on propaganda and the general uncritical consensus, and perspectives offered by leading stand-up comics themselves on the function of satire in society.

This chapter’s aim is to bring together the theoretical and empirical aspects of satire in a harmonious and consistent whole. The existence of congruities between the scholarship and the reflections of practitioners will reinforce the validity of testing H1. And while H1 will be tested formally in Chapter 9, H2 will be tested in this chapter.

## 2. Contextual Considerations

The impression that society, as a whole, is highly propagandized<sup>2</sup> is suggested by several factors and a wealth of scholarship reviewed in Chapters 4-5. But that a sphere of general uncritical consensus exists, and that it is sustained by the mass media, is suggested by two phenomena: by the mechanism of satirical critique itself, which

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<sup>1</sup> 1971:58.

<sup>2</sup> As pointed out by Childs (As quoted in Carey, 1997:14) and Boorstin, 1961; and documented by Alex Carey, 1997, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, 1995, and Edward Herman 2000.

involves the debunking of generally uncritically accepted ideas, and by the use of humour as a test for the rationality of those generally uncritically accepted ideas. Laughter then not only indicates that the humour has been successfully transferred and understood, but also recognition that the expressed point of view is novel and valid. Humour, after all, must be clear, concise and creative<sup>1</sup> to elicit the desired effect. As noted by Sigmund Freud, the peculiar fact about jokes is that they only produce their “*full effect* on the hearer if they are new to him. This characteristic of jokes (which determines the shortness of their life and stimulates the constant production of new jokes) is evidently due to the fact that the very nature of surprising someone or taking him unawares implies that it cannot succeed a second time.”<sup>2</sup> Novelty however is just one of several seemingly necessary components for full effect, in addition to brevity, clarity and familiarity with the topic. And the latter aspect, familiarity with the topic, is also a central component, which is evident anecdotally in our everyday experience, but also manifested theoretically. As argued by Stephen Leacock in the case of Cervantes, “[t]he humour involved in Don Quixote cannot be understood without the background”<sup>3</sup> of the feudal system; that is, the political economy of the time.

As reviewed in Chapter 1, stand-up comedy is a “huge cultural phenomenon”<sup>4</sup> currently experiencing a “second boom,”<sup>5</sup> and according to industry polls, “25% of Millennials say comedy helps them shape their political beliefs” while “53% say comedy makes them think and gives them perspective.”<sup>6</sup> Taking a cue from this opinion poll, the following question arises: why is stand-up comedy viewed as performing the role that is assigned to the mass media and is so often self-referentially usurped by the media?

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<sup>1</sup> A perspective shared by both humour theorists and humour practitioners. Explored below.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, 1960:188-189. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>3</sup> 1938:68.

<sup>4</sup> Lockyer *et al.* 2011:100.

<sup>5</sup> Fox, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Cook, 2012.



After all, should not the mass media, in their manifold manifestations, make people “think” and “help shape their political beliefs”?

According to the scholarship,<sup>1</sup> as an institution, the mass media follow priorities (advertising revenue and profitability) that make them ill-suited to host systemically adversarial information, that is, information that undermines the ruling political economy. The scholarship offers a multitude of evidence in support of the fact that the mass media are not a hospitable environment for critical information,<sup>2</sup> and that hence, they fail to fulfil their critical mandate. Furthermore, if recent polls find that audiences turn to stand-up comedy to get “perspective” on issues, this inclination may be related to a principle outlined by Lord Shaftesbury in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: “’Tis the habit alone of reasoning, which can make a reasoner. And men can never be better invited to the habit, than when they find pleasure in it;”<sup>3</sup> thus, “[w]e shall grow better reasoners, by reasoning pleasantly and at our ease.”<sup>4</sup> The jovial environment provided by stand-up comedy makes it a suitable location of inquiry for the purposes of testing H2. Therefore, the answer to the initial question posed at the outset of this chapter, “Why Satire?” is the following: because the satirical content of stand-up comedy can be used as a test for the existence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus, if, contextually, the most rigorous and prestigious scholarship on satire offers conclusions that are in line with the five realms of inquiry<sup>5</sup> examined thus far. Therefore, this chapter will delve into the scholarship on humour and satire. But in the interests of methodological rigour, it is first necessary to define what the subject of analysis is. And therefore, the next question is: What is satire?

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed in Chapter 5, Sections 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> See McChesney, Begdikian, Chomsky, Herman, among others, *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 5, Sections 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> 1773:69.

<sup>4</sup> 1773:77.

<sup>5</sup> Language; Political Economy; Ideology; Propaganda; Mass Effects.

### 3. Terminological Distinctions

Satire has been examined substantially in the last couple of centuries. But as opposed to other examinations, the present inquiry focuses on stand-up satire, that is, the satirical content of a particular form of comedy: stand-up comedy. This type of comedy is unique in one respect: it involves nothing more than a humorous monologue in front of a live audience. The monologue, which is based on spoken word alone, is perfect instance of externalization of the language faculty. It “evokes images” in the minds of the audience, and laughter is the physical reaction sought when the audience recognizes the humour in the evoked images. Humour recognition then falls in line with the fundamental Cartesian insight that the “use of language has a creative character: it is typically innovative without bounds, appropriate to circumstances but not caused by them – a crucial distinction – and can *engender thoughts in others* that they recognize *they could have expressed themselves*.”<sup>1</sup> Engendering thoughts in others is the basic characteristic of language generally and stand-up comedy forcefully. Humour recognition, laughter, signals successful transmission-reception of meaning. This is valid anecdotally too, in the often-posed question “did you get it?” Therefore, in order to properly contextualize the satirical content of stand-up comedy (that is, its political economic commentary), it is first necessary to review terminology and distinctions.

#### 3.1 Laughter, Humour, Comedy, Satire

Stand-up comedy consists of a humorous monologue, which in turn consists of a series of jokes: sentences drawn together with the objective of eliciting laughter; and when the jokes tackle some political-economic aspect of society, the content is called

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, 2016:7.

satirical, as opposed to other jokes (dog jokes, sex jokes, yo mama jokes, etc.). The definition of stand-up thus brings together various terms with different definitions: laughter, humour, comedy and satire.

Laughter, for starters, is a physiological event that occurs in humans and other animals, whereby rhythmical audible contractions of the diaphragm are emitted in response to some external or internal stimuli. The stimuli can be physical, like tickling,<sup>1</sup> or it can be cognitive, which is via humour. And here it is important to keep in mind that this dissertation does not aim to examine the properties of laughter nor review the theories of laughter<sup>2</sup> and conditions for “funniness”. The aim is only to investigate the political content of stand-up comedy. Returning to the physiological aspect of laughter, Conan O’Brien observed that he always thought of laughter as originating in

our reptile brains somewhere, because it’s actually some weird bodily process. It’s an art form where we’re dealing with ideas and language, but the response you’re looking to create is like trying to get people to sneeze or hiccup. You’re looking for them to react by an *involuntary physical process*. And if they’re not sneezing and hiccupping, it means you’ve failed.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, humour as a cause of laughter differs from tickling in that it is not a physical stimulus, but a symbolic one; that is, cognitive. John Morreall, Emeritus Professor at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg and one of the foremost experts on the subject of humour, explicitly distinguishes between non-humorous laughter situations and humorous laughter situations.<sup>4</sup> Humour, the cognitive stimulation of laughter, involves two steps, one internal and one external: internally, it consists of an observation that manipulates relevant symbols; externally, it is shared via communication and can take on various forms: in vignettes, spoken word, sign language,

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<sup>1</sup> Morreall, 1983:1.

<sup>2</sup> For a robust and up-to-date perspective on laughter, see Bouissac, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Provenza *et al.*, 2009:57.

<sup>4</sup> Morreall, 1983:1.

braille, etc. As reviewed in Chapter 2, the language faculty involves the production, arrangement and rearrangement of cognitive symbols, not only to understand the world and interpret it, but also to recreate it.<sup>1</sup>

The symbolic nature of humour is central to the present discussion, as it brings together insights in three realms of scholarship reviewed thus far: language; propaganda; mass effects. In terms of language, as noted by Ian Tattersall, Curator Emeritus at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, humans are unique in possessing it. Unlike all other living organisms, we “live not entirely in the world as Nature presents it to us, but substantially in worlds that we re-create in our heads. We can do this because we are “symbolic” creatures, meaning that *we mentally decompose the world around us into a vocabulary of discrete symbols, which we can combine and recombine in our minds to imagine alternate worlds.*”<sup>2</sup> In terms of propaganda, it too involves the manipulation of significant symbols. As explained by Harold Lasswell, “propaganda is the management of collective attitudes by the *manipulation of significant symbols.*”<sup>3</sup> And when the task of disseminating the manipulated symbols is performed by the mass media on a vast scale, the cognitive environment as a whole is inevitably altered.

In terms of mass effects, as noted by Elizabeth Fones-Wolf in the case of the mass propaganda campaign conducted by US corporations to win the “everlasting battle for the mind” of America in the post-war period, “the images and ideas of business were pervasive, filling much of America’s cultural space *with a series of selectively distorted symbols* that made it difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to discover and articulate

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<sup>1</sup> Tattersal, Tattersall, 2010:400.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *emphasis* added.

<sup>3</sup> Lasswell, 1927:627. *Emphasis* added.

competing visions of the American polity.”<sup>1</sup> Professor V.O. Key of Harvard University expressed the same point of view. In the cascading effort deployed by big business to alter the “climate of opinion,” the strategy was straightforward: “to fill “America’s cultural space” with a constant stream of “selectively distorted symbols” in order to “shape public attitudes favourably toward the business system.”<sup>2</sup> Enter satire.

In satirical humour, there is a strikingly similar mechanism at play: the re-arrangement of significant symbols. But the intent of satirical manipulations is to dissuade, not to persuade. It is not to “inculcate”<sup>3</sup> love or hate, as Lasswell would have it, but to debunk and to demystify existing symbolic arrangements. Humour itself is a cognitive activity whereby a symbolic arrangement contrasts with an already existing symbolic arrangement and regularly exposes the “arbitrariness” of existing symbolic arrangements.<sup>4</sup> If the general uncritical consensus – manufactured consent, conventional thinking, ideas that are taken for granted, etc. – is conceptualized as a set of manipulated symbolic arrangements that enjoy general currency, then satire can be imagined as a set of symbolic arrangements that call uncritical ones into doubt.

If laughter is a physiological event and humour is a cognitive activity that releases that event, then comedy is a series of instances of humour arranged in a narrative or storyline and satire is a series of instances of humour arranged in a narrative to challenge existing political-economic narratives. It follows then that stand-up satire, given that it employs a humorous “monologue as a vehicle of social critique,”<sup>5</sup> involves the externalization of a particular arrangement of symbols in order to contrast pre-existing symbolic arrangements that enjoy a wide uncritical consensus. Is this view

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<sup>1</sup> Fones-Wolf, 1995:288. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> See Key, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Lasswell, 1935:189.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, 1968:370.

<sup>5</sup> Yaross Lee, 2017:xvii.

of stand-up satire supported by the scholarship on humour, comedy and satire? In order to answer this question, this chapter will review the most rigorous and prestigious contributions in the field of comedy and humour studies.

#### 4. Common Theoretical Denominators

The western canon on humour, comedy and satire offers several important insights that are found both in terms of theory and practice. Averroes' Commentaries on Aristotelian poetics are an example of the former; Voltaire's *Candide* an example of the latter. The canon can be divided chronologically in three major groups: classic, modern and contemporary. The first consists of early theoretical contributions by Socrates, Aristotle, Averroes, and Erasmus. The second consists of perspectives offered by Lord Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Freud and Bakhtin. While contemporary scholarship, based on advanced research methods, consists of insights provided by Mary Douglas, John Morreall, Andrew Stott, Bastian Mayerhofer and Diana Popa. The list is not exhaustive for reasons of analytical economy, as this inquiry attempts to provide sufficient documentation consistent with precision of argument: references are therefore examined chronologically and collected into a consistent theoretical whole. The purpose is to generate a general framework for the analysis of stand-up satire as the artillery of critique against the general uncritical consensus.

##### 4.1 Classic Theory

In 420 BCE, Socrates hinted at the relief function of humour, observing that comedy is "a mixture of pain and pleasure."<sup>1</sup> Later, Aristotle added the dimension of

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in Plato, *Phaedo*, 360 BCE.

incongruity, because “the ridiculous is a kind of mistake.”<sup>1</sup> Fast-forward to the Middle Ages. Around 1150, Averroes<sup>2</sup> reformulated Aristotelian dramatic theory in his commentaries, distinguishing comedy from tragedy. According to Averroes, comedy is the art of denunciation, intended to criticize corruption, whereas tragedy is the art of commendation, intended to encourage righteousness. In fact, as summarized by Javitch, Averroes’ “interpretation of tragedy as the art of praise (aiming to incite virtue), and of comedy as the art of blame (aiming to castigate vice)”<sup>3</sup> is an early stepping stone in the study of satire. The “art of blame” involves problems (*vices*), hence Mark Twain’s quip that “there is no laughter in heaven,”<sup>4</sup> because in heaven there are no problems. The central element is the definition of the aims of satire: humour as the vehicle for blame, to castigate vices.

In 1511, Erasmus added his contribution in *The Praise of Folly*. The book, which could have otherwise been titled “Everyone is a fraud,” meticulously castigated the vices of virtually all the holders of power, both spiritual and temporal; and especially merchants, the “basest of all others” who

though they lie by no allowance, swear and forswear, steal, cozen, and cheat, yet shuffle themselves into the first rank, and all because they have gold rings on their fingers. Nor are they without their flattering friars that admire them and give them openly the title of honourable, in hopes, no doubt, to get some small snip of it themselves.<sup>5</sup>

In the above excerpt, Erasmus connects 16<sup>th</sup> century political economy and ideology: the growing merchant class and their flattering admirers, the friars. The *Praise of Folly* was printed in 1511, and six years later, riding on the ripple effect brought about by the book and anti-Catholic agitation, Martin Luther nailed a copy of his 95 Theses to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Poetics*, 350 BCE.

<sup>2</sup> Medieval Arab polymath (1126-1198) who, among others, sparked the revival of Greek culture which was lost in Europe during the Dark Ages, and thus contributed to Neo-classicism.

<sup>3</sup> Javitch, 1999:54.

<sup>4</sup> As cited by Morreall, 2009:51.

<sup>5</sup> Erasmus, 2003:39.

door of the Wittenberg Castle church, inaugurating the Protestant Reformation. In fact, as P.S. Allen noted, a catholic Spaniard, Caruaialus, bitterly condemned Erasmus' exercise of free thought, for he was, "in the guise of a jester, destroying the whole Church with his quips and jokes."<sup>1</sup> In no small manner, the sequence of events demonstrates the validity of David Hume's maxim: "the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded."<sup>2</sup> Erasmus' *Folly* destabilized conventional opinion, and Martin Luther added his energetic political activism to the cause of religious independence from Rome. And although, as Janin noted, Erasmus would have "denied it vehemently, later reformers found that *The Praise of Folly* had helped prepare the way for the Protestant Reformation."<sup>3</sup>

In his encomium, Erasmus argued that "folly" brings mankind some relief from their accumulated woes,<sup>4</sup> inaugurating the relief theory of humour. Erasmus observed that "the otherwise great Rhetoricians with their tedious and long-studied Orations can hardly effect, to wit, to remove the trouble of the Mind, I have done it at once, with my single look."<sup>5</sup> He also asked readers to appreciate "from how many evils I have delivered my Fools,"<sup>6</sup> so to "take notice of this blessing which Nature hath giv'n fools, that they are the only plain, honest men and such as speak truth."<sup>7</sup> In light of anecdotal evidence, Erasmus concluded that that "the same thing which, if it came from a wise man's mouth might prove a Capital Crime, spoken by a fool is receiv'd with delight."<sup>8</sup> In a similar fashion to Erasmus' *fool*, the famed playwright George B. Shaw also talked about the

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, 1913: xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, 1889:109-110.

<sup>3</sup> Janin, 2008:160.

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus, 1913:9.

<sup>5</sup> 1913:71.

<sup>6</sup> 1913:69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> 1913:72.



freedom of the satirist. In describing the works of Mark Twain, Shaw noted that “he has to put things in such a way as to make people who would otherwise hang him believe he is joking.”<sup>1</sup> Which is summarized in the quote that is often attributed to Shaw: “if you’re going to tell people the truth you better make ‘em laugh, otherwise they’ll kill you.”<sup>2</sup> Erasmus also observed that steady and systematic exposure to satire can make people “so well skilled at the same weapons [artifices of persuasion], that they would be able to keep their pass, and fence off all assaults of conviction.”<sup>3</sup> For this reason P.S. Allen, in her introduction to Erasmus’ *Folly* noted that satire is a “sharp instrument to cut away the blinding film of custom.”<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.2 Modern Theory

In the first decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (henceforth, Lord Shaftesbury), one of the earliest observers of the relationship between satire and propaganda from a systemic, structural point of view, noted that satire grows in reaction to what he called “spiritual tyranny.”<sup>5</sup> In his day the Catholic Church was by far the main influencer of public discourse and public opinion. And for this analysis “spiritual tyranny” and “propaganda” can be considered equivalent. Lord Shaftesbury says: “the greater the weight [of spiritual tyranny] is, the more bitter the satire. (...)”<sup>6</sup> This is the first theory on the relationship between propaganda and satire in the western canon, the first attempt at a law of social psychic pressure and release. Satire, Shaftesbury posits, “will naturally fall heaviest where the constraint [imposed by spiritual tyranny] has been severest. The greater the weight is,

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<sup>1</sup> Kaplan, 1967: 277.

<sup>2</sup> Starr, 1951:60.

<sup>3</sup> Erasmus, 1876:129.

<sup>4</sup> Allen, 1913: iii.

<sup>5</sup> Shaftesbury, 1709:5.

<sup>6</sup> Shaftesbury, 1709:5.

the bitterer will be the satire. The higher the slavery, the more exquisite the buffoonery.”<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury thought that there was much “spiritual tyranny” in his society, and asked the reader “what the effect must be when men came to be *persecuted from all sides* about their manner and appearance, and had to struggle and improvise in attempts to adjust and compose their facial expressions *according to the right mode*.”<sup>2</sup> As aforementioned, Shaftesbury’s “spiritual tyranny” is the conceptual equivalent of “propaganda” and he held that humour was a test for the veracity of conventional opinions: “For without wit and humour, reason can hardly have its proof, or be distinguished,”<sup>3</sup> because it was the “the saying of an ancient Sage, ‘that humour was the only test for gravity; and gravity, of humour, for a subject which would not bear raillery was suspicious; and a jest which would not bear a ferocious examination was certainly false wit’.”<sup>4</sup>

In assessing the impact of witty critics and jokers, Shaftesbury concluded that satirists “seemed better critics [than pedagogues] and more ingenious, and fair in their way of questioning received opinions, and exposing the ridicule of things.”<sup>5</sup> Although Shaftesbury contrasted jesters with pedagogues back in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, in our contemporary times we can replace “pedagogues” with the mainstream news media. Recent polls, as previously discussed, find that millennials appear to trust comedians far more than the news media.<sup>6</sup> And some fifty years after the publication of *The Praise of Folly*, Voltaire penned *Candide*, a classic work of satire that aimed to undermine the sentimental foibles of his age, the clichés, absurd reasonings.

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<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:72.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, 2017:9.

<sup>3</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:73-74

<sup>4</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:74.

<sup>5</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:81.

<sup>6</sup> Poindexter, 2012.

In the early twentieth century, other dimensions were added to the analysis of satire. Sigmund Freud too examined the “pressures” inherent in civilized societies and the economies involved in “psychic expenditures” released by jokes. Given the “repressive activity of civilization,”<sup>1</sup> the joke, for Freud, “represents rebellion against that authority, a liberation from its pressure.”<sup>2</sup> And therefore, when we look at satire, we find that

the object of the joke’s attack may equally well be institutions, people in their capacity as vehicles of institutions, dogmas of morality or religion, views of life which enjoy so much respect that objections to them can only be made under the mask of a joke and indeed of a joke concealed by its façade.<sup>3</sup>

Freud hypothesized a psychic expenditure involved in the repressive activity of civilization, under the weight of circulated “dogmas”. And he noted that “by the help of a joke, this internal resistance is overcome in the particular case and the inhibition lifted.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in societies where the overwhelming stream of communications reiterate “dogmas”, psychic pressures abound: “That being so (...) both for erecting and for maintaining a psychical inhibition some ‘psychical expenditure’ is required (...) it is therefore plausible to suppose that *this yield of pleasure corresponds to the psychical expenditure that is saved.*”<sup>5</sup> The literature therefore offers a socio-economic hypothesis by way of Shaftesbury and Freud: that satire is directly proportional to propaganda, the greater the weight of propaganda, the greater the demand for release; and in this case, for satire. Freud certainly believed in the validity of this hypothesis when he stated, in

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, 1960:120.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, 1960:125.

<sup>3</sup> Freud, 1960:129.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, 1960:144.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, 1960:145.

no equivocal terms, that “[A joke] shatters respect for institutions and truths in which the hearer has believed.”<sup>1</sup>

Freud also argued that our enjoyment of jokes indicates what is being repressed in the psyche in more serious ways. The joke allows to “overcome inhibitions”, as they are attacks on psychic controls.<sup>2</sup> And it is important to note that these “psychic controls” are not “natural” but artificial, and increased and sustained, daily, by the mass-media, which are “historically unique instruments of psychic management and manipulation.”<sup>3</sup> In economic terms, the demand for liberating satire increases as the “spiritual tyranny,” the psychological repression, increases in society. Freud thought that modern civilization and higher education played a major role in “the development of *repression*” and supposed that, under such repression, the psyche undergoes “an alteration (...) as a result of which what was formerly felt as agreeable now seems unacceptable and is rejected with all possible psychical force. (...) *The repressive activity of civilization* brings it about that (...) *tendentious jokes* provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost.”<sup>4</sup> By “tendentious jokes” Freud meant satirical ones, ones that deal with power and wealth, authority, deference and worship. In line with Shaftesbury, Freud praised satirical humour for disabling psychic repression because “tendentious jokes are especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority. The joke then represents rebellion against that authority, *a liberation from its pressure.*”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, 1960:163.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, 1960:144. Verbatim: “By the help of a joke, this internal resistance is overcome in the particular case and the inhibition lifted.” Freud also hypothesized that “this yield of pleasure corresponds to the physical expenditure that is saved” (145) and that jokes “shatter respect for institutions and truths in which the hearer has believed.” (163)

<sup>3</sup> Mills, 2000:305.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, 1960:120-121.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, 1960:125.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin offers a similar analysis. In his study of the carnivalesque, Bakhtin found that humour and cynicism may least of all be defined as naïve. Instead, they demand careful and attentive analysis. In resisting “praise, flattery, hypocrisy (...) this laughing truth expressed in curses and abusive words, degraded power,”<sup>1</sup> and Bakhtin posited that “[l]aughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; *it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry*, from fear and intimidation, from naiveté and illusion.”<sup>2</sup> We thus find in Bakhtin a recurring theme present in Erasmus, Shaftesbury and Freud: liberation from pressure. The Russian formalist also argued that the carnival itself exposed the existence of two worlds, one official, the other common, one restrictive, the other liberating. Echoing Shaftesbury’s “spiritual tyranny”, Bakhtin observed that in Medieval Europe the official culture was “ruled by a special type of relationship. Officially the palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes were *dominated by hierarchy and etiquette*, but in the marketplace *a special kind of language* was heard, almost *a language of its own*, quite unlike the language of the Church, palace, courts and institutions.”<sup>3</sup> This is a political economic critique of culture, with power and authority vested in the ecclesiastical and aristocratic minority, against the culture of the marketplace, of common people. And Carnival, Bakhtin suggests, is where the clash between the two cultures becomes most visible, in what comedy scholar Andrew Stott describes as “an eternal struggle (...) comprising a political manifestation of popular opposition to the dominant order and the enactment of alternative regimes.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin, 1984:92-93.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: 123.

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin, 1968:154.

<sup>4</sup> 2014:34.

### 4.3 Contemporary Theory

In 1970, the famed British symbolic anthropologist Mary Douglas examined the epistemology of the joker in a manner wholly consistent with Shaftsbury, Freud and Bakhtin's earlier observations. In a most important passage in the history of satirical theory, Douglas concluded that "the joke affords an opportunity for realizing that *an accepted pattern* has no necessity (...) that a *particular ordering of experience*<sup>1</sup> may be arbitrary and subjective."<sup>2</sup> And when is this most evident? When is it evident that "particular orderings of experience" are operative and at play? According to Douglas, they become apparent when humour is employed in order "to lighten for everyone the oppressiveness of social reality,"<sup>3</sup> for the "joker's own immunity can be derived philosophically from his apparent access to another reality than that mediated by *the relevant structure*. (...) His jokes expose the inadequacy of realist structurings of experience. (...) [because jokers] pass beyond the bound (...) and give glimpses of truth which escape through the *mesh of structured concepts*."<sup>4</sup> From a theoretical point of view, Mary Douglas' "particular ordering of experience", "reality mediated by the relevant structure", "realist structurings of experience", are analytical synonyms of propaganda, and the "mesh of structured concepts," its by-product, is an analytical synonym of the general uncritical consensus. Conveniently abbreviated as GUC, the general uncritical consensus is the "mesh" of structured concepts, whose "inadequacy" is "exposed" by jokers, in Douglas' terms. And the joker is thus generally immune to the GUC given his "apparent access" to another reality, that is, to perspectives outside the

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<sup>1</sup> An uncritically accepted pattern, and a particular ordering of experience, like capitalist ideology, for instance, or any operational group belief, represented as it were by conventional wisdom, custom, mainstream commentary, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, 1968:365

<sup>3</sup> Douglas, 1968:372

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, 1968:373.

sphere of GUC. In fact, for Douglas, “the joke form rarely lies in the utterance alone (...) it can be identified in the total social situation.”<sup>1</sup>

On the subject of mirth, Douglas very much concurred with Freud, noting that the enjoyment of jokes derives from a “kind of economy. At all times we are expending energy in monitoring our subconscious so as to ensure that our conscious perceptions come through a filtering control. The joke, because it breaks down the control, gives the monitoring system a holiday.”<sup>2</sup> With humour, “something is saved in psychic effort, something which might have been repressed has been allowed to appear [given that] for Freud the joke lies in the release from control.”<sup>3</sup> And given that this “control” is cognitive, the release from it, in a context where discourse is dominated by propaganda, amounts to a release from the control of opinions exercised by propaganda. Douglas therefore concluded that “all jokes have this subversive effect on the *dominant structure of ideas*. Those which bring forward the physiological exigencies to which mortal beings are subject, are using one universal, never-failing technique of subversion.”<sup>4</sup> The dominant structure of ideas is another way of describing Adorno’s general uncritical consensus. Douglas in fact explained that jokes are plays “upon form” that bring into relation

disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first. (...) The joke merely affords an opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that *any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary* and subjective.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1968:363.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:364.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*:365.

An example of a particular ordering of experience that is arbitrary is the political economy, the system for life in which *Homo sapiens* seeks a livelihood, with all of its inequality, cruelty, greed and indoctrination.

An exhaustive literature review has determined that a synthesis of Douglas' contextual theory for humorous subversion and Adorno's general uncritical consensus is wholly absent in the scholarly literature. And yet, in light of the present discussion, its plausibility would appear very strong indeed. Though, to be fair, the magnitudes involved are different. When Douglas refers to "particular ordering of experience" and "accepted pattern," she is pointing out a small aspect of a much larger whole, insofar as the "accepted pattern" is artificial and by and large sustained by the mass media. On the other hand, Adorno's general uncritical consensus can be viewed as the aggregate effect brought about by the constant circulation and dissemination of "particular orderings of experience", ie. Propaganda. In this light, it is no surprise that "in every period there is a pile of submerged jokes"<sup>1</sup> and the form of the joke "consists of a victorious tilting of uncontrol against control, it is an image of the levelling of hierarchy, the triumph of (...) unofficial values of official ones."<sup>2</sup>

Douglas also examined the role of the joker, who "lightens for everyone the oppressiveness of social reality, demonstrates its arbitrariness by making light of formality in general."<sup>3</sup> She explains that jokers "challenge the relevance of the dominant structure"<sup>4</sup> via their "apparent access to other reality than that mediated by the relevant structure"<sup>5</sup> in order to "expose the inadequacy of realist structurings of experience" and

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas, 1968:366.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:372.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:373.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



“give glimpses of a truth which escapes through the mesh of structured concepts.”<sup>1</sup> The “mesh of structured concepts” is the outcome of what Douglas terms the “social control of experience.” It is largely congruent with Adorno’s general uncritical consensus, in so far as mass propaganda’s function is the engineering of mass consent.<sup>2</sup> “The social control of experience” is akin to Lasswell’s definition of propaganda: “the management of collective attitudes via the manipulation of significant symbols.”<sup>3</sup> Satire can thus be used as a test for the existence of the sphere of GUC in that it reveals “the arbitrary, provisional nature of the very categories of thought, by lifting their pressure for a moment and suggesting other ways of structuring reality.”<sup>4</sup>

The existence of other ways of structuring reality apart from those offered by “the dominant structure” is a key point examined by John Morreall, founder of the International Society for Humour Studies (ISHS). In his influential 1983 contribution on humour, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, Morreall notes that “though wit is often based on similarities between things”<sup>5</sup> at other times it is not, and in order to “understand the comment we have to *shift to that point of view* from our ordinary one.”<sup>6</sup> And “shift” is the key to the relationship between humour and political consciousness. In the *Humour and Freedom* chapter, Morreall explores the “liberating effect of humour,”<sup>7</sup> which is nowhere more apparent than in “in the political sphere.”<sup>8</sup> He stresses that possessing “a sense of humour” is a cognitive ability that aids in the “preservation” of “freedom of thought.”<sup>9</sup> Morreall therefore would agree with Shaftesbury that satire reacts to ideological

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Bernays, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> 1927:627.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, 1968:374.

<sup>5</sup> 1983:73.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* *Emphasis added.*

<sup>7</sup> 1983:101.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

persecution, for “the persecuting spirit has raised the bantering one.”<sup>1</sup> He adds that the “spirit of humour is incompatible with both hero-worship and fear (...) [it] is liberating not only in the face of political constraints, but also with social mores. When we look at our own culture with a sense of humour, we see our customs, which *we often take for granted* as the *natural way of doing things*, as just one possible way of doing things.”<sup>2</sup> Recall P.S. Allen’s point of satire piercing the “blinding film of custom.”<sup>3</sup>

In contemporary mass mediated culture, our ways of seeing and doing things are not only taken for granted, but also, by and large, fabricated. On the “perspective shifting” that satire offers, Morreall echoes Mary Douglas, who posits that humour offers “an opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity.”<sup>4</sup> Meaning, it affords a chance to realize that some idea or belief a person had taken for granted, accepted, has no reason for being accepted. Therefore, in a society that produces and disseminates “accepted patterns” continuously, possessing a strong sense of humour is one of the “best weapons”<sup>5</sup> against indoctrination; or, as Morreall would have it, against “the procedure known as ‘brainwashing’.” Indoctrination, much like brainwashing boils down to “essentially trying to take away [a] person’s mental flexibility and capacity to think for himself, and implant in the person a single line of thought from which he will not deviate.”<sup>6</sup> And what role does humour play? Citing psychiatric evidence, Morreall says that if the person can “maintain his sense of humour, [indoctrination] will not happen. As psychiatrist William Sargent reported, based on his experience with people

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<sup>1</sup> 1709:72.

<sup>2</sup> 1983:102-103.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, 1913: iii.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, 1968:365.

<sup>5</sup> 1983:107.

<sup>6</sup> 1983:107.

in concentration camps, if at any point in the brainwashing procedure the subject laughs, 'the whole process is wrecked and must be begun all over again'."<sup>1</sup>

If we examine the satirical content of stand-up comedy, heeding to Mary Douglas' suggestion that "in every period there is a pile of submerged jokes,"<sup>2</sup> it will become evident that the pile of submerged jokes ready to be discovered is by and large the result of what Morreall calls "brainwashing," just on a mass scale. In this research project, the mass scale effect is the general uncritical consensus, GUC for convenience. Recall Lasswell's definition of propaganda: "the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols [whereby] the word attitude is taken to mean a tendency to act according to certain patterns of valuation."<sup>3</sup> Certain "accepted patterns" Mary Douglas would say, conducive to the aims of propaganda: "the presentation of an object in a culture in such a manner that certain cultural attitudes will be organized toward it. The problem of the propagandist is to intensify the attitudes favourable to his purpose, to reverse the attitudes hostile to it".<sup>4</sup> Lasswell concluded that propaganda is "ever-present" in modern life because "most of that which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion. Democracy has proclaimed the dictatorship of palaver."<sup>5</sup>

This should come as no surprise, given the abundant evidence covered in Chapters 4-6. The key point is that propaganda will be heaviest where the population has won enough civil and political rights that "violence and intimidation" are not options any longer, and therefore concentrations of power and wealth must turn to

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<sup>1</sup> 1983:107.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, 1968:366.

<sup>3</sup> 1927:627.

<sup>4</sup> 1927:629.

<sup>5</sup> 1927:631.

managing opinions through propaganda. In line with insights by V.O. Key and Alex Carey among others, reviewed in Chapter 6.

On the subject of humour and intellectual freedom, Morreall concludes: “the person with a sense of humour can never be fully dominated, for his ability to laugh at what is incongruous will put him above it to some extent and will preserve a measure of his freedom.”<sup>1</sup> Morreall’s “ability to laugh at what is incongruous” is an equivalent to Douglas’ “access to another reality,” and Morreall’s “preserve a measure of his freedom” is an equivalent to Douglas’ “joker’s own immunity.” The conceptualization is identical; the difference is solely semantic. Mary Douglas and John Morreall both point at the same power conferred by the same cognitive ability.

Turning to satire specifically, according to University of Southern California Professor of English Andrew Stott, it is “the most directly political of comic forms,”<sup>2</sup> in that it “aims to criticize or censure people and ideas through the use of humour.”<sup>3</sup> It’s the “most directly political” because it deals with imbalances in power and wealth, and its humour is often employed to level hierarchically, real as well as perceived. The central element is the definition of the aims of satire: humour as a vehicle for blame to castigate vices, in line with Averroes’ insight. Hence, satire is not a pre-emptive force, but one that functions in reaction to pre-existing conditions or events.

So, to understand stand-up satire, which consists of humour (but is not limited to humour), it is necessary to look at what it reacts to. Rebecca Krefting, Professor of American Studies at Skidmore College and Director of the Media & Film studies Program, mentions this aspect in passing in her book on *American Humour and Its Discontents*, and calls satirical comedy “charged humour” because it “tears into the

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<sup>1</sup> 1983:101.

<sup>2</sup> 2014:156.

<sup>3</sup> 2005:147.

fabric of our beliefs.”<sup>1</sup> But as with the majority of scholarship, Krefting’s contribution too misses the central point: satire, or “charged humour,” principally tears into the fabric of our “uncritical beliefs,” which, if taken together, can be conceptualized as forming a sphere: the sphere of general uncritical consensus. This consensus, crucially, is not spontaneous, but manufactured, engineered.<sup>2</sup> Stott touches on this aspect, echoing Shaftesbury’s law of humour: “a nation’s appetite for comedy is formed in direct proportion to the degree of political oppression it experiences.”<sup>3</sup> If comedy booms occurred in the US, which they have in the 60s, 90s and 2010s, then scholars must wonder under what guise does “political oppression” occur in the US. This research project points at propaganda pressure to engineer opinion, to engineer uniformity; basically Shaftesbury’s “spiritual tyranny.” And hence satire “aims to denounce folly and vice and to urge ethical and political reform through the subjection of ideas to humorous analysis.”<sup>4</sup>

In *Developments in Linguistic Humour Theory*, whose editorial team and advisory board consists of a veritable who’s who of humour research,<sup>5</sup> Marta Dynel reviews the main approaches used in the field and represents the current “state of the art”<sup>6</sup> of inquiry. The three main approaches are the incongruity, superiority and relief theories of humour, although it is the “incongruity approach that prevails in linguistic scholarship.”<sup>7</sup> The volume includes interdisciplinary developments in the linguistics of humour and draw on findings from other fields, primarily “sociology, psychology and

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<sup>1</sup> 2014:2.

<sup>2</sup> 2001:100.

<sup>3</sup> 2014:150.

<sup>4</sup> 2014:156.

<sup>5</sup> Among others, Delia Chiaro, Giseline Kuipers, Salvatore Attardo, Sharon Lockyer, John Morreall.

<sup>6</sup> 2013:ix.

<sup>7</sup> 2013:vii.

anthropology.”<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this inquiry, the significant contributions are from Mayerhofer<sup>2</sup> and Popa,<sup>3</sup> while the General Theory of Verbal Humour – which seeks to explain and predict which texts are funny, why, and which are not<sup>4</sup> – is not. The present inquiry, once again, does not aim to examine the properties of “funny,” but the context in which stand-up satire emerges and which provides it with targets. In this sense, it is similar, though not identical, to Bakhtin’s carnivalesque model, in which satire enters into “all spheres of ideological life.”<sup>5</sup>

Mayerhofer’s study offers a neuro-cognitive approach centred on “perspective clashing,” essentially on how humorous structures are “processed in the recipients’ minds, how they can be mentally represented, and how this representation could trigger the emotional reaction of laughter and mirth.”<sup>6</sup> Perspective clashing is in line with incongruity theories in that it implies cognitive discrepancies of some sort, an “incompatibility between a perceived situation or stimulus and its expected pattern; i.e. an individual’s cognitive model of reference.”<sup>7</sup> The cognitive model of reference is constructed based on “a chunk of knowledge. If the new input is surprising given the expectations based on the cognitive model of reference, incongruity arises.”<sup>8</sup> Here Mayerhofer supports Hurley *et al.*’s debugging theory<sup>9</sup> of humour, whereby humour occurs in “overcoming committed false beliefs.”<sup>10</sup> When these false beliefs are held by a group, they can be considered (false) operative group beliefs,<sup>11</sup> and laughter is assumed

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<sup>1</sup> 2013:ix.

<sup>2</sup> 2013:211-234.

<sup>3</sup> 2013:367.

<sup>4</sup> Attardo, 1994; Attardo, 2001; Raskin, 1985; Raskin, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Kibler, 1970:73.

<sup>6</sup> 2013:212-213.

<sup>7</sup> 2013:213.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> 2011.

<sup>10</sup> 2013:221.

<sup>11</sup> Examined in the next chapter.

as the “emotional reward for a committed belief we have successfully abandoned.”<sup>1</sup> However, neither Hurley *et al.* nor Mayerhofer provide an account for the production and circulation of “false beliefs” in society, nor what forces influence the “chunk of knowledge,” which is surprising, given that prominent satirical comedians variously define themselves, along with Lenny Bruce, “surgeons with scalpels for false values.”<sup>2</sup> The present inquiry, on the other hand, does include models for the production and circulation of false beliefs and values in society, and therefore the other side of Mayerhofer’s “perspective clashing” equation is not left unexamined: the chunks of knowledge he refers to are systematically and continuously manipulated by propaganda.

In *Televised Political Satire: New Theoretical Introspections*, Diana Popa defines satire in terms of its function, as it “proposes progress and the betterment of society through the exposure of human vices and follies to ridicule and scorn,”<sup>3</sup> and its mechanism, for “in satire, incongruity is employed to emphasise the gap between the ideal and the real, between appearance and essence.”<sup>4</sup> Again, this reference to a gap between the ideal and the real, between appearance and essence, wherein language plays the crucial part. As Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale University, Robert Dahl said, the reality most people live in “*falls short not only of an ideal* but of an actual condition of equality that was taken for granted.”<sup>5</sup>

Popa argues that political satire addresses “the inconsistencies and inadequacy of political acts and decisions, and the incompetence, recklessness, and corruption of

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<sup>1</sup> 2013:221.

<sup>2</sup> Zoglin, R. 2008:10. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> 2013:375.

<sup>4</sup> 2013:376.

<sup>5</sup> Dahl, 1990:95.

politicians and political leaders.”<sup>1</sup> Her “macro-to-micro” multilayer model explains satire as a “mode” in which the “condensation of a complex idea”<sup>2</sup> takes place. This conception of satirical mode, or function, is central, and will be explored in the next chapter, but in a slightly revised form: satirical content as statements in which a condensation of “complex symbols” occurs in order to dissolve operative group beliefs. Thus, Mayerhofer and Popa’s contributions fit well within a specific, rigorous and prestigious tradition of satirical theory. The theoretical model proposed in this dissertation is developed on top of this tradition’s several contributions.

Satire theory, thus reviewed, comes full circle. The evidence is in Andrew Stott’s definition of satire, which consists of three parts: 1) aiming to denounce folly and vice; 2) urging ethical and political reform; 3) subjecting ideas to humorous analysis. For the purposes of the present inquiry, the second part can be discarded. The focus is on the denunciation of folly and vice *via* the subjection of ideas to humorous analysis, and the key term is *via*. Parts 1 and 2 of Stott’s definition are consistent with the classical literature, from Averroes (“comedy as the art of blame”) through Erasmus (“a hard-hitting satire on church and lay corruption, arrogance and incompetence”<sup>3</sup>) to Shaftesbury (satirical humour is a “lenitive remedy against vice, and a kind of specific against superstition and melancholy”<sup>4</sup> because “without wit and humour reason can hardly be tested, or be identified as such”<sup>5</sup>). They are also consistent with modern and contemporary insights. Freud noted the connection between propaganda and satire, stating that “every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same jokes is

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> 2013:388.

<sup>3</sup> Janin, 2008:160.

<sup>4</sup> 2014:180.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, 2011:5.



evidence of *far-reaching psychical conformity*.”<sup>1</sup> And in Bakhtin, Mary Douglas and John Morreall we find that the employment of humour for political critique provides for “temporary liberation from *the prevailing truth and from the established order*,”<sup>2</sup> because satire gives “glimpses of a truth which escapes through the mesh of structured concepts,”<sup>3</sup> and therefore the holder of satirical thought “can never be fully dominated.”<sup>4</sup> Satire uses perspective clashing<sup>5</sup> to emphasize the “gap between the real and the ideal.”<sup>6</sup> These various strands of theory are consistent internally, amongst each other, and externally, with the other realms of inquiry examined thus far. Therefore, there is a strong case to be made that they belong in the same conceptual framework. Together, they frame the cognitive dimension of satire at the individual level, and its institutional dimension at the social level.

As this review has shown, there are many definitions of satire. Some call it “charged humour,” others humorous social commentary, others more simply as a type of externalization of the language faculty that makes people laugh and think, in that exact order. But satire’s nature is to resist, and so it is fitting that it would also resist definitions.

## 5. The Artillery of Dissensus

At the individual-cognitive level, the perspectives of Shaftesbury, Freud, Douglas and Morreall all assume that humour is a particular cognitive ability. It follows specific parameters; it is built on an associative capacity that recruits symbols already present in the memory of the user; it is used to contextualize any given symbolic arrangement

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, 1960:185. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> Bakhtin, 1968:10.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas, 1968:373.

<sup>4</sup> Morreall, 1983:101.

<sup>5</sup> Popa, 2013:367

<sup>6</sup> Meyerhofer, 2013:211.

provided by “the dominant structure” (in Douglas’s words). Freud agreed that the “essence of wit is neatly to span gulfs between different ideas”<sup>1</sup> and given that the number of concepts the human mind can entertain is theoretically infinite, the associative capacity is theoretically infinite also, much like every other category of human creativity: art, music, etc. However, satirical humour differs from other creative mental abilities in that it confers a “measure of [intellectual] freedom” in the holder, and much in the same way as card games, the best card to draw - the one that can turn a weak hand into a winning one - is always the joker. The question is how to make the leap from the individual level to the societal one, looking at the role of satire as an institution.

This cognitive immunity conferred by a satirical disposition at the individual level is important, politically. After the first wave of mass-mediated political and commercial propaganda that took place in the United States and also in Germany,<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell observed that “eloquence is inversely proportional to solid reason.”<sup>3</sup> And given that “[m]odern propagandists have learnt from advertisers (...) the technique of producing irrational belief,”<sup>4</sup> acquiring “immunity to eloquence is of the utmost importance to the citizens of a democracy.”<sup>5</sup> If “to those who control publicity, [general] credulity is an advantage,”<sup>6</sup> Russell notes that “to the individual, a power of critical judgment is likely to be beneficial; consequently the State does not aim at producing a

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<sup>1</sup> As cited by Douglas, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> In the US, mass-mediated propaganda was pioneered by the Creel Commission to arouse support for US entry into WWI, and later by Edward Bernays to arouse enthusiasm for consumer products. In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler praises American and English propaganda efforts during WWI and expressly advocates modelling German propaganda on the “psychologically right”(234), “ingenious” (237) and “most strikingly effective” (238) propaganda strategies adopted by Anglo-American governments. (Hitler, A. *Mein Kampf*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941)

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2005:246-247.

<sup>4</sup> 2005:247.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> 1962:190

scientific habit of mind.”<sup>1</sup> Again, the refrain on the nexus between humour and immunity.

As aforementioned,<sup>2</sup> Mary Douglas stressed that “the joker’s own immunity can be derived philosophically from his apparent access to another reality than that mediated by the relevant structure. His jokes expose the inadequacy of realist structurings of experience.”<sup>3</sup> Morreall concurs, given that “the person with a sense of humour can never be fully dominated (...) for his ability to laugh at what is incongruous in the political situation will (...) preserve [his freedom] of thought.”<sup>4</sup> In Freud we find too that

it is nevertheless evident that not everyone is equally capable of making use of that method, the joke-work is not at everyone’s command, and altogether only a few people have a plentiful amount of it; and these are distinguished by being spoken of as having ‘wit’. ‘Wit’ appears in this connection as a *special capacity* – rather in the class of the old mental ‘faculties’; and it seems to emerge fairly independently of the others, such as intelligence, imagination, memory, etc.<sup>5</sup>

This “special capacity” is an associative cognitive ability realized in language, and the success of humour reveals that “an accepted pattern,” any operational group belief, was taken for granted. As Freud put it, “every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far-reaching psychical conformity,”<sup>6</sup> underscoring the link between humour and propaganda, and hence the relationship between the general uncritical consensus and the artillery of dissensus. Recall Mary Douglas’ epistemology of satirists who “challenge the relevance of the dominant structure”<sup>7</sup> via their “apparent

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 1962:190.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 7, Section 4.3.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas, 1968:373.

<sup>4</sup> 1983:101.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, 1960:172.

<sup>6</sup> Freud, 1960:185.

<sup>7</sup> 1968:373.

access to other reality than that mediated by the relevant structure.”<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin points in the same direction: the carnival offers a glimpse of another reality and an occasion to challenge the dominant structure. “As opposed to the official feast,” Bakhtin concludes, “one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from *the prevailing truth and from the established order*; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions.”<sup>2</sup>

If we look at satire at the social level, from an institutional point of view, we find that this “temporary liberation” and “suspension” are from “spiritual tyranny,” in Shaftesbury’s words; temporary liberation from “repressive civilization,” in Freud’s words; temporary liberation from propaganda and the general uncritical consensus, in contemporary terms. When Bakhtin posits that carnival satire liberates “from the prevailing truth” and “*from fanaticism (...) and illusion*”<sup>3</sup> he is echoing Shaftesbury’s claim that satirical humour (*raillery* in Shaftesbury’s words) functions as “a kind of specific against superstition (...).”<sup>4</sup>

The social connection between satire and propaganda is also evident in the congruities between comedy and philosophy, as suggested by Morreall: “a standard procedure in both comedy and philosophy is to bring up a *widely accepted idea* and ask the three C questions: Is it clear? Is it coherent? Is it credible?”<sup>5</sup> However, Morreall, much like Krefting, overlooks the central question for contemporary mass-mediated society: how are widely accepted ideas generated, disseminated, and by whom for what purpose? Morreall adds that although “comedy and philosophy work against the natural

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Bakhtin, 1968:10.

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin, 1968:10.

<sup>4</sup> As cited in Stott, 2014:180.

<sup>5</sup> 2009:128. *Emphasis* added.

human predisposition to indoctrination”<sup>1</sup> the problem is that “most of the time, most of us do what we are told and think what we are told. (...) Comedians and philosophers often think in counterfactuals, *mentally manipulating possibilities* as easily as most people think about realities.”<sup>2</sup>

Though it is possible to agree with Morreall when he argues that most of us do and think “what we are told,” if humans were in fact naturally “predisposed” to indoctrination, one wonders why the techniques of collective manipulation would become so sophisticated, painstakingly sustained and systematic, and so lavishly remunerated. University of West Virginia Professor Elizabeth Fones-Wolf would disagree with Morreall on the “natural predisposition” of people to indoctrination. Her research demonstrates “the scale of the efforts and the frenzied dedication”<sup>3</sup> of big business interests to “to shape the ideas and images that constituted America’s political culture” that persuaded “a majority of Americans [came] to give *uncritical support* for big business and the market while growing increasingly suspicious of organized labor and government.”<sup>4</sup> If the tendency to indoctrination were a “natural” inclination in *Homo sapiens*, trillions of dollars need not be spent on propaganda to inculcate love and hate for products and ideas.

In light of the scholarship reviewed thus far, when it comes to satire, the mental manipulation Morreall refers to actually consists of mental reverse-manipulation, that is, the untangling of already existing manipulated symbols, variously manipulated in the interests of commodities, policies and ideas, as Bernays put it.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, three institutional aspects are central to this inquiry. In every society there exists a sphere of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* *Emphasis added.*

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, 2003:235.

<sup>4</sup> Fones-Wolf, 2016. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>5</sup> Bernays, 2004:39.

general uncritical consensus (Douglas' "dominant structure of ideas," "mesh of structured concepts") that gives way to psychological pressures (Shaftesbury's "spiritual tyranny", Freud's "psychic repression"), which satire challenges via the employment of humour in the service of undoing structured concepts, exposing the "inadequacy of realist structurings of experience" and releasing the existing cognitive pressures. Given that in contemporary societies the "dominant structure of ideas" is sustained by the mass media, for the commercial and political purposes outlined in Chapters 5-6, it is necessary to examine the perspectives of satirical comedians themselves. Do their accounts support or refute the scholarship?

## 6. The Brigade of Dissensus

Stand-up satirists are often conscious of their institutional function in society and some of the most prominent ones have explained it in various terms. Lenny Bruce called himself "a surgeon with a scalpel for false values."<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks stressed that it isn't "comedians who come from fucked-up backgrounds. It's the world that's fucked up, and the world needs comedians to set it right."<sup>2</sup> George Carlin chimed in on the objectives of his satire: "I like to find out where the line is, sense where the line is drawn, and then deliberately cross it, and drag the audience with [me] and have them happy that [I] did it. That's the key. Once I get them over there they'll say 'that's good'."<sup>3</sup> In debunking the mythology around and the reverence for the late Steve Jobs, Bill Burr remarked: "I know, this is always uncomfortable, you bought into it,"<sup>4</sup> implying that his role, as a stand-up comedian, is to make audiences opt out of ideas they had hitherto bought into. There are many other similar examples that substantiate this perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Zoglin, R. 2008. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> Hicks, 1988: time code 2:38-2:55.

<sup>3</sup> Carlin, 1997: time code 3:20-3:46.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Burr, 2012: time code 2:26-2:30.

One of the most lucid accounts on the institutional perspectives of stand-up satirists is found in an admirable compendium of interviews edited by long time comedy industry insider, Paul Provenza. In *Satiristas!*, Provenza explains the make-up of satirical comedians, from a birds-eye view, in his introduction:

most comedians are smarter than the average bear. It's just a fact. They have to be, or they can't be doing comedy. In comedy, you have to be at least a notch or two above your audience, and their audience is the average American. I rest my case. *They see absurdity in everything, everywhere, all the time. They can't help it; it's a curse.* And when you see enough of that, you start to get pretty sceptical about things. So they are thinkers. And a lot of them only work nights, so their days are free. That's a dangerous combination, there: a tendency to think and some time to do it. And to read. *They read a lot.* They have to write material all the time, and a lot of information has to keep going in for the jokes to keep coming out.<sup>1</sup>

Provenza also summarizes the mechanism satirical comedians employ in the development and execution of their material, offering this point of view on institutional relationship between satire, acting as the artillery of critique against the general uncritical consensus:

In order to make [audiences] laugh in groups, *you have to know what they think* and why they think it, all the time. A joke works because it's a surprise. You have to know what they expect and what they don't expect before you can surprise them with the unexpected. *You've got to know what the perceived truth is before you can subvert it.* (...) *Comedians*, more than anybody except maybe George Orwell and Karl Rove, *know all about groupthink.* They can smell it. They can feel it. They know how to create it, and they know how to destroy it. If you don't think you're susceptible to groupthink, well then you have never seen a really good comedian.<sup>2</sup> [And satire is] *iconoclasm* in the truest sense of the word: reverence for the icon is what enables those greedy posers to get away with it, so .... Destroy the swamp, and no one buys swampland.<sup>3</sup>

In passing, we can note the conceptual congruity between Provenza's "swampland" and Douglas' "mesh of structured concepts." Given this descriptive affinity, taken as a cue for further inquiry, there are grounds to review the shared perspectives of stand-up

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<sup>1</sup> Provenza *et al.* 2010:xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:xiv-xv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*: 190.

satirists. The most significant contributions in the compendium, published in 2010 and based on interviews carried out between 2009-2010, are reproduced below. Twenty-six perspectives stand out for their congruency with the theoretical contributions examined thus far: Five on the political economy, two on the mass media, four on propaganda, six on the general uncritical consensus, and nine on the function of satire. The congruities are emphasized in italics. They provide a significant sample of perspectives held by major figures who practice the trade.

In terms of the political economy, five quotes stand out: Roseanne Barr's point that "they [the wealthy] block that message, because they're making too much money off of things as they are"; Craig Ferguson's "the political process has been hijacked by corporate culture, corporate control is about minority interests and issues"; Don Novello's "It's all mind game, Democrat or Republican, they're all the same"; David Feldman's "vast economic divide and the control that corporations have"; and Bill Maher's "The heart of the problem is the corporate takeover of government."

Roseanne Barr: "And I, Roseanne Barr, am a Jew and not a Zionist. Most Jewish Americans are like me. In fact, most Jews in Israel think exactly like me, but the top tier – the first and second estates, politicians – all *block that message, because they're making too much money off things as they are.*"<sup>1</sup>

Craig Ferguson: "You have to attack something, I know, but my feeling is you have to attack power. Power is what I attack. I don't attack weakness, because it doesn't feel satisfying to me. (...) *I just know that iconoclasm is what this thing – comedy – is meant to be.* (...) everybody that runs for power is always questionable. (...) power should be made fun of. Anyone who seeks power should be got at. (...) to criticize what's wrong [is not unpatriotic], that's just lies per our own corporate culture. And I'm saying that from my own comfortable office at the CBS Corporation, but corporate culture has sold itself as two things: one, corporate culture has said 'This is truly American,' which is fucking bullshit, and two, corporate culture has said that capitalism and corporate culture are the same thing. That's fucking rubbish as well. (...) My personal belief is that *the political process has been hijacked by corporate culture.* (...) I think what will happen is that as people get more disadvantaged they personally get more political. What we'll see is a rise in political interest, which will eventually

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*: 73.



disseminate corporate control. Because *corporate control is about minority interests and issues that should be majority interests.*"<sup>1</sup>

Don Novello: "It's all *mind game*, and you'll see that both sides are the same. Democrat or Republican, *they're all the same with all that money and the PR and the private planes and scandals and deal-making...* It's just two rocks that look different. Turn 'em over, and they've got the same things underneath 'em man."<sup>2</sup>

David Feldman: "*the real issues in this country (...) Like the vast economic divide and the control that corporations have.* That's all that matters to me. The only candidate worth voting for is one who says 'You're not black, not Jewish, not Hispanic, not gay, not whatever interest group. What you are is not rich, and one paycheck away from losing your house and health insurance, that's what you are.' Forget this identity politics we've fallen prey to, it's just haves and have nots, that's it."<sup>3</sup>

Bill Maher: "I lay a lot of blame on the media (...). The problem begins with the corporate takeover of news organizations. (...) We're coasting on this image of being number one that we've had in our minds, but it's not 1955 anymore. (...) The heart of the problem is the corporate takeover of government – otherwise known as fascism. Congress is just the leisure service of American corporations now. *That's hard to defeat because people don't understand; they can't seem to see 'the corporation' as the entity: they work for a corporation, they love Nabisco's cookies.*"<sup>4</sup>

In terms of the mass media, two quotes stand out in addition to the several examples of mass media censorship outlined in Chapter 1, Section 3: Eddie Brill's comment "All network television is really advertising - with some TV show around it. That's the bottom line. Advertisers want a show to be a certain way so they can sell their product the way they want it to be sold"; and Jello Biafra's "America has far less free press than many other countries. You can write anything you want to, but who's going to publish it?"

Eddie Brill: "it's network TV, so there are places we can't go, even in late-night. (...) these shows are cookie-cutter shows: forty-four minutes of show, sixteen minutes of commercials. *All network television is really advertising - with some TV show around it. That's the bottom line. Advertisers want a show to be a certain way so they can sell their product the way they want it to be sold. So are you looking for the greatest artists to come out there and do their edgiest, most provocative satirical piece? You and I are, but advertisers aren't. And, in a sense, it's really their show.* I understand how a network show has those parameters that keep people from doing what they really want to do, but that game is a

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*: 102;104;105;106.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*: 175.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: 300-301.

given; that's why people watch HBO, that's why people go to live comedy shows – or if they don't, they should – because that's where the real meat is. The six-minute set that comics do on this show [The Late Show with David Letterman] really are basically just little promos for 'go see this person live.' Just like with a band: here's one song from the album; if you like it, buy the rest of it. It's just a nice, crafted, six-minute promo to interest you in seeing more of what this person does without the limitations of television.”<sup>1</sup>

Jello Biafra: “Just cross the border into Canada and you'll see how even their avowedly more conservative newspapers have a lot more actual content in them than newspapers here. *That kind of lack of content is censorship. America has far less free press than many other countries. You can write anything you want to, but who's going to publish it?* Sure, you can put anything you want on the Internet until somebody complains and MySpace, Facebook or Google take it down. You can say anything you want to – as long as nobody gets to read or hear it.”<sup>2</sup>

In terms of propaganda, four quotes stand out: Robin Williams' “discrepancies in what we're told”; Michael McKean's “lag between what they're telling you is the truth and what you perceive the truth to be”; Jay Leno's point about “The New York Times, USA Today, the LA Times, the Boston Globe, (...) hav[ing] the same story”; and David Cross' “now there's more stimulation, more media, more bombardment of the advertising culture we're in. There's a great deal of misinformation and disinformation. America is number one in propaganda.”

Robin Williams: “trying to learn some of *the discrepancies in what we're told*. (...) The big lie only breaks down when you hit 'em with the big truth. (...) We're like the Resistance.”<sup>3</sup>

Micheal McKean: “That's *what satire deals with: the lag between what they're telling you is the truth and what you perceive the truth to be*. (...) *the bubbles people live in*. (...) And it's fine. I understand it, because the world outside is full of police sirens and all kinds of shit. But anyone living within a constant bath of self-assurance like that is very much like a political party. Political parties are groups of people who live inside political bubbles. (...) *Satire has a point to it: it's meant to wound or to correct. It's the work of the muckraker*, to a certain extent.”<sup>4</sup>

Jay Leno: “*The trick* is not to know *more* than everybody else knows, *it's to know exactly what everybody else knows*. If a story's on the cover of the New York Times, USA Today, the L.A. Times, the Boston Globe, *if they all have the same story*, that's what you write jokes about. My job is not to give the audience new information – sometimes you can, but the trick is to *take the information they*

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:235.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:311.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:8;10;12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:136;138.

*already have, then turn it on its head a little, or exaggerate or blow it out of proportion to make it funnier than it is in real life.”<sup>1</sup>*

David Cross: “*People are just not that thoughtful about most things. It’s not like people go, ‘I refuse to listen to politics or watch the news; I’m only going to watch American Idol.’ There’ve always been distractions; there will always be distractions. It’s just now there’s more stimulation, more media, more bombardment of the advertising culture we’re in. I don’t think it’s a calculated, cynical ploy; it’s just capitalism. It’s giving people what they want and finding a way to make money out of it. (...) There’s a great deal of misinformation and disinformation, and the effect of that is probably more the polarization of people than that they’re checking out. (...) And America’s number one in a lot of things in the world, and we’re also number one in propaganda. We have the best, most finely tuned propaganda machine that works without you even realizing it. We honestly believe that we are a blessed country, the best, greatest country in the world, that we’ve done so much good stuff that we aren’t capable of doing any evil, that the rest of the world are all just jealous ‘cause we have the highest quality of life on the planet and we live in a true democracy, and that in America if you don’t like something, you can always do something about it. You and I can sit here and know that’s a crock of shit, but there are plenty of people who believe all of it. (...) Like I was saying [about propaganda], one Bill O’Reilly doesn’t matter, but two thousand Bill O’Reilly’s do matter. One joke doesn’t matter, but two thousand late-night Jay Leno jokes? That starts to add to the cultural feeling.”<sup>2</sup>*

In terms of the general uncritical consensus, six quotes stand out: Paul Mooney’s “People drink the Kool-Aid simply because it’s there to drink;” Dave Attell’s “complacent consumer mentality;” Doug Stanhope’s “America dulls down everything;” Patton Oswalt’s “dumb consumerism to support the overall structure;” Eddie Ifft’s “We’re all chanting the same thing, all drinking the Kool-Aid. It’s groupthink;” and Will Durst’s “mortar of people’s apathy or inattention to things.”

Paul Mooney: “for us as comedians, as truth-sayers, as satirists – political, social, and otherwise – we have a very hard job with this new environment we’re in now. (...) It’s the Jim Jones syndrome. *People drink the Kool-Aid* simply because it’s there to drink. There’s no thought process. (...) *People have been programmed* that if you get out of line, you’re the enemy. See, us comedians, we cross the line, which is good. We open people’s eyes.”<sup>3</sup>

Dave Attell: “*People are so complacent with just buying what they’re sold, and it’s really hard to break that.* I guess if I’m making any points with what I’m doing, it’s breaking up that whole through line of “I’ve been told this is what’s good; I’ll buy anything they tell me I should.” (...) But all they really have is *this shopping mall, consumer mentality.*”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:108.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:290;291.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:44;45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:63.

Doug Stanhope: "America dulls down everything. Maybe everywhere does, but I live in America, and everything always seems to be dulled down. Music, cars, movies – everything. (...) Very few people in this world are actually conveying their own opinions. *People parrot ideas from some media garbage they heard, or half-heard (...) it's all so media-driven, you wonder 'If there were no media, what would I worry about?'* (...) I think it's time for entertainment to take over politics. They've used entertainment for so long to divert and distract people from what's going on politically, it's just ripe to backfire on them."<sup>1</sup>

Patton Oswalt: "I don't want to get too paranoid, but a lot of these awful TV shows like *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, the Britney Spears stuff, *all the stuff that just celebrates dumb consumerism ... that's just another way of supporting this overall structure*. Shows like *Keeping up with the Kardashians* are victory gardens for neocons: it grows the lettuce and the cabbage that'll keep our nation going the way it is. 'Help the neocons – *keep people dumb and buying shit.*'"<sup>2</sup>

Eddie Ifft: "*Most of us all think the same things, eat the same things, drink the same things*. The number one restaurant in America is TGI Friday's, and we all know that's not the best cuisine in the world. (...) that's what America loves, because it's all just pandering to the majority. You get the big portions, and you always know what you're gonna get and it's always gonna taste exactly the same. That's TGI Friday's. That's Applebee's. That's Dane Cook. That's evangelical mega-churches. *We're all chanting the same thing, all drinking the Kool-Aid. It's groupthink: when you see everybody else do it, you think 'this must be the thing to do'.* (...) *With comedy you can rally people against them. Humour really is the only weapon some people have.* (...) And jokes grow too; they travel through lives. You're performing to people who hear those thoughts, and because they laughed at them and maybe felt the truth of them, they'll relate those thoughts to other people. (...) It's amazing how many times I hear Chris Rock quoted, and not as a comedian, not like, 'Chris Rock said the funniest thing....' *It's more that he said something insightful.* He's quoted like a President or a scholar. Ultimately, even though he's trying to make people laugh, *people use those jokes as a guide to their thoughts*. If you say something so profound that it actually causes the laugh, then it can actually change the way people think."<sup>3</sup>

Will Durst: "You first responsibility is always to get the laugh – but if you can make a statement with the laugh, then you're doing something that at least approaches art. And what we can do is *plant seeds of doubt* in the *mortar of people's apathy or inattention to things*. Little seeds that may grow and crack that mortar someday."<sup>4</sup>

And in terms of the purposes of satire, nine quotes stand out: Tommy Smothers' "a more powerful scream against the darkness"; Colin Quinn's "point out the bullshit on both sides of everything"; Greg Poops "being on the outside throwing darts at it [the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:67;68;69.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:145.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:183;184.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:271.

system]”; Will Durst “plant seeds of doubt in the mortar of people’s apathy or inattention to things”; Bob Odenkirk’s “poking fun at and letting the air out of pompous people and pretension and all that”; Scott Thompson’s “We mock our society and poke fun at the foibles of human behaviour”; Andy Borowitz’ hitting a “target rich environment”; Todd Hanson’s “looking at things rationally”; and George Carlin’s “make notes about the freak show and report it to others.”

Tommy Smothers: “If I had the intellect, the intelligence to write and create *a more powerful scream against the darkness*, I’d do it, I’d take it as far as I can – without becoming a preacher, ‘cause I’ve been there before, and it’s not funny and it’s not rewarding.”<sup>1</sup>

Colin Quinn: “I always believed being a comic means you *point out the bullshit* on both sides of everything – and in yourself too. If you’re talking about politics, you have to see that Republicans and Democrats are both lying and hypocritical, and you need to point out how in your own personal life you are, too. (...) *Everybody has the same cable, the same stores, the same fucking iPods, gets the same movies, the same news ... Most of this country has pretty much the same fucking life now, more or less. We’re all the fucking same.*”<sup>2</sup>

Greg Poops: “Political comedy’s included in the discourse much more now. Maher, Stewart and Colbert have important people on their shows – prime ministers, senators, people active in the system. When you do that, you become part of the discourse as opposed to *being on the outside throwing darts at it.*”<sup>3</sup>

Will Durst: “You first responsibility is always to get the laugh – but if you can make a statement with the laugh, then you’re doing something that at least approaches art. And what we can do is *plant seeds of doubt* in the *mortar of people’s apathy or inattention to things*. Little seeds that may grow and crack that mortar someday.”<sup>4</sup>

Bob Odenkirk: “Well, being in comedy is all about *poking fun at and letting the air out of pompous people and pretension and all that*, so the last thing you want is to appear to be pontificating or self-important.”<sup>5</sup>

Scott Thompson: “We *mock our society and poke fun at the foibles of human behaviour*, and that would be satire.”<sup>6</sup>

Andy Borowitz: “There’ve been waves in the past where satire exploded, like the early seventies Nixon years – times not dissimilar from the times we’re in now, actually. (...) So the Bush years have been as kind to satire as the Nixon years

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:215;219.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:271.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 271.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*:286.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*:247.

were. It gave us what the Pentagon calls a *'target rich environment'*. (...) This is not a Republican/Democrat thing at all, but it does seem like large corporations are in the driver's seat, dictating a lot of what our government does. And they *control the media*."<sup>1</sup>

Todd Hanson: "the human condition is inherently flawed, to the point that it is deserving of ridicule. No matter what you're talking about, if it involves the human condition, there's something in there that deserves to be ridiculed. (...) [R]ather than to entertain people with comedy, I'd rather point out things that make me angry, and in so doing, make them angry. That's kind of the idea of satire: *to vex the world*. (...) *Comedy comes from just looking at things rationally without sentimentality*."<sup>2</sup>

George Carlin: "When you're born in the world, you're given a ticket to the freak show. When you're born in America, it's a front-row seat. And some of us in the front row, like me and you, Paul, bring our notebooks. *We make notes about the freak show and report it to others*. That's the role I found myself in."<sup>3</sup>

To combine two representative conceptions of satire: "Throwing darts" at a "target rich environment." Hence, on aggregate, functioning in the manner of an artillery of dissensus. The above perspectives substantiate the theoretical framework proposed thus far: the Brigade of Dissensus employs the Artillery of Dissensus to target elements in the General Uncritical Consensus, against a backdrop influenced by the Political Economy. And satirical comedians, as all the above excerpts illustrate, share many of the perspectives outlined in the scholarship and examined in the present inquiry.

## 7. Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, the declared aim was to assess the presence of congruities in three domains in order to test the validity of hypothesis 2 [H2]. This chapter presented strong conceptual congruities between: 1) various perspectives offered in humour and satire scholarship, and the dimensions they cover; 2) between the scholarship on satire and the scholarship on propaganda and the general uncritical consensus, and the dimensions they cover; and 3) between the scholarship on satire, the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:274; 277.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*:279;282.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:340.

scholarship on propaganda and the general uncritical consensus, and perspectives offered by leading stand-up comics themselves on the function of satire in society. In all three realms remarkable congruities were observed; congruities that can sustain a general theoretical framework. And stand-up satirists' own perspectives indicate the same three aspects that are central to this inquiry: that in contemporary society there exists a sphere of general uncritical consensus (Douglas' "dominant structure of ideas," "mesh of structured concepts") sustained by mass mediated propaganda (Shaftesbury's "spiritual tyranny", Freud's "psychic repression") in the service of a status quo of political economic inequality, which satire challenges via the employment of humour in the service of undoing structured concepts, "plant[ing] seeds of doubt in the mortar of people's apathy or inattention to things," thereby exposing the "inadequacy of realist structurings of experience" and releasing the existing cognitive pressures the "spiritual tyranny" of propaganda entails.

The stated aim of this chapter was to test hypothesis two [H2], that satire functions as the artillery of dissensus against the general uncritical consensus. The properties of the artillery of dissensus are exhibited in this example of SC<sup>2</sup> among others examined in detail in Chapter 9:

It's so funny to me when they were on the news too about the Iraqi alleged assassination attempt. Basically, it was a car bomb, that, you know, the guy driving was gonna kill himself too. And everyone's going 'What a cowardly act. What a cowardly act.' Well, wait a minute. This guy is in a car bomb, gonna blow himself up against this huge fucking capitalist New World Order leader America. And meanwhile, we're launching cruise missiles from 200 miles away on floating iron islands. Who are the cowards again? Point out cowardice again to me in the dictionary. I apparently didn't get the whole meaning correctly when I read it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. 1997. Interval: 53:45-54:30

The two standout elements of the above quote are the propaganda and the political critique: the former is introduced by “and everyone’s going what a cowardly act”, while the latter points out the cowardice in launching missiles from floating iron islands. To test H2, this chapter searched for theoretical coherence in various domains of scholarly inquiry and between the theoretical canon and the perspectives offered by leading stand-up comics themselves on the function of satire in society. It thus brought together the theoretical scholarship on humour, comedy and satire, and the empirical record of stand-up satire, in a harmonious and consistent framework. The manifest existence of congruities between the scholarship and the reflections of practitioners confirms *prima facie* the validity of H2 because the empirical record on stand-up comedians ‘ own perspectives bears to the theoretical scholarship a stronger affinity, both in the function assigned to humour and the epistemology of the satirist, than could possibly have been produced by accident. Therefore, in this light, satire emerges as a cognitive ability, carried out institutionally, that engages a steadfast battle against the general uncritical consensus. And satire takes aim at a “target rich environment” consisting of a panoply of items, symbolic arrangements, that populate the general uncritical consensus, the sphere of GUC. Stand-up satirists typically find an issue in the GUC, any popular idea – ie. an operational group belief – that is taken for granted and undermine it with their humour. But the question now is whether this impression, which is still theoretical, is corroborated or refuted by data: does the satirical content of stand-up comedy bear out the theoretical framework assembled in Parts I and II of this research project? In other words, does the content sustain the context of satire and the contest of satire? This question calls for a longitudinal textual content analysis of stand-up comedy, and a word on methodology is at this point indispensable.



## **PART III**

### **THE CONTENT OF $SC^2$**

## CHAPTER 8: METHOD & METHODOLOGY

*"Explain the complicated and visible,  
by the simple and invisible [for]  
coherent assumptions on what  
is still invisible,  
may increase our  
understanding of the visible."*  
Jean Baptiste Perrin<sup>1</sup>

*"So long as authority inspires awe,  
confusion and absurdity enhance  
conservative tendencies in society."*  
Stanislav Andreski<sup>2</sup>

*"[A] joke is a sort of syllogism,  
with a major proposition as its hypothesis.  
The rest of it, in one fashion or other,  
can be reduced to  
a set of consequences  
running to an absurdity."*  
Stephen Leacock<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Preview

So far, this research project has reviewed and examined the theoretical scholarship in two ways, one contextual the other relational. Part I, on the context for the relationship between humour and political consciousness, elicited major threads from four realms of inquiry and assembled them into a consistent whole. The realms – biolinguistics, political economy, ideology and propaganda – correspond to Chapters 2-5. Part II, on the contest between political consciousness and humour, elicited major threads from two realms of inquiry and assembled them into a consistent dialectical framework, with mass media effects on one end, reduced to the "general uncritical consensus," and satirical humour on the other, acting as the artillery of dissensus. As any interdisciplinary inquiry, the present one recommends itself not so much by detailed and precise arguments, which it has so far strived to produce, as by providing a

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Jacob, 1973:16; Perrin, 1926: [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> 1972:90. Also cited in Sokal *et al.*, 1998:1.

<sup>3</sup> 1938:113-114.

harmonious picture for the relationship between political consciousness and stand-up comedy satire.

This framework for the emergence of satire heeds to E.B. White's caution: "Humour can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind."<sup>1</sup> Instead of dissecting the frog to find the internal mechanisms that cause humour and laughter, this inquiry examined the "pond," to keep with the amphibious metaphor. And the pond, the context, is by and large influenced by political-economic imperatives, which have various ramifications. In contemporary advanced mass-mediated society, these ramifications are informed by systematic and sustained propaganda.

As a whole, the context provides satire with a "target rich environment."<sup>2</sup> In the literature, the context is at times referred to as "the general uncritical consensus,"<sup>3</sup> or "the mesh of structured concepts,"<sup>4</sup> or the "swampland,"<sup>5</sup> and "the mortar of people's apathy or inattention to things,"<sup>6</sup> depending on the field of study: Adorno in Sociology, Mary Douglas in Anthropology, Paul Provenza and Will Durst in Comedy. And E.B. White's caution was not an isolated instance, for Stephen Leacock too expressed the same recommendation for cautious analysis when the subject is humour, because "to analyze is often to destroy. (...) And so perhaps a 'funny character' broken apart and analyzed is like a broken toy; it won't go together again. If the study of humour is ever taken seriously, we must handle it carefully, lest it work its own undoing."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> White, 1999:303.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Borowitz, *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 6.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Adorno, *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 6, Section 5.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas, *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 5.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Provenza, *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 6.

<sup>6</sup> Will Durst, *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 6.

<sup>7</sup> 1935:68.

As Chapter 7 has demonstrated, there is a fundamental consistency between the theories offered by the scholarship on humour and satire and the perspectives of satirists themselves. This consistency supports not only the congruities identified in Chapter 1 - between comedian's political content and select content by academic scholars - but also, and more importantly, the legitimacy of testing Hypothesis 1 [H1] in order to verify the soundness of the theoretical framework:

*H1: that a major indicator suggesting the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus is the satirical content of stand-up comedy, which manifests itself in relation to it.*

As with any methods Chapter, this one too describes the actions taken to investigate the research question and the "rationale for the application of specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information applied to understanding the problem, thereby, allowing the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability."<sup>1</sup> Therefore this chapter will seek to answer two questions: how is the corpus of material collected and the content-significant corpus generated? How will it be analyzed? Three procedural disclaimers will inform both the sample and the chosen methodology: content analysis. The three disclaimers are required insofar as they frame the way in which the object of H1 will be tested.

## 2. Procedural Disclaimers

Given that the satirical content of stand-up comedy consists of statements, that in turn statements consist of facts and assertions of facts, and given that these statements are communicated, that is, externalized via spoken language, three disclaimers are in order. There is a need to: distinguish between facts and propositions; highlight the dependency of beliefs and statements on propositions; address the fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> USC, 2017:[Link](#).

vagueness of externalized language. Once these disclaimers are made explicit, the research methodology and rationale will be explained in detail.

## 2.1 Facts and Propositions

In *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Nobel laureate Bertrand Russell examined: the nature of facts, which exist in the world whether or not we think of them; the nature of beliefs, which are true or false by reference to facts; and the nature of propositions, which are the vehicles of truths and falsehoods.<sup>1</sup> “The first truism,” Russell explains, “is that the world contains facts, which are what they are whatever we may choose to think about them, and that there are also beliefs, which have reference to facts, and by reference to facts are either true or false.”<sup>2</sup> A fact, therefore, is the element that makes a proposition true or false. If a proposition states “Stand-up comedy is booming,” the proposition is true under certain statistical conditions and false under other statistical conditions. Therefore, the statistical condition that makes the statement true (or false) is the “fact.” And facts are expressed when propositions assert that a certain thing has a certain property, or that it has a certain relation to another thing.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to stress that facts belong to the objective world. They “are not created by our thoughts or beliefs except in special cases.”<sup>4</sup> They “have to be discovered by observation, not by reasoning; when we successfully infer the future, we do so by means of principles which are not logically necessary, but are suggested by empirical data.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mumford, 2003:98.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 2003:101.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2003:102.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 102.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, 2005:528.

On the other hand, statements and judgments have the “duality of truth and falsehood.”<sup>1</sup> Propositions in particular are the “typical vehicles on the duality of truth and falsehood” given that they are sentences in the indicative, “asserting something” and not questioning or commanding or wishing.”<sup>2</sup> The concept of truth “as something dependent upon facts largely outside human control”<sup>3</sup> is central to both the natural sciences and the social sciences, notwithstanding the epistemic relativist claims of the post-structural and post-modern tradition.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is rational to expect that these properties hold across all statements; that is, all externalized language and hence, all communication.

From this vantage point, distinguishing between facts and assertions of facts is key to the methodology employed by this inquiry. As explained by physicist Alain Sokal and philosopher of science Jean Bricmont, a fact is “a situation in the external world that exists irrespective of the knowledge we have (or don’t have) of it – in particular, *irrespective of any consensus or interpretation.*”<sup>5</sup> And, when it comes to the critique of the general consensus, adherence to facts is central. Because

in order to challenge prevailing assumptions – other people’s as well as our own – it is essential to keep in mind that one can be wrong: that there exist facts independent of our claims, and that it is by comparison with these facts (to the extent that we can ascertain them) that our claims have to be evaluated.<sup>6</sup>

The key dimension for the purposes of this research is the relationship between “challenging prevailing assumptions” and the “comparison with facts” in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 2003:103.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 104.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2005:737.

<sup>4</sup> For a scathing and ultimately vanquishing critique of post-structural and post-modernist epistemic relativism, see Sokal & Bricmont’s *Fashionable Nonsense* (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Sokal *et al.*, 1998:103.

<sup>6</sup> Sokal *et al.*, 1998:103.

evaluate claims. This research will determine whether or not this dimension informs and underlines the satirical content of stand-up comedy.

In further support of the soundness of this position, the former President of the American Philosophical Association, Larry Laudan, pointed out the independence of facts from claims about facts very eloquently: “The displacement of the idea that facts and evidence matter by the idea that everything boils down to subjective interests and perspectives is – second only to American political campaigns – the most prominent and pernicious manifestation of anti-intellectualism in our time.”<sup>1</sup> It follows that the analysis of any statement should adhere to the central methodological principle of the scientific method: “to evaluate [its validity] on the basis of the facts and reasoning supporting it, without regard to the personal qualities or social status of its advocates or detractors.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 Beliefs and Propositions

As aforementioned, when the content under scrutiny consists of beliefs and statements, their main characteristic is the duality of truth and falsehood. According to Russell, “a belief or statement has duality of truth and falsehood, which the fact does not have. A belief or statement always involves a proposition.”<sup>3</sup> Suppose it is a fact that George Carlin is dead. There are two propositions: “George Carlin is dead” and “George Carlin is not dead.” And for these two propositions corresponding to the same fact, there is one fact, one condition in the world, a “situation in the external world,”<sup>4</sup> that makes one true and the other false. Therefore, there are “two different relations that a proposition may have to a fact: the one the relation that you may call being true to the

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<sup>1</sup> In Laudan, 1990:x. Also cited in Sokal *et al.*, 1998:50.

<sup>2</sup> Sokal *et al.*, 1998:188.

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2003:105-106.

<sup>4</sup> Sokal *et al. Op. Cit.*

fact, and the other being false to the fact.”<sup>1</sup> In this case, the former proposition is true to the fact, the latter is false to the fact.

But in terms of the general acceptance of beliefs, the standard is often related more to fancy and reiteration than adherence to empirical verification. The history of science itself is a testament to the fact that the generally accepted beliefs seldom rest on whether they are or not supported by facts. For example, it was only 500 years ago, with advanced astronomy, powered by the Indo-Arab numerical system, that geo-centrism was defeated by helio-centrism. And not because of the authority of those supporting helio-centrism, but by the facts supporting helio-centrism. How? Well, via a specific type of methodology that seeks to test theories, that is, generalizations, with experiments. And “[t]his agreement between theory and experiment, when combined with thousands of other similar though less spectacular ones, would be a miracle if science said nothing true – or at least approximately true – about the world.”<sup>2</sup>

The same holds for the abandonment of the flat earth model to explain the motion of celestial bodies, the abandonment of bloodletting as a practice to cure disease, the abandonment of witch-hunting as a way of keeping the community “devil-free,” and so on. This last case is truly extraordinary. Without reviewing the entire history, which certainly makes any reader with a modicum of humanity recoil in absolute horror, it suffices to keep in mind that still in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, women, typically elderly women, were executed for the impossible offence that is witchcraft. It took a biting satirical critique by Joseph Addison in the pages of *The Spectator* in England to point out in the irrationality and social brutality inherent in torturing and executing ageing, weak and probably senile women, whom he dubbed “Moll Whites”, after they were slandered

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, 2003:106.

<sup>2</sup> Sokal *et al.*, 1998:57.



by folks in their own communities. The general uncritical consensus concerning witchcraft was a stubbornly persistent one. “When an old Woman begins to doat and grow chargeable to a Parish,” Addison explained,

she is *generally* turned into a Witch, and fills the whole Country with *extravagant Fancies, imaginary Distempers and terrifying Dreams*, in the meantime, the poor Wretch that is the innocent Occasion of so many Evils begins to be frightened at herself, and sometimes confesses secret Commerce and Familiarities that her Imagination forms in a delirious old Age.<sup>1</sup>

The repercussions of the general uncritical consensus concerning witchcraft were no small matter, for it “cut off Charity from the greatest objects of Compassion, and inspires People with a Malevolence towards those poor decrepid Parts of our Species, in whom Human Nature is defaced by Infirmary and Dotage.”<sup>2</sup>

Turning now to political beliefs, a similar pattern jumps to the eye. As explained by Robert Dahl, Sterling Professor of Political Science Emeritus at Yale University, the currency of political beliefs depends crucially on circulation; their circulation depends on reiteration; reiteration on funding; and funding depends on the beliefs’ service to wealth and power, that is, the status quo. For when researchers investigate “what factors influence the content of the political beliefs”<sup>3</sup> that people acquire, they will find that one “obvious determinant is the extent to which [people] are exposed to a particular outlook, which depends in turn on (...) whether the idea is present in one’s own environment. Two necessary conditions, are, clearly, that the idea has been formulated and that it has been diffused to the individual’s environment.”<sup>4</sup> The diffusion of ideas to the environment is a task performed most effectively by the mass media. In all their manifestations (radio, print, tv, internet, etc), they are for the most part private

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<sup>1</sup> Addison, 1853:166. *Emphasis* added. See also Addison, 1711: [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> Addison, 1711: [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> 1971:169.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

institutions that pursue commercial goals, owned and controlled by even larger private multinational conglomerates, which, together, often behave monopolistically, as demonstrated, conclusively, by the former Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, Ben Bagdikian.<sup>1</sup>

Generally held beliefs then come about by virtue of widespread dissemination that follows political-economic imperatives, and in practice, consist of statements. But they are complex statements, consisting of propositions that in turn consist of symbols. Even religious beliefs consist of propositions, like the belief in God or mystical creatures in an imagined afterlife. A 2016 Gallup poll, for instance, found that 89% of Americans say “they believe in God;”<sup>2</sup> a 2011 Associated Press-GfK poll found that 77% of Americans “believe in angels;”<sup>3</sup> and a 2013 poll revealed that a majority of Americans believe “in the existence of the devil.”<sup>4</sup> These beliefs are complex propositions, like “god exists,” “angels exist,” “the devil exists.” And like all propositions, in turn, they consist of symbols. Symbols that are evoked in the mind, following the basic property of language, that it evokes cognitive images. A complex symbol, as Russell explained, is such because it consists of “parts which are also symbols: a symbol may be defined as complex when it has parts that are symbols. In a sentence containing several words, the several words are each symbols, and *the sentence composing them is therefore a complex symbol* in that sense.”<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, scientific knowledge in general then consists of a fairly large set of complex symbols, based on evidence and argument, supported by the available facts and verified by experimentation allowed by the available techniques. The term

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<sup>1</sup> 2004 & 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Gallup, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> AP-GfK, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> PRNewswire, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, 2003:105. *Emphasis* added.

“available” is key, for as we all know, earlier science is surpassed by subsequent science, and in this sense, as a realm of cognitive activity, science bears more fruits than, for instance, literature and fiction. As explained succinctly by Cambridge University Physical Chemistry Professor and famed English novelist, Charles Percy Snow, “literature changes more slowly than science. It hasn’t the same automatic corrective, and so its misguided periods are longer.”<sup>1</sup> Then, as intelligence piles on intelligence, the large set of complex symbols based on evidence and argument (clear and logical thinking) that science continuously refurbishes, ends up, at certain intervals, in a conflict with systems of entrenched power and wealth. As noted by Stanislaw Andreski, Professor of Sociology at the University of Reading, UK, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of clear and logical thinking in the construction of complex symbols for the entire collective enterprise that human knowledge consists of. For this reason, the spirit of scientific research is also at odds with the worship of authority; much like the spirit of humour, which, John Morreall observed, is incompatible with “hero-worship.”<sup>2</sup> Andreski, on this matter, pointed out that confusion and absurdities are instrumental for the preservation of entrenched power in society, and are therefore encouraged; while “clear and logical thinking leads to a cumulation of knowledge (of which the progress of the natural sciences provide the best example) and the advance of knowledge sooner or later undermines the traditional order.”<sup>3</sup>

### 2.3 Vagueness and Externalized Language

On the topic of the accumulation of knowledge made possible by the language faculty, there is ample evidence in the scholarship. Language, according to *Fitch et al.*,

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<sup>1</sup> 1961:9.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 5.

<sup>3</sup> 1972:90. Cited in Sokal *et al.*, 1998:1.

can be imagined as a “bidirectional system” that allows for the “expression of arbitrary thoughts as signals and the reverse interpretation of those signals as thoughts. (...) [H]umans appear to be unique in possessing a system that allows *any* concept we can entertain to be expressed and understood.”<sup>1</sup> And this bidirectional system functions at the individual level, in communication, but also at the social level, in terms of collective culture. In fact, our “*capacity to share thoughts socially* allows human cultures to *accumulate knowledge* in a way that would be impossible without language and underpins the progressive accumulation of complexity seen in most aspects of culture, from science and technology to myth and religion.”<sup>2</sup> *Homo sapiens*’ ability to share meaning through language is unique in Animalia. Fitch *et al.* also stress that the language faculty and the sharing of information yield culture, and that, in turn, a central property of culture is “a means of high-accuracy copying (...) which (...) allows for *accumulation of good ideas*, a fact that is central to human cultural progress.”<sup>3</sup> Humans need to look no further than their own dwelling and their possessions to get a glimpse of good ideas: a little switch to turn the light on is a good idea, and so is the domestication of electricity; walking with shoes on instead of barefoot is a good idea; a zipper for pants is a good idea; running tap water at home is a good idea; a fridge to keep foods edible for a longer time is also a good idea, and so on. And even though “at the heart of culture” is a means of “high-accuracy copying,” this property does not hold for language itself, internally.

As a cognitive computational system, language is not accurate per se; at least, not accurate in the referential sense. As explained by Chomsky, in the “symbolic systems of

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<sup>1</sup> Fitch *et al.*, 2010:795. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* *Emphasis* added.

<sup>3</sup> Fitch *et al.*, 2010:800. *Emphasis* added.

other animals, symbols appear to be linked directly to mind-independent events.”<sup>1</sup> Reactions to calls for danger, or distress, are a case in point. But the symbols of human language are “sharply different. Even in the simplest cases, there is no word-object relation, where objects are mind-independent entities. There is no reference relation, in the technical sense familiar from Frege and Peirce to contemporary externalists.”<sup>2</sup>

The identity ascribed through language to things is only a fictitious one, and evidence suggests that the language system of humans allows for the creation of symbols that do not exist, and for “sounds with meaning” that do not relate to anything in the external world, like words of pure logic: and, or, not, etc.<sup>3</sup> There is no object in the world corresponding to words of pure logic. Nevertheless, this characteristic of language does not strain information exchange between humans, and is “no impediment to interaction, including the special case of communication, (...) No one is so deluded as to believe that there is a mind-independent object corresponding to the internal syllable [ba] (...) *But interaction proceeds nevertheless, always a more-or-less rather than a yes-or-no affair.*”<sup>4</sup> And a key aspect of communication – that is, all externalized language regardless of medium (spoken, written, braille, sign, etc.) – is precisely its vagueness, which yields the “more-or-less” understanding of all shared meaning, which are symbols, ie. mental objects. As stressed by Berwick *et al.*, “every particular act externalizing this mental object yields a mind-independent entity, but it is idle to seek a mind-independent construct that corresponds to the syllable [ba].”<sup>5</sup> And all the possible combinations of syllables that yield mental objects hold the same property that defines the units they are composed of. For this reason,

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, 2016:126.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Russell, 2003:216.

<sup>4</sup> Chomsky, 2016:126.

<sup>5</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2016:84.

communication is not a matter of producing some mind-external entity that the hearer picks out of the world, the way a physicist could. Rather, communication is a more-or-less affair, in which *the speaker produces external events and hearers seek to match them as best they can to their own internal resources*. (...) Communication (...) *succeeds insofar as shared mental constructs, background, concerns, presuppositions, and so on, allow for common perspectives to be (more or less) attained*.<sup>1</sup>

This property of externalized language, communication, that makes it a “more or less affair” via shared mental constructs, suggests that it is, in fact, an activity in which the expression and interpretation of thoughts between minds occurs vaguely.

In his landmark 1923 essay on *Vagueness*, Russell proposes to “prove that all language is vague. (...) Vagueness and precision alike are characteristics which can only belong to a representation, of which language is an example.”<sup>2</sup> Russell explores the vagueness of language by noting that vagueness, or precision, belong to the representation of occurrences, but not to occurrences themselves. He remarks that, therefore, “every proposition that can be framed in practice has a certain degree of vagueness.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, crucially, vagueness does not imply falsehood. “Vagueness, clearly, is a matter of degree, depending upon the extent of the possible differences between different systems represented by the same representation. Accuracy, on the other hand, is an ideal limit.”<sup>4</sup> And therefore, Russell argues, “there is not only one object that a word means, and not only one possible fact that will verify a proposition. The fact that meaning is a one-many relation is the precise statement of the fact that all language is more or less vague.”<sup>5</sup> On this matter, Russell was, back in 1923, anticipating the findings *biolinguists* would publish almost a century later. It would be fallacious to suppose that knowledge – that is, the accumulation of good ideas – is false because it is based on

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<sup>1</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2016:85.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 2003:213.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:216.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:217.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*:218.

vague representations. “On the contrary,” Russell concludes, “a vague belief has a much better chance of being true than a precise one, because there are more possible facts that would verify it.”<sup>1</sup>

The three disclaimers discussed above were required to frame the procedure through which H1 will be tested. The satirical content of stand-up comedy consists of statements, and as we have seen, there is a difference between facts and assertions of facts, propositions and beliefs. And communication, being essentially an interaction in which vague meaning is exchanged, occurs in a highly productive fashion nonetheless: meaning is, after all, transmitted. And as stressed above, vagueness does not imply falsehood; on the contrary, it is easier for something vague to find factual correspondence, than something accurate. And when it comes to the satirical content of stand-up comedy, the same property must hold: being a form of communication, which is a “more or less affair,” the comedic “speaker [too] produces external events and hearers seek to match them as best they can to their own internal resources.”<sup>2</sup> So now the question is about the properties of satirical statements, taken as complex symbols.

### 3. The Object of Investigation

This research project takes stand-up satirical statements as the object of investigation. The literature suggests that satirical statements involve the use of humour as a corrective to propaganda, and that therefore, the relationship between the two is associative. Satire, as a particular form of communication, employs humour. And humour, in turn, involves a cognitive ability that springs from the language faculty. The ability consists in a particular associative capacity that joins into the same set concepts

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:219.

<sup>2</sup> Berwick *et al.* 2016:84-86.

from (what appear at first to be) different and separate domains. As Freud put it, the “essence of wit is neatly to span gulfs between different ideas.”<sup>1</sup> With satire, the function is manifestly to challenge some dogma or irrational belief that is operative in a group. The challenged object thus has to possess two characteristics: the first is that it is irrational (in that it is not based on evidence and argument); the second that it is operative in a group. As Jay Leno said, “the trick is *not* to know more than everybody else knows, it’s to know *exactly* what everybody else knows,”<sup>2</sup> recalling, along with Freud, that “laughing at the same jokes is evidence of *far-reaching psychical conformity*.”<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1 Satirical Statements

If these contributions are synthesized into a single formula, the satirical content of stand-up comedy (SCSC, or SC<sup>2</sup> for convenience) would involve the contrast between an operative group belief (OGB) with some contrary empirical rational argument, call it “proposition” and thus for conceptual convenience (CERP), that when externalized in spoken word a) evokes the desired mental impression in the hearer and b) yields the “involuntary physical process” that is laughter, as Conan O’Brien put it.<sup>4</sup> It follows that the satirical humour set {OGB,CERP} would at minimum involve the juxtaposition of a complex symbol {OGB} with Freud’s “different idea” {CERP}, in order to undermine the persuasion of OGB, that is, its hold. It is important to recall that satirical humour is a process whereby OGB is in fact undermined, its symbol dissolved, so to speak, by association with CERP: the dissuasive dimension of satire lies in the juxtaposition. Likewise, it is important to keep in mind that irrational beliefs are such in that “they are

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in Douglas, M., 1968. *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 4.

<sup>2</sup> As cited in Provenza, *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 6.

<sup>3</sup> Freud, 1960:185. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 3.



not based on evidence and argument”<sup>1</sup> and that it is fairly easy for the highly imaginative *Homo sapiens* to accept them. After all, *Homo sapiens* “is a credulous animal and must believe something; in the absence of good grounds for belief, he will be satisfied with bad ones.”<sup>2</sup>

This dissuasive dimension of satire, that provides for the dissolution of OGBs, reflects Freud’s remark that a joke “shatters respect for institutions and truths in which the hearer has believed.”<sup>3</sup> Note that “institutions” and “truths” are, from a linguistic point of view, umbrella terms, mental objects, complex symbols that enjoy group consensus, and hence are “believed in.”<sup>4</sup> The theme of the “artillery of dissensus versus the general uncritical consensus” which guides the present inquiry is the overarching concept for the process which traces back to Lord Shaftesbury’s observation that humour is often employed with remarkable success as test for reason.<sup>5</sup> The importance of Lord Shaftesbury’s theory will be discussed in further detail at the closure of this chapter. This way of framing the relationship between humour and political consciousness builds on Stephen Leacock’s finding that humour is, so to speak, primarily an associative exercise. If we examine satirical statements, Leacock argues, we will find that they “bring together a set of facts, phenomena, or fancies, actualities or accidents, that set up an incongruity (...) In other words a joke is a sort of syllogism with a major proposition as its hypothesis. The rest of it, in one fashion or other, can be reduced to a set of consequences running to an absurdity.”<sup>6</sup>

In terms of the dissolution of OGBs, we can turn to bio-linguistics, where humour, at least in terms of mechanism, follows the same fundamental properties of language

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<sup>1</sup> Noam Chomsky, quoted in Morris, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 2009: 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 5, Section 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7, Section 4.

<sup>6</sup> 1938:113-114.

proper. As discussed in Chapter 2, with *Merge* we have the computational associative capacity that underpins the language faculty, and the atomic elements the *Merge* combines have a “role in symbolizing, in evoking cognitive images,’ and in ‘moulding’ our notion of reality” as Nobel laureate Francois Jacob put the matter.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the language faculty moulds our notion of reality, both in terms of persuasion and dissuasion: in propaganda, ie. the manipulation of significant symbols in the service of persuasion;<sup>2</sup> and in satire, ie. the employment of humour (which itself involves the manipulation of symbols) in the service of dissuasion.

The power of language to “mold our notion of reality” is the biological underpinning of language as a tool for thought, an “internal mental tool” in the words of the distinguished paleoneurologist Harry Jerison, who posits that “language did not evolve as a communication system (...) the initial evolution of language is more likely to have been (...) for the construction of a real world,” and as a “tool for thought.”<sup>3</sup> Just like every other organ, the brain too functions according to biological rules. And just as food enters the stomach and leaves it with nutrients, so

“impressions arrive at the brain through the nerves; they are then isolated and without coherence. The organ enters into action; it acts on them, and soon it sends them back changed into ideas, which the language of physiognomy and gesture, or the signs of speech and writing, manifest outwardly. We conclude then, with the same certainty, *that the brain digests, as it were, the impressions*, ie. That organically it makes the secretion of thought.”<sup>4</sup>

In stand-up comedy this is forcefully the case, as hearers “digest impressions” in their minds and the evoked images represent the “secretion of thought.” Laughter could simply signal that the desired impression was in fact delivered, or that previously operative beliefs are now dissolved. But unlike other modes of communication, stand-

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Chomsky, 2007:23.

<sup>2</sup> Lasswell, 1927:627.

<sup>3</sup> Jerison, 1973:55. Also quoted in Berwick, 2011:26.

<sup>4</sup> Cabanis, 1981. Also cited in Chomsky, 2016:84-85.

up comedy relies on spoken word alone, the baseline externalization mechanism of the language faculty. And it is interesting to note the role of satire as precisely a “tool for thought” applied to OGBs. Its role is highlighted in audience reactions to successful transmission, when typically, something along these lines is uttered by the receiver: “haha, that’s so true. I never thought of that before.”

### 3.2 Satirical Mechanism

However, it is important to point out that this discussion does not blur the conceptual lines between function and mechanism, which, as is the case in biology and the natural sciences, are logically distinct categories.<sup>1</sup> The function of humour and the mechanism of satire are logically separate questions. Mechanism is addressed by asking the “how” question; function is addressed by asking the “what for” question. Hence, the mechanism offered here, namely  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$  whereby OGB is undermined by virtue of the association (juxtaposition) with CERP, describes the symbolic mechanism in externalized speech (the spoken satirical content of stand-up comedy), and not the internal neurological/biological mechanism that lies at the heart of humour. In terms of function, it is hypothesized that the manifest one is the dissolution of OGBs. Note that the success of the dissuasive force of satire is indicated by polls: millennials are distrustful of the media, the mass circulators of OGBs,<sup>2</sup> but trust their comedians,<sup>3</sup> the suppliers of  $\{OGB,CERP\}$ .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bolhuis, 2015:89.

<sup>2</sup> See Poindexter, 2012:35.

<sup>3</sup> See Poindexter, 2012; also Cook, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> A conceptual counterpoint could be advanced here: if there is such a thing as a general uncritical consensus, that on aggregate has a hold on the majority, how could millennials at the same time distrust the media, one of the central actors in the production of the general uncritical consensus? Just because they say they do, does not mean the distrust is active all the time.

#### 4. Research Design

Given the disclaimers and the model proposed, it is necessary to frame the compatible method of data collection. The method involves five steps: selecting the research paradigm that guides the inquiry; the appropriate sampling to gather the total corpus of material; content analysis to extract the satirical statements from the corpus of material and to produce categories from the significant content; theoretical analysis to determine whether the findings substantiate or refute the SC<sup>2</sup> model on the basis of the six realms of inquiry synthesized thus far (Language; Political Economy; Ideology; Propaganda; General Uncritical Consensus; Artillery of Critique). The theoretical analysis will seek to answer three questions: Does the content support or refute the SC<sup>2</sup> mechanism? Does the content support or refute the context and contest for the relationship between humour and political consciousness? If we examine the satirical content of stand-up comedy in the 1990-1999 period in the US, do the findings suggest that we can answer the two questions in the affirmative in light of the six realms of inquiry that inform the context of stand-up satire and provide it with targets?

The sample will yield a corpus of material: the satirical content of stand-up comedy SC<sup>2</sup> as delivered by select comedians in stand-up specials, which are assumed to contain the best material chosen by the comedians themselves. Following similar contemporary research on stand-up comedy, the present inquiry too will “highlight particular comics and routines as notable cultural interventions,”<sup>1</sup> and examine the satirical content conducive to the “disruption of widely shared social opinions.”<sup>2</sup>

Highlighting particular comics over a large time-frame does not however jeopardize the reliability of this research’s results. On the contrary, as pointed out by

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<sup>1</sup> Meier *et al.*, 2017:xxviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv.

Meier *et al.* in their scholarly collection *Standing Up, Speaking Out*, the fact that there are “simply too many comics that are important to the tradition of stand-up comedy and the culture it stands to change to address them all [entails that] any attempt to rank them in order of significance is highly subjective at best.”<sup>1</sup> The corpus of material, though selective and thus discretionary, will not however be arbitrary, given that the focus of this inquiry is on the satirical content SC<sup>2</sup> as manifested *within* the outlined political-economic context: therefore, the focus is on SC<sup>2</sup> as an operative discourse *within* the general uncritical consensus and *against* it, yielding, as aforementioned the set SC<sup>2</sup> = {OGB, CERP} whereby OGB is undermined.<sup>2</sup> The content significant corpus of material, which will consist of satirical statements, will be yielded by the sample in a manner that is consistent with this inquiry’s methodological program, that is, in terms of ontology and epistemology.

#### 4.1 Ontology and Epistemology

A paradigmatic framework that is consistent with the aims of the research has to be defined in terms of ontology and epistemology. These must be applicable to the field of inquiry and consistent with the chosen methodology (content analysis) and with the theoretical application as applied to the quantitative findings of the satirical content. As emphasized by Guba *et al.*, the ontological question is an important one: “what is the form and nature of reality, and therefore what can be known about it?”<sup>3</sup> They identify four main paradigmatic positions in qualitative and quantitative research pertaining to the social sciences: *positivism, post-positivism, critical theory et al., and constructivism*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Meier *et al.*, 2017:xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Moreover, “CERP” when pronounced, sounds like “syrup,” which is particularly apt, as the syrup that dissolves operative group beliefs.

<sup>3</sup> Guba *et al.* 1998:201.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

This research endorses the *post-positivist* ontological position, otherwise known as *critical-realism*. As they define it, “[r]eality is assumed to exist but to be only imperfectly apprehendable (...) because of the posture of proponents that claims about reality must be subjected to the widest possible critical examination to facilitate apprehending reality as closely as possible.”<sup>1</sup> In terms of the corpus of material produced by this inquiry, it is assumed to be “real” insofar as the satirical content was actually spoken, actually delivered within reported contexts, and actually reproduced herein verbatim. Obviously, the term “reality” in this case classifies the object of analysis: the satirical content of stand-up comedy produced in the span of a decade, 1990-1999. And the chosen ontological position is consistent with the research conducted thus far. As Noam Chomsky stated, “*rationality is a tool* that you better have if you want to achieve anything. You might as well have some grasp of *what the real world is like*. If you give up on that you can be an easy victim for any outside force.”<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the epistemological problem, this research endorses a positivist position. The epistemological question asks “what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? (...) So if, for example, a “real” reality is assumed, then the posture of the knower should be one of objective detachment or value freedom in order to discover “how things really are” and “how things really work”.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the question concerning the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known finds two logical answers. In regards to the content analysis, the research epistemology falls within the *positivist* paradigm, and is thus *dualist and objective*. Guba *et al.* argue that “[t]he investigator and the investigated ‘object’ are assumed to be independent entities,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 2011, [08:00-08:36](#).

<sup>3</sup> Guba *et al.* 1998:201.

and the investigator to be capable of studying the object without influencing or being influenced by it.”<sup>1</sup> This follows from two givens: the object of analysis is historical proper, and therefore impedes any influence of the investigator on the object investigated and the nature of the object itself, produced as such regardless of subsequent research. In simple terms, the identified instances of SC<sup>2</sup> cannot be influenced by the investigator. They were produced as such by the stand-up comedians and this research reproduces them verbatim. The SC<sup>2</sup> and the investigator are independent entities. Thus, the findings of the content analysis are considered replicable. The stand-up comedians, regardless of any investigator, actually produced the corpus of material elicited by this research. And the content analysis operations, systematic and comprehensive in the period under scrutiny, have not, and could not have altered the corpus of material. The only instance in which the independence of investigator and object investigated could be disproved would arise solely in cases of conscious manipulation of the findings and a consequent case for academic dishonesty. But this, in turn, would prove the immutability of the object investigated, as the manipulation can occur and be proven only if the object to be manipulated is originally certain, fixed and historically immutable. Therefore, a post-positivist ontology, by which reality is assumed to exist but to be only imperfectly apprehensible, and a positivist epistemology, by which investigator and investigated object are assumed to be independent entities, are in line with the research methodology *ipso facto*; that is, as a consequence the verifiability of the corpus of material and the reliability of the content analysis’ findings.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

## 4.2 Two-Pronged Methodology

It could be argued that to endorse a critical-realist ontology and a dualist and objective epistemology for an inquiry into SC<sup>2</sup> raises questions of inconsistency. How can an investigator who assumes reality to exist but to be only imperfectly apprehensible, also assume that s/he and the object investigated are independent entities, with the former capable of studying the latter without influencing or being influenced by it? The answer to this *prima facie* inconsistency lies in the research methodology - in the two methods utilized for this inquiry. The first methodology is consistent with a positivist paradigm: "Questions and/or hypotheses are stated in propositional form and subjected to empirical test to verify them; possible confounding conditions must be carefully controlled (manipulated) to prevent outcomes from being improperly influenced."<sup>1</sup> The overarching methodology involves the combination of a quantitative and qualitative analysis. The corpus of material is elicited by the content analysis, and the quantitative analysis will have followed a comprehensive examination of all the instances of SC<sup>2</sup> produced by the subjects in the selected timeframe, and thus will be exhaustive.

Furthermore, the content analysis identifies all the statements with the highest-match frequency, and then uncovers the "thematic distribution" of the comedians' SC<sup>2</sup>. The identification of the themes will not be based on the investigator's discretion, but on the "manifest context" to which their statements belong. And the definition of categories will progress with the extrapolation of SC<sup>2</sup>, in line with content analysis, because, as noted by Glaser *et al.*, "one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used

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<sup>1</sup> Guba *et al.* 1998:204.



to illustrate the concept”<sup>1</sup> refraining, to the most possible extent, from the use of “a priori assumptions.”<sup>2</sup> In short, the categories will not be constructed before the identification of the statements, but will be generated *during* their identification of as the statements themselves present as useful categories. This provides for a full categorization of SC<sup>2</sup>; no satirical statement is left out of any category. As Weber points out in his monograph on content analysis, the term “*category* [can] be reserved for words with *similar* meanings and/or connotations.”<sup>3</sup> By the same token, this analysis holds the term “category” for statements or “clusters of words with *different* meanings or connotations that taken together refer to”<sup>4</sup> a similar theme, identified by their subject or object, denominated “category.” And the resulting categories will not be necessarily mutually exclusive. The use of discretion on the investigator’s behalf to provide for the exceptions in the “thematic distribution” of SC<sup>2</sup> does not question the independence of the “object” investigated, as any comprehensive examination of the satirical material spoken by the comedians in the selected timeframe will yield the same results. The authenticity of SC<sup>2</sup>, as long as the integrity and comprehensiveness of the archival records is guaranteed, is as such independent of any investigator. The sampling and coding procedures are clear and the empirical data can be checked; it is not anecdotal.

#### 4.3 Sample Selection

The sample is longitudinal in that it covers ten years from 1990 to 1999. The total corpus of material includes excerpts from stand-up comedy specials that contain satirical content, defined as humorous critiques of political-economic aspects of social life, discarding other types of humour (for instance, dog jokes, sexual jokes, yo-mama

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<sup>1</sup> Glaser *et al.*, 1999:23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Weber, 1990:37.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

jokes, musical humour<sup>1</sup> etc.) that do not display a dimension that manifestly involves some type of social criticism or political economic critique. The content analysis also discards duplications, that is, satirical statements that are duplicated by the same comic in later performances. In eliciting the relevant satirical content from the overall corpus of material, this inquiry will employ Lord Shaftesbury's theories as a methodological guide, given its congruity with prestigious twentieth century scholarship.

Shaftesbury offered three important insights in his *Sensus Communis*: Raillery [satire] is directly proportional to spiritual tyranny [propaganda], therefore the "greater the weight, the bitterer the satire"<sup>2</sup>; humour is a "*specifick*"<sup>3</sup> against superstition [and] delusion"<sup>4</sup> because wit and humour are the "test" of reason, for a subject which "cannot bear raillery is suspicious"<sup>5</sup>; and comedians seem "better critics [than pedagogues], and more ingenious, and fair in their way of questioning received opinions, and exposing the ridicule of things."<sup>6</sup> In Shaftesbury's times "pedagogues" were the main propagandists, and we can substitute "pedagogues" with "news media" to give contemporary salience to Shaftesbury's point. How do these three insights impact the sample of SC<sup>2</sup> that will be examined in the next chapter?

As Lord Shaftesbury observed over three centuries ago, "'tis the persecuting Spirit has rais'd the *bantering* one."<sup>7</sup> In the literature, this is the earliest record of a clear

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Schickele for instance won 4 consecutive Grammy awards for best-spoken comedy in 1990-1994, but his material is musical (P.D.Q. Overtures, Chorals, Classical, Percussions, etc.) and is thus excluded from the sample; same with Weird Al Yankovic's *Poodle Hat* studio album which won the Grammy in 2004. Al Franken won a Grammy for *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot* in 1997, but it was an audio- book, and is thus also excluded from the sample. In 2001 George Carlin won the Grammy Award for his audio- book *Brain Droppings*, and likewise it is excluded from the sample.

<sup>2</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:72

<sup>3</sup> *Ie. tool.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*:128.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*:73-74.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*:81.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*72.

association between satire and “spiritual tyranny” over people’s opinions. Shaftesbury finds that

“the natural free spirits of ingenious men, if imprison’d and controul’d, will find out other ways of motion to relieve themselves in their constraint: and whether it be in Burlesque, Mimickry or Buffonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be reveng’d on their constrainers.”<sup>1</sup> [Because if people are] “forbid to speak their minds seriously on certain Subjects, they will do it ironically.”<sup>2</sup>

Shaftesbury explained that the wealthy and powerful minority in society can only blame itself for being the target of satire. They may “thank themselves if they in particular meet with the heaviest of this kind of treatment [being subject to raillery]. For it will naturally fall heaviest where the constraint has been severest. The greater the weight is, the bitterer will be the satire. The higher the slavery, the more exquisite the buffoonery.”<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.4 Hypothesis Testing

The present research project, in a similar vein, examines American stand-up comedy, given that the United States is the country that has produced the most significant stand-up comedy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and not coincidentally, given that the US has been the world hegemon since 1945, home to the most “propagandized people of any nation,”<sup>4</sup> and “the most illusioned people on earth.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the “bitter” statements that the next chapter will examine will be selected in terms of their cogency, “for without wit and humour, reason can hardly have its proof, or be distinguished.”<sup>6</sup> Because, as was the saying of an ancient sage, “humour was the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*:71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*:72.

<sup>4</sup> Harwood Childs, as quoted by Meier, 1950:162. Also cited in Carey, 1997:14.

<sup>5</sup> Boorstin, 1961:240.

<sup>6</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:73-74.

only test for gravity; and gravity, of humour, for a subject which would not bear raillery was suspicious.”<sup>1</sup>

The test of gravity is afforded by subjecting H1 to verification, and determining the congruency of H1 with the six realms of inquiry examined in Chapters 2-7. Therefore, the next chapter will examine SC<sup>2</sup> - the satirical content of stand-up comedy - elicited from the total corpus of material over the course of ten years, 1990-1999. And the aim is to test H1: *that a major indicator suggesting the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus is the satirical content of stand-up comedy, which manifests itself in relation to it.* The hypothesis is captured by the formula  $SC^2 = \{OGB, CERP\}$ , whereby OGB, as an operative group belief, is targeted and undermined by virtue of the association with CERP, a contrary empirical rational argument/proposition. The following chapter will examine whether the evidence supports or refutes the H1.

## 5. Conclusion

In terms of the two methodological questions posed at the outset of this chapter, the answers are as follows. The corpus of material consists of satirical statements produced by American stand-up comedians in the period 1990-1999. Satirical statements are complex symbols. They may consist of facts and assertions of facts, they target beliefs, which in turn reduce to propositions which have relations of truth or falsehood to facts. And given that they are communicated, that is, externalized via words, and operate in informed settings, they interact with beliefs, that is, generally held beliefs, operative group beliefs. Satirical statements, as products of the language faculty, evoke images in the mind of receivers and “mold our notions of reality,” notwithstanding the fundamental vagueness of externalized language, since

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

communication is a “more or less affair,”<sup>1</sup> in which the comedian produces external events and audience members seek to match them as best they can to their own internal resources.

As revealed by careful research, “even the simplest expressions have quite intricate meanings,”<sup>2</sup> and in “Rylean terms, phrases of common usage may be “systematically misleading expressions.”<sup>3</sup> This is forcefully the case with satirical humour reduced to a symbolic formula which includes operative group beliefs, which themselves consist of statements. A case in point is the frequently employed operation in humour called *Face Value Technique*, which “consists in the contrast between the face value of the words or phrases as usually used and the logical significance of it.”<sup>4</sup> The aim is to generate data to test H1 captured by the formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ . The symbolic properties of satirical statements are exhibited in this example of  $SC^2$ :

I have several rules I live by. First rule: I don't believe anything the Government tells me. Nothing. Zero. And I don't take very seriously the media or the press in this country who in the case of the Persian Gulf War were nothing more than unpaid employees of the Department of Defense. And who most of the time function as a kind of unofficial public relations agency for the United States Government. So I don't listen to them. I don't really believe in 'My Country.' And I gotta tell you folks, I don't get all chocked up about yellow ribbons and American flags. I consider them to be symbols and I leave symbols to the symbol-minded.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2016:85.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 2016:44.

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, 2016:118.

<sup>4</sup> Leacock, 1935:27.

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 2:35-3:58.

## CHAPTER 9: SC<sup>2</sup> CONTENT ANALYSIS

*"They seemed better critics  
and more ingenious, and fair  
in their way of  
questioning received opinions,  
and exposing the ridicule of things."*  
Lord Shaftesbury<sup>1</sup>

*"The humour that we call American  
is based on seeing things as they are."*<sup>2</sup>  
Stephen Leacock

*"The spirit of humour is incompatible  
with (...) hero-worship and fear."*  
John Morreall<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Preview

Given the research methodology laid out in Chapter 8, this chapter will seek to answer three questions: 1) What are the significant examples of the satirical content of stand-up comedy (SC<sup>2</sup> for short) in the decade 1990-1999 that: a) are present in stand-up comedy specials b); satisfy the conditions set out thus far; c) can be used to test the formula  $SC^2 = \{OGB, CERP\}$ <sup>4</sup>? 2) Furthermore, does the SC<sup>2</sup> indicate the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus where OGBs (operative group beliefs) are targeted and undermined by virtue of the association or juxtaposition with CERPs, (contrary empirical rational propositions)? 3) What is the thematic distribution of SC<sup>2</sup>?

This chapter answers the three questions by way of a content analysis of a unique and original data set. It will look at the evidence in order to test Hypothesis 1 (H1), namely, that a major indicator suggesting the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus is the satirical content of stand-up comedy, which manifests itself in relation to it. Stated otherwise, satire indicates propaganda, and, as Lord Shaftesbury

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<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:81.

<sup>2</sup> Leacock, 1938:127.

<sup>3</sup> Morreall, 1983:102-103.

<sup>4</sup> Operative Group Beliefs juxtaposed to Contrary Empirical/Rational Propositions.

would have it, satirical content emerges in response to “spiritual tyranny,” which, as we have seen, involves the manipulation of complex symbols to manage opinions and attitudes.<sup>1</sup>

The SC<sup>2</sup> elicited in this chapter is not produced by one performer alone, and thus this project exceeds the confines of a case study. In addition, the SC<sup>2</sup> is generated by 35 performers and thus this project is systematic rather than anecdotal because it extracts the political content from the overall content in a methodical, organized and logical fashion. In terms of delineating SC<sup>2</sup>, the following definition will be used, yielded by the most recent scholarly contribution on stand-up satire.<sup>2</sup> The satirical content of stand-up comedy consists of statements that:

1. act as “vehicles of social critique;”<sup>3</sup>
2. deflate “received opinions and proffering unexpected wisdom;”<sup>4</sup>
3. participate “in the discourse of social change,”<sup>5</sup>
4. provide “an alternative mode of expression while operating outside the rules of serious discourse.”<sup>6</sup>

As a whole, satirical stand-up comedy is defined as:

- a) an “alternative mode of expression” that
- b) occurs in a performative context in which
- c) a “lone rhetor offer[s] a punchline-peppered monologue to an audience (...)
- d) for the express purpose of laughing for an hour or so”<sup>7</sup>
- e) in order to “critique dominant culture”<sup>8</sup> and
- f) “disrupt widely shared social opinions.”<sup>9</sup>

If 1-4 are present in conjunction with a-f then this definition is political in so far as it encapsulates and is consistent with the theoretical framework, supported by the empirical record, that supplies the formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ , whereby the satirical

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<sup>1</sup> See Lasswell, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Yaross Lee, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Yaross Lee, 2017:xvii

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: xviii.

<sup>5</sup> Meier, 2017: xxii.

<sup>6</sup> Meier, 2017: xxii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*:xxiii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*:xxv.

content of stand-up comedy consists of the association/juxtaposition of operative group beliefs and contrary empirical rational propositions.

The sample includes a variety of “rhetors” in a wide timeframe, from various backgrounds and of different gender. The rhetors are professional US stand-up comics who have released at least two (2) ‘Specials’, which are sometimes later released in ‘Albums’ as records. The content is elicited from solo performances between 30-60 minutes in length, variably produced by either HBO, Comedy Central, Showtime, etc. The industry considers stand-up specials to be the best and most representative work the comedians have assembled, and it is therefore rational to assume to find content significant material therein. However, some types of stand-up comedy specials or albums have been excluded from the sample for two reasons: because the comic is not American ‘and’ the show was not performed in the US (therefore excluding Eddie Izzard’s *Live at the Ambassador’s* while including Jim Carrey’s *Unnatural Act*) and/or because the special contains music (such as ‘Weird’ Al Jankovic’s albums). In fact, some of the top-selling comedy albums are musical albums with humorous songs, such as The Lonely Island’s *Incredibad*. These comedy albums have been excluded from the sample because the present research project focuses on monologues and spoken word alone. Furthermore, not all comedians perform satirical material, while some of those who do, do so overwhelmingly. For instance, Andrew Dice Clay, one of the most popular stand-up comedians in the US in the late 80s and early 90s, performed no detectable political material in his two most successful specials, one of which is his 1990 compilation of his most appreciated acts: *The Day Laughter Died*.<sup>1</sup> In the specials of other comedians, such

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<sup>1</sup> The other is his 1991 special titled *For Women Only*, which also is void of any political material. Andrew Dice Clay. *They Day That Laughter Died*. Released March 14, 1990. [Link](#).

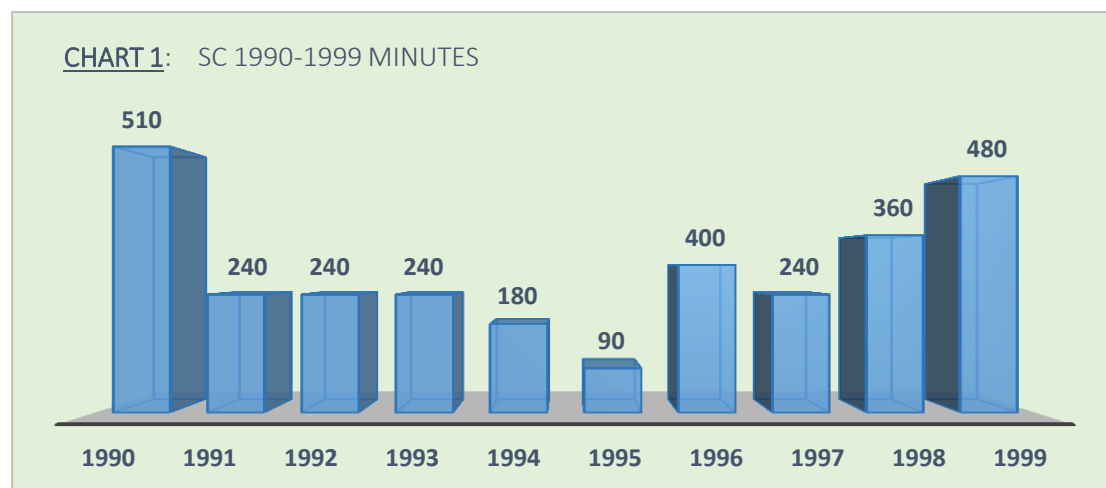


as Bill Hicks, George Carlin, Chris Rock, Dennis Miller, Eddie Griffin, the political-economic content is abundant.

This chapter will thus proceed in chronological order, examining the  $SC^2$  of multiple comedians, starting in 1990 and ending in 1999. The most content significant examples are included and discussed, following the methodological guidelines laid out in Chapter 8. The goal is assembling 10 years of  $SC^2$  to test the formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$  and the guiding hypothesis H1.

## 2. The Data

The sample corpus consists of 66 stand-up comedy specials performed by 35 stand-up comics between 1990-1999. A total of 2910 minutes of stand-up comedy specials were reviewed, equal to 48 hours and 30 minutes of spoken word material. As shown in Chart 1, the minutes are not evenly distributed across the period: in some years there were more stand-up specials to review, in others less<sup>1</sup>; and the intensity is highest at the beginning and end of the period.



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<sup>1</sup> Most stand-up comedians do not release specials every year, as they find employment in television shows, cinema, etc.

In terms of the performers, there is a wide variety in the sample corpus, both in terms of ethnic background and also gender. If the performers are ordered by the amount of specials included in the sample under scrutiny, the list is:

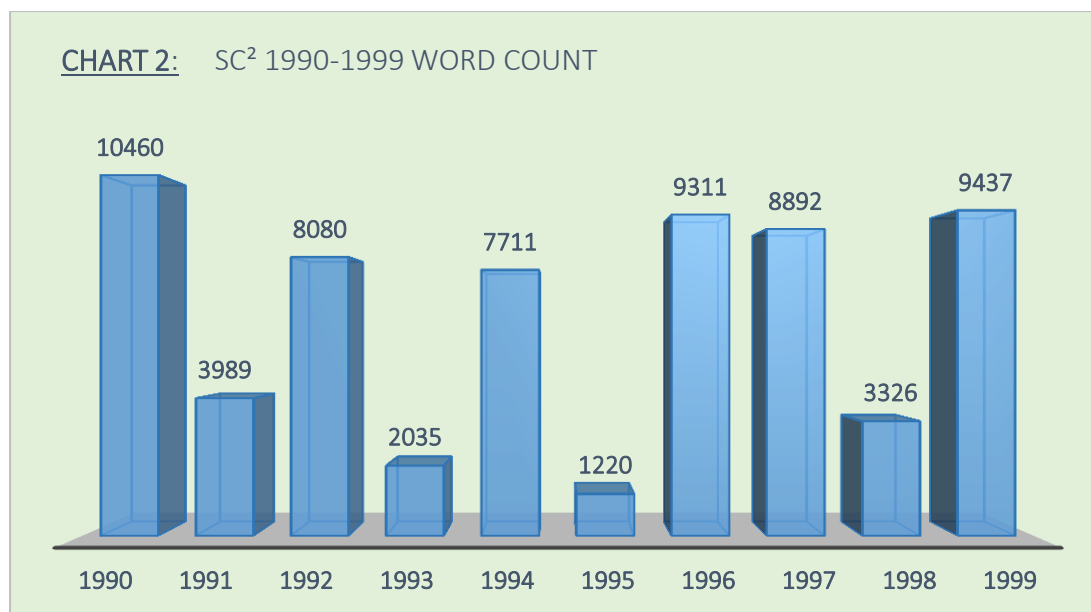
<b>Table 5 – Sample of Comedy Specials in the period</b>				
<b>Specials</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Comics</b>	Bill Hicks Dennis Miller Eddie Izzard	George Carlin Chris Rock Eddie Griffin	Andrew Dice Clay Ellen DeGeneres	Sam Kinison Richard Jeni Jeff Foxworthy Dennis Leary Bill Engvall Mitch Hedberg
<b>Specials</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>Comics</b>	Roseanne Barr Steven Wright Barry Crimmins Jim Carrey Jamie Foxx Martin Lawrence	Billy Connolly Jeanine Garofalo Dave Chappelle Adam Sandler Brian Regan Dana Carvey	Jerry Seinfeld John Pinette David Spade Margaret Cho Doug Stanhope Al Jankovic	Dave Chappelle D.L. Hughley Margaret Smith

Not all performances were available for consultation and inclusion,<sup>1</sup> and as discussed above, not all specials were included in the content significant sample, for they were excluded on methodological grounds. The excluded specials are those by: Eddie Izzard, a UK comedian who performed in the UK in the period under scrutiny; Billy Connolly, *idem*; Al Jankovic, on musical comedy grounds; et al.

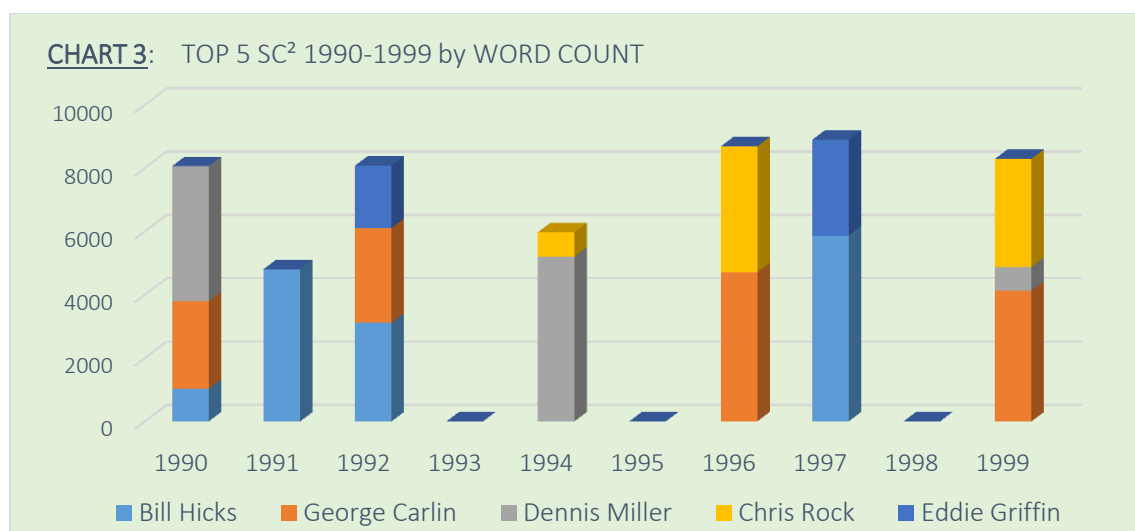
In terms of the content significant sample, meaning, the sample that includes political-economic content devoid of humorous though apolitical content, it is a fraction of the whole. The total word count for the content significant sample,<sup>2</sup> which excludes all statements that do not tackle political-economic topics (such as animal jokes, sexual jokes, relationship jokes, etc.) produced in the 1990-1999 decade is equal to 64117, though not evenly distributed in the period under investigation, as demonstrated in Chart 2.

<sup>1</sup> Either because copies are out of print. or access was denied on copyright grounds.

<sup>2</sup> The full sample is reproduced in Appendix A.



As shown in Chart 3, the five most prolific producers of SC<sup>2</sup> by word count in the period under scrutiny are: Bill Hicks (14812), George Carlin (14602), Dennis Miller (10221), Chris Rock (8163) and Eddie Griffin (4999). Note that Bill Hicks, who died in 1994, had 2 specials released posthumously in 1997.



The content for this analysis is limited to the English language and delivered in the USA. Their respective SC<sup>2</sup> data is included in Table 6 below. Again, the word count does not represent the entirety of their materials. It only represents a fraction of it, the fraction that contains satirical content dealing with political and/or economic issues as defined above.

<b>TABLE 6</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Bill Hicks	1024	4811	3115	0	0	0	0	5862	0	0	<b>14812</b>
George Carlin	2773	0	2996	0	0	0	4703	0	0	4130	<b>14602</b>
Dennis Miller	4268	0	0	0	5207	0	0	0	0	746	<b>10221</b>
Chris Rock	0	0	0	0	766	0	3981	0	0	3416	<b>8163</b>
Eddie Griffin	0	0	1969	0	0	0	0	3030	0	0	<b>4999</b>

The next step in the content analysis is to examine the themes and the thematic distribution of SC<sup>2</sup> over the period. This step consists of two operations. The first, a quantitative coding, that is, a simple word analysis, in order to identify the most recurring words in the period. The second, a qualitative coding, letting the data suggest functional categories as the text itself presents as useful for the qualitative analysis.

### 3. Quantitative Coding

In this research step, the content significant sample was reduced even further, excluding content that might not have political-economic references but is present in larger paragraphs or routines that are political: for example, a routine on sex scandals in politics that segues into relationships between men and women, only to return later to sex scandals in politics. The segue into the relationship content was dropped. The content significant sample was therefore reduced substantially. The Text Analyzer<sup>1</sup> software was used for this operation, generating the following data. In 1990, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 6762, in 538 sentences, with a lexical density<sup>2</sup> of 24.22. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> words was Bush (24), followed by war (16),

<sup>1</sup> © Online Utility 2018. [www.online-utility.org](http://www.online-utility.org)

<sup>2</sup> Lexical density is defined as the number of lexical words (or content words) divided by the total number of words. Lexical words give a text its meaning and provide information regarding what the text is about. More precisely, lexical words are simply nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs.

language (13), control, country (11).<sup>1</sup> In 1991, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 4541, in 474 sentences, with a lexical density of 24.2. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was drugs (34), followed by sexual (19), war (14), pornography (11). In 1992, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 6923, in 703 sentences, with a lexical density of 22.36. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was planet (24), followed by country, god (20), war (20), Bush (13). In 1993, the content significant sample was reduced solely to Sam Kinison's *Live From Hell* special, as no SC<sup>2</sup> was detected in the other specials of that year. The cumulative number of words involved in the special SC<sup>2</sup> is 1825, in 201 sentences, with a lexical density of 26.79. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was war (16), followed by homeless (11), Kurds (8), bomb (7), America (7), president (6). In 1994, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 6660, in 542 sentences, with a lexical density of 24.17. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was white (28), followed by black (26), country (17), god (13), president (9), jail (9). In 1995, the content significant sample was reduced solely to Jeanine Garofalo's *Comedy Half Hour* special, as no SC<sup>2</sup> was detected in the other specials of that year. The cumulative number of words involved in the special SC<sup>2</sup> is 1075, in 103 sentences, with a lexical density of 36.0. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was hate (9), fashion (3), god (3), SNL (3), lying, models, lesbian (2). In 1996, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 8888, in 944 sentences, with a lexical density of 18.8. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was crack (32), followed by black (29), drugs (18), white (16), vote, god (15), president, country (13), money (12), drug (12), abortion (11), Colin (11), King, America, Death (10), Sanctity, Powell (9). In 1997, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 7579, in 765 sentences, with a lexical density of 20.7. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was world (19), followed by god (18), miracle (17), planet (16), Satan (14), drugs (13),

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<sup>1</sup> For the rest see Appendix.

country, evolve (11), pot, white (10), children, America, chained (9), hate, Africa (8). In 1998, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 2055, in 226 sentences, with a lexical density of 33.3. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was black (6), followed by sophisticated, rednecks (5), racist, crack, commercial, drug, rent (4). And finally, in 1999 the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 9216, in 934 sentences, with a lexical density of 21.1. The most frequent SC<sup>2</sup> word was white (31), followed by black (29), money (20), Clinton (19), bullshit (17), children, country (15), Indians (11), violence, gay, aids (10), advertising, school, media, job (9), taxes, business, American (8).

Over the entire sample period under investigation, the data is the following: between 1990-1999, the cumulative number of words involved in SC<sup>2</sup> was 55524, in 5430 sentences, with an average lexical density of 23.9. Therefore, the total word count was further reduced from 64117 to 55524.

#### 4. Qualitative Coding

In this research step, the units of analysis were not individual words, but larger units, phrases and sentences. The content significant sample then consists of 5430 sentences grouped into thematic categories. As aforementioned in Chapter 8, this stage produces categories from the significant content. And the definition of categories progresses with the extrapolation of SC<sup>2</sup>, which is consistent with content analysis, as “one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept”<sup>1</sup> refraining, to the most possible extent, from the use of “a priori assumptions.”<sup>2</sup> In short, the

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<sup>1</sup> Glaser *et al.*, 1999:23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

categories were not been constructed before the identification of the statements, but were generated *during* the identification of statements and as the statements themselves presented as useful categories. This provided for a full categorization of SC<sup>2</sup>; no satirical statement (phrase or sentence) has been left out of any category. As Weber points out in his monograph on content analysis, the term “*category* [can] be reserved for words with *similar* meanings and/or connotations.”<sup>1</sup> By the same token, this analysis holds the term “category” for statements or “clusters of words with *different* meanings or connotations that taken together refer to”<sup>2</sup> a similar theme, identified by their subject or object, denominated “category.” The resulting categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and frequently, the same paragraph may exhibit content expressed in different sentences that, taken individually, may belong to different categories. In the main, five thematic categories have been identified: 1) SC<sup>2</sup> and Specific Political Figures [SPF]; 2) SC<sup>2</sup> and Political Groups [PG]; 3) SC<sup>2</sup> and the General Uncritical Consensus [GUC]; 4) SC<sup>2</sup> and Political Economic Propaganda [PEP]; 5) SC<sup>2</sup> and the Political Economic System [PES]. The five categories are defined as follows.

**SPF Theme:** Statements in this thematic category involve elected or unelected government officials, leaders of political groups, official or not, leaders of religious groups, leaders of activist groups, etc. They frequently identify a specific political figure, who can even belong outside the formal political realm, but whom nevertheless exercise a political role: Martin Luther King on the issue of civil rights is one example, Barbara Streisand for LGBTQ issues is another, etc. Even a media personality renown for being on one or the other side of the political spectrum is included in the category, like radio-host Rush Limbaugh for instance.

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, 1990:37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

An example of an SPF statement is the following:

*We have a new president now: George Bush. I find Bush an interesting dichotomy in that he is anti-abortion and yet pro-death penalty. Heh, I guess it's all in the timing, huh George?*<sup>1</sup>

**PG Theme:** Statements in this thematic category involve political groups of all types that are referred to as groups and not necessarily by any particular member: political groups (democrats, republicans, liberals, conservatives, etc.), environmental, gender (feminist movement), religious (evangelical, anti-abortion, pro-life, creationists, etc.), all groups or organizations who seek some reform or advance an agenda.

An example of PG statement is the following:

*I find it ironic that people who are against sexual thoughts are generally these fundamentalist Christians who also believe you should be fruitful and multiply. Pffft. Seems like they would support sexual thoughts, you know? Perhaps even a centerfold in the Bible.*<sup>2</sup>

**GUC Theme:** Statements in this thematic category involve public/mass opinion, public/mass beliefs, public/mass behavior, etc. GUC statements frequently include phrases such as 'everybody says', 'people say', 'everybody's like', 'they go', etc. These references to mass opinion, beliefs, behaviors may or may not include causal connections with propaganda.

An example of GUC statement is the following:

*It's amazing what people will believe. I mean, I watch these infomercials late at night. If it gets late enough, the products start to look good to me. (...) I think the dumbest thing you can think late at night is you know, "I'm gonna get this thing and get in shape." It's 3 in the morning, you got potato chip crumbs on your shirt there, you got one eye open, one sock hanging off of the foot. You go "Yeah, I'm gonna start working out with this thing. I'm gonna order this thing. This is all I need to get in shape. This is a fantastic device." Rip-off. We can't stop getting ripped-off.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 25:37-25:50.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. 1991. Interval: 24:25-24:41.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Seinfeld. *I'm Telling You for the last Time*. 1998. Interval: 54:22-56:20.



**PEP Theme:** Statements in this thematic category involve the manipulations of language, symbols to control attitudes and public opinion. They frequently include phrases such as ‘the news said’, ‘the media is like’, ‘the government said’, ‘advertising is like,’ etc. Or they may point to what a specific political figure or media outlet said.

An example of PEP statement is the following:

*I'm also tired of the media talking, of course, we know that Iraqis control their State media. We know that. But they're always kind of "Iraqi State-Sponsored TV, hehehe. We'll be right back, after this word from Mobil.<sup>1</sup>*

**PES Theme:** Statements in this thematic category involve generalizations about how the political economic system works, and the issues are systemic or structural, making reference to the behavior of political/economic institutions or sectors and how the function in aggregate, that is, from a birds-eye view. They frequently include phrases such as ‘The government’, ‘The banks/ers’, ‘The politicians/Politics’, ‘The military’, ‘The clergy’, ‘Religion,’ ‘Industry’, ‘Advertising’ etc. They may also involve what is legal versus what is illegal, taxes, the profit-seeking nature of the political-economic system, as these features are fundamental characteristics of the political economic system. Institutional racism is also included in this category, in that it is a feature of the political economic system when institutions (Police, Government, etc.) are involved, as discussed in Chapter 3. These statements differ from PG statements in that the reference is on institutions that are part of the larger political economic system, and not specific political groups that seek to advance an agenda for reform.

An example of PES statement is the following:

*I do not understand why prostitution is illegal. Why should prostitution be illegal? Selling is legal. Fucking is legal. Why isn't selling fucking legal? You know, why should it be illegal to sell something that's perfectly legal to give away? I can't follow the logic on that at all. Of all the things you can do to a person, giving someone an orgasm is hardly the worst thing in the world. In*

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval: 05:43-5:55.

*the army, they give you a medal for spraying napalm on people. In civilian life, you go to jail for giving someone an orgasm. Maybe I'm not supposed to understand it.*<sup>1</sup>

The qualitative analysis generated the following results, summarized in Table 7.

<b>TABLE 7</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>SPF</b>	21	2	11	2	21	0	8	7	0	16	<b>88</b>
<b>PG</b>	10	3	6	0	7	0	10	11	0	4	<b>51</b>
<b>GUC</b>	26	20	22	7	26	3	34	24	7	34	<b>203</b>
<b>PEP</b>	28	13	15	5	9	2	20	13	4	19	<b>128</b>
<b>PES</b>	12	3	17	7	16	3	20	22	8	29	<b>137</b>

The results were produced by counting statements as single units of analysis, unless the statements were structurally not independent from their larger context – paragraph – and therefore intertwined with other statements to deliver meaning. The breakdown by year and stand-up comedian is summarized in Table 8, and therefore the ultimate reduced content significant sample consists of the SC<sup>2</sup> produced by the comedians below. The qualitative coding identified the following in the period under scrutiny:

- 88 Specific Political Figure statements;
- 51 Political Group statements;
- 203 General Uncritical Consensus statements;
- 128 Political Economic Propaganda statements;
- 137 Political Economic System statements.

<b>TABLE 8 – Category hits by Comic &amp; Year</b>													
<b>1990</b>		<b>SPF</b>	<b>PG</b>	<b>GUC</b>	<b>PEP</b>	<b>PES</b>	<b>1995</b>		<b>SPF</b>	<b>PG</b>	<b>GUC</b>	<b>PEP</b>	<b>PES</b>
	George Carlin	4	8	8	15	1		Jeanine Garofalo	0	0	3	2	3
	Bill Hicks	1	0	4	3	2	<b>1996</b>						

<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 34:45-35:29

	Barry Crimmins	9	0	4	8	4		Andrew Dice Clay	0	0	1	0	0
	Dennis Miller	7	2	10	2	5		Chris Rock	6	0	18	5	4
<b>1991</b>								George Carlin	2	10	15	13	15
	Bill Hicks	1	1	8	8	1		David Cross	0	0	0	2	1
	Jim Carrey	0	1	3	0	0	<b>1997</b>						
	Bill Hicks	1	1	9	5	2		Bill Hicks	7	11	17	10	18
<b>1992</b>								Eddie Griffin	0	0	7	3	4
	Bill Hicks	6	4	9	8	6	<b>1998</b>						
	George Carlin	4	2	9	6	8		Dave Chappelle	0	0	4	0	5
	Eddie Griffin	1	0	4	1	3		Jerry Seinfeld	0	0	2	2	1
<b>1993</b>								Jeff Foxworthy	0	0	1	2	2
	Sam Kinison	2	0	7	5	7	<b>1999</b>						
<b>1994</b>								Chris Rock	10	1	15	3	10
	Chris Rock	0	0	3	0	4		George Carlin	3	2	14	11	14
	Martin Lawrence	0	0	5	2	4		David Cross	0	1	2	4	2
	Dennis Miller	21	7	18	7	8		Dennis Miller	3	0	3	1	3
<b>1990-1999</b>							<b>SPF</b>	<b>PG</b>	<b>GUC</b>	<b>PEP</b>	<b>PES</b>		
<b>TOTALS</b>							88	51	203	128	137		

George Carlin leads the content significant sample with 164 category hits, followed by Bill Hicks with 143, Dennis Miller 97, and Chris Rock 79. Data considerations aside, it is necessary to look at the evidence. The evidence consists of examples of statements, as is standard in linguistic science as well and content analysis more generally. The evidence will be examined for the GUC, PEP and PES categories, for each year, to see whether the statements support or refute the hypothesis, by comparing them with the set formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ , whereby OGB, an operative group belief, is targeted and undermined by virtue of the association with CERP, a contrary empirical rational proposition.

Note that, although the sample has been reduced to its most content significant whole, the most represented category is GUC (general uncritical consensus), followed by PES (political economic system), PEP (political economic propaganda), SPF (specific political figure), and PG (political group). And while the SPF and PG categories present interesting material, for the purposes of this analysis the focus will be on the GUC, PEP and PES categories, in that order. Select  $SC^2$  content will be reproduced and it will be

tested in terms of the formula in order to support or refute the leading hypothesis. The whole content significant sample is included *in toto*, unabridged, in the Appendix.

Every instance of SC<sup>2</sup> has been transcribed, reproduced, categorized, though only a select few, for reasons of analytical economy, are selected for qualitative analysis.<sup>1</sup> The next section features 81 statements out of a total of 568. As aforementioned, for the purposes of this analysis, the selected excerpts of SC<sup>2</sup> are reproduced verbatim, uncensored. Given that the excerpts invariably include profanities, expletives, and/or slang pejoratives, reader discretion is advised. The significant portions of the SC<sup>2</sup> will be emphasized in **bold**. And just as a reminder, this analysis does not aim to demonstrate what makes the content 'funny'. It only examines the elements that can support or refute the guiding hypothesis.

## 5. Evidence & Analysis

The following texts were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1990:

GUC1: *I get tired of **people talking about** bad words and bad language. Bullshit. It's the context that makes them good or bad. The context that makes them good or bad. For instance, you take the word '**nigger**'. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the word 'nigger' in and of itself. It's the racist asshole that's using it that you ought to be concerned about. **We don't care when Richard Pryor or Eddie Murphy say it.** Why? 'Cause we know they're not racist: they're niggers. Context. Context. We don't mind their context because they're black.*<sup>2</sup>

GUC2: *I think the world is falling apart out there. Do you feel that way? Did you watch this shit, you watch the flag-burning thing? Wasn't that great? Whoa, if everyone showed their true colors then didn't they? Retarded nation that we are. Scary. **People acted as though** the Supreme Court approved of flag-burning. 'Does that mean we have to burn our flags?' No, No, No. It's not what they said. They said that perhaps if somebody wants to burn a flag he perhaps doesn't need to go to jail for a year. (...) **People snapped over this.** Did you watch that? **People just went:** 'Hey buddy, let me tell you something, my daddy died for that flag.' This, really? Wow, I*

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<sup>1</sup> The entire sample is nonetheless included in the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 45:51-48:37

bought mine. They sell them at K-Mart and shit. Yeah. 'He died in the Korean War for that flag.' Oh, what a coincidence, mine was **made in Korea**.<sup>1</sup>

GUC3: We're sick of the **Pentagon, so greedy** they have an **extra side on their building**. We don't need stealth bombers. What do they do? They fly around and you can't tell they're there. Well, why don't you **just say you have them**?<sup>2</sup>

PEP1: I don't like **words that hide the truth**. I don't like words that conceal reality. I don't like euphemisms or euphemistic language. And American English is loaded with euphemisms. Cause Americans have a lot of trouble dealing with reality. Americans have trouble facing the truth. So they invent a kind of soft language to protect themselves from it. And it gets worse with every generation. For some reason it keeps getting worse. I'll give you an example of that. There's a condition in combat, most people know about it, it's when a fighting person's nervous system has been stressed to its absolute peak and maximum, can't take anymore input. The nervous system has either snapped or is about to snap. In the First World War, that condition was called '**shellshock**.' Simple, honest, direct language. Two syllables. 'Shellshock.' Almost sounds like the guns themselves. That was 70 years ago. Then a whole generation went by and the Second World War came along, and the very same combat condition was called 'battle fatigue.' Four syllables now. Takes a little longer to say, doesn't seem to hurt as much, fatigue is a nicer word than shock. Shellshock, battle fatigue. Then we had the war in Korea 1950, **Madison avenue** was riding high by that time, and the very same combat condition was called 'operational exhaustion.' Hey we're up to 8 syllables now. And the humanity has been squeezed completely out of the phrase, it's totally sterile now. 'operational exhaustion'. Sounds like something that might happen to your car. Then of course came the war in Vietnam, which has only been over for about 16-17 years. And thanks to the lies and deceits surrounding that war I guess it's no surprise that the very same condition was called '**post-traumatic stress disorder**.' Still 8 syllables, but we've added a hyphen. **And the pain is completely buried under jargon**. Post-traumatic stress disorder. I'll bet you if we'd have still been calling it 'shellshock' some of those Vietnam veterans might have gotten the attention they needed at the time. I'll bet you that. I'll bet you that. But, but it didn't happen. And one of the reasons, one of the reasons, is because we were using that soft language. That language that takes the life out of life.<sup>3</sup>

PEP2: George Bush says 'we are **losing the war on drugs**.' You know what that implies? There's a war being fought, and **people on drugs are winning it**. What does that tell you about drugs? Some creative people on that side, they're winning the war and they're fucked up! Hey, I don't get it because alcohol and cigarettes are drugs. So the war is taking a definite

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 35:30-38:30.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval: 09:32-09:44

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 48:38-51:30

*ceasefire here* isn't it. Yeah, alcohol and cigarettes kill more people than crack, cocaine, heroin combined.<sup>1</sup>

PEP3: We do not support these people because they are killers. And we're opposed to killing. And we've been opposed to killing much longer than George Bush has been outraged by something. George Bush who suddenly has found out that '**Chemical weapons are immoral.**' Maybe because there's **not much to defoliate** in the Middle-East. I'm not sure. George Bush: 'Chemical weapons are immoral. You know, come on, you **should kill people only with good conventional weapons.** Not a chemical weapon. Only DOW only Union Carbide should murder, that should be left in their hand. Chemical weapons are otherwise wrong'.<sup>2</sup>

PES1: It's time for me to get a little drink of water. Figure this stuff is safe to drink. Actually, I don't care if it's safe or not. I drink it anyway. You know why? 'Cause I'm an American and **I expect a little cancer in my food and water.** That's right. **I'm a loyal American** and I'm not happy unless I've let **government and industry poison me** a little bit every day. Let me have a few hundred thousand carcinogens here.<sup>3</sup>

PES2: First thing I noticed when I came here was **the homeless situation.** Now, I'm no bleeding heart, ok, but when you're walking down the streets of New York City and you're stepping over a guy on a sidewalk, who, I don't know, might be dead, does it ever occur to you to think '**wow, maybe our system** doesn't work?' Does that question ever bubble up out of you? I mean if there was only a couple of bums I'd think 'well, they're fucking bums.' But **there's thousands** of these fucking gu., I mean I'm running like a bum hurdle down the fucking street: The 100 Yard Bum Hurdle.<sup>4</sup> And I had no idea there was thousands of these guys. (...) Man, some of these guys, they look healthy, I don't get it. They're just fucking bums, you know what I mean? The very idea they want me to just give them the **hard earned money ... my folks send** to me every week, fuck! You leach! Get a job man. My dad works 8 hours a day for this money. The nerve of these people.<sup>5</sup>

PES3: Bush is talking, you know, how about his **hanging around with Assad?** 'Well, this is part of our madman conservation program. In ten years if they **threaten us** with another **peace dividend** we can start to expose his **atrocities**'. We've drawn a line in the sand and we've told the whole world that we'll pay any price rather than develop a **sane energy policy.**<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 28:02-30:40.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:02:06-02:41

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 19:40-20:01

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*, 1990. Interval: 00:01-06:34.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*, 1990. Interval: 00:01-06:34.

<sup>6</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:03:55-04:16

1990 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC texts, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around a) disapproval for bad words, b) attachment to the US flag, and c) Pentagon budget appropriations for defense technology. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating that a) in certain cases they do not arouse disapproval, b) they are not manufactured in the US, c) impossibility of justifying profligate defense expenditures.

In terms of PEP statements, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda on a) soldiers' post-traumatic health disorders, b) the 'war' on drugs, c) chemical weapons are 'immoral'. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating that a) jargon buries meaning to the detriment of healthcare, b) disparities of treatment regardless of body count, c) no weapon is moral.

In terms of PES statements, the operative group beliefs are centred around the political economic system in terms of a) potable water, b) homelessness, c) relations with foreign dictators. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating that a) the management of water is in the hands of government and industry, b) homelessness is a widespread phenomenon, c) peace dividends de facto interrupt the international arms trade. Finally, two additional GUC & PES texts:

*GUC4: Now fur. I don't believe in fur. I don't wear fur. But it stops right there. Because I am pro-choice across the board and I'm beginning to think that the number one endangered species in this country is somebody who retains their freedom of choice. I have nothing against these fur people but I think, **these fur people**, we're gonna have to get it through their head that personal likes and dislikes are merely opinions and not laws of the land. Fur farms aren't the way to go, nobody wants to see these animals stuck in these traps, the traps should be reserved for social activists but there are ... I have seen people in New York City **step over fellow human beings** laying in their own piss, to spit on somebody who's wearing chinchilla. And you know, now they pretend to spit on you if you wear fake fur. I mean, how far do we go with this madness?<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 28:22-29:52

PES4: *There seems to be an intrusive nature to religion now in this country that I don't quite understand. There isn't an hour of the day where a **television preacher** doesn't bully his way into your living room. I see through these guys like used Neutrogena. You know they say they don't favor any **particular denomination**, but I think we've all seen their eyes light up at **tens and twenties**.*<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the GUC4 text, the operative group belief is the general uncritical consensus around widespread opposition to the fur trade, while the contrary rational empirical proposition is that this opposition occurs in a context of widespread indifference to homelessness. In terms of the PES text, the operative group belief is centred around the political economic system in terms of the televised religion, juxtaposed with the contrary empirical rational proposition indicating that it is another profit-seeking institution in the political economic system.

The following statements were selected for GUC and PEP categories for the year 1991:

GUC1: *We had this big war thing happen, I don't know if you caught any of that. It was a very stressful time for me, the war, I'll tell you why. I was in the unenviable position of being for the war, but against the troops. Not the most popular stance I've ever taken on an issue, I must say. I don't choose wisely always, and yet, I'm committed. First of all, this needs to be said: **there never was a war**. 'How can you say that Bill?' Well, **a war is when two armies are fighting**. So you see, right there, we can all agree, it wasn't exactly a war. <sup>2</sup> I guess the most amazing thing about the war, obviously, the **disparity in the casualties**. Iraq 150 thousand casualties. USA ... seventy-nine. Let's go through those numbers again. They're a little baffling at first glance. Iraq 150 thousand, USA ... seventy-nine. **Seventy-nine?** Does that mean **if we had sent over 80 guys** we still would have won that fucking thing, or what?<sup>3</sup>*

GUC2: *Christians who kill. Ah, we're about out of ideas on this planet aren't we? That's why I love people like George Bush, or this guy Pat Robertson, this televangelist in the States. These are '**Christians for stronger nuclear armament**.'* Oh what a great deal of faith. Because I know if **Jesus** were

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 34:15-34:36

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval: 06:19-07:41.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval: 10:25-11:01.



here, he'd probably have an **Uzi** on him. Don't you think he would? Yeah he would. *'The **prince of peace** is back ... but he's **pissed off**'*.<sup>1</sup>

GUC3: You know, I don't know what you all believe in, and I don't really care. But you have to admit, beliefs are odd. A lot of Christians wear **crosses around their neck**. You think when Jesus comes back he ever wants to **see a fucking cross**? It's kinda like going up to Jackie Onasis with a little sniper rifle pin. 'Hi there Jackie! Just thinking of John. We loved him'.<sup>2</sup>

PEP1: Once again though, I was watching **CNN**. Man, it blew it all, all the anxiety. Remember how it started? They **kept talking** about the **'Elite Republican Guard'** in these hushed tones, remember that, like they were the boogie man. 'Yeah. We're doing well, but we have yet to face the Elite Republican Guard.' Yeah, like these guys are ten feet tall desert warriors, never lost a battle, they shit bullets. Well, after two and a half months of continuous carpet-bombing, not one reaction at all from those fuckers. They became simply the 'Republican Guard'. Not nearly as elite as we may have led you to believe. And after another month of continuous bombing, and not one reaction at all, they went from the 'Elite Republican Guard' to the 'Republican Guard' to **'The Republicans made this shit up** about there being Guards out there.' We hope you enjoyed your fireworks show.<sup>3</sup>

PEP2: That's what I hate about the **War on Drugs**. I'll be honest with you. What I can't stand is all day long we see **those commercials** 'Here's your brain. Here's your brain on drugs. Just say no. Why do you think they call it 'dope'?' And then the next commercial is ... 'This Bud's for you. Come on everybody, let's be hypocritical bastards. It's ok to drink your drug. Hahahah. **We meant those other drugs, those untaxed drugs**. Those are the ones that are bad for you.' **Nicotine, alcohol: good drugs**. Coincidentally, **taxed drugs**. Oooh, how does this fucking work? Thank god they're taxing alcohol man, it means we got those good roads we can get fucked up and drive on. Thank god they're taxing this shit man. We'd be doing donuts in a Wheatfield now. 'Thank god we're on a highway. This is a good drug.'<sup>4</sup>

1991 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC texts, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around a) the war in the Persian Gulf, b) Christians who support weapons, and c) Christians who wear crosses. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate a) the disparity in forces and casualties, b)

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval: 36:09-36:42.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval: 37:05-37:55.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval: 11:05-12:22.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 09:53-10:57

the conciliatory character of Jesus in the New Testament, c) the rational aversion towards the representation of murder on the part of the victim.

In terms of PEP texts, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda on a) the strength of Iraq's military, b) the War on drugs, c) chemical weapons being immoral. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that a) jargon buries meaning to the detriment of healthcare, b) disparities of treatment regardless of body count, c) no weapon is moral.

The following statements were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1992:

GUC1: *Unbelievable. And you know what's wild, people's attitudes in the States about it. Talking about **Kennedy** people come up to me: 'Bill, quit talking about Kennedy man. **Let it go.** It was a long time ago. **Just forget about it.**' I'm like: 'Alright. **Then don't bring up Jesus to me.**' As long as we're talking shelf-life here. 'Bill, you know Jesus died for you...' Yeah, it was a long time ago, forget about it. How about this: get Pilate to release the fucking files. Quit washing your hands Pilate and release the goddam files. Who else was on that grassy Golgotha that day? 'Bill, it was just... taking over of democracy by totalitarian government, let it go.'*<sup>1</sup>

GUC2: *I don't really believe in my country. And I gotta tell you folks, I don't get all choked up about **yellow ribbons** and **American flags**. I consider them to be **symbols** and **I leave symbols** to the symbol-minded.*<sup>2</sup>

GUC3: ***We're so self-important.** So self-important. Everybody's gonna save something now. Save the trees, save the bees, save the whales, save those snails. And the greatest arrogance of all: **Save the planet.** What? Are these fucking people kidding me? Save the planet? We don't even know how to take care of ourselves yet, **we haven't learned how to care for one another**, we're going to save the fucking planet? I'm getting tired of that shit. Tired of that shit. Tired.*<sup>3</sup>

PEP1: *Now you might be noticing that I don't **feel about that war** the way we're being told we were supposed to feel about that war. The way we were **ordered and instructed** by the United States Government to feel about that war. See, my mind doesn't work that way. I got this real moron thing I do, it's called: thinking. And I'm not a really good American because I like to form my own opinion. I don't just roll over when I'm told to. It's sad to say,*

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 16:22-17:23.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 2:35-3:58.

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. "The Planet is fine," *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 1:17-7:37.

but most Americans just roll over on command. Not me. Not me. I have several rules I live by. First rule, I don't believe anything the Government tells me. Nothing. Zero. And I don't take very seriously **the media or the press** in this country who in the case of the Persian Gulf War were nothing more than unpaid employees of the Department of Defense. And who most of the time function as a kind of **unofficial public relations agency for the United States Government**. So I don't listen to them.<sup>1</sup>

PEP2: Now to balance the scale I'd like to talk about some things that bring us together. Things that point out our similarities instead of our differences. Because that's all you ever hear about in this country are differences. That's **all the media and the politicians are ever talking about**, the things that separate us, things that make us different from one another. That's the way the ruling class operates in any society they try to divide the rest of the people. They keep the lower and the middle classes fighting with each other so that they the rich can run off with all the fucking money. Fairly simple thing. Happens to work. You know, anything different, that's what they're going to talk about: race, religion, ethnic and national background, jobs, income, education, social status, sexuality, anything you can do **to keep us fighting with each other** so they can keep going to the bank.<sup>2</sup>

PEP3: Then I get into this mofucka, I'm watching **on TV** some **white boy stole** the car ran down the freeway and the police shot his ass. You ever see this shit? I knew the motherfucker was white when I watched it 'cause they didn't show **no picture**. 'Cause **when a nigga fuck up**, the picture come up all day, every day. Five o'clock news: the nigger that fucked up. Six o'clock, the nigga that fucked up. Ten o'clock, the nigga that fucked up. **CNN twenty-four hours a day**, the nigga that fucked up.<sup>3</sup>

PES1: **Bush** tried to buy votes towards the end of the election. Went around, you know, **selling weapons to everyone**. Getting that **military-industrial complex** vote happening for him. Sold 160 fighter jets to Korea, then 240 tanks to Kuwait, and then goes around making speeches why he should be Commander in Chief, because: **'We still live in a dangerous world.'** Thanks to you, you fucker. What are you doing? Last week Kuwaitis had nothing but rocks. **Quit arming the fucking world** man.<sup>4</sup>

PES2: You know we armed Iraq. I wondered about that too, you know, during the Persian Gulf War, those **intelligence reports** would come out: **'Iraq, incredible weapons. Incredible weapons.'** How do you know that? 'Huh, well .... We looked at the **receipt**. But as soon as that check clears we're going in. What time's the bank opening? Eight? We're going in at nine. We're going in for God and Country and Democracy and here's a fetus

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 2:35-3:58.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:11-7:51.

<sup>3</sup> Eddie Griffin. *One Night Stand*. 1992. Interval: 2:25-9:51.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 07:35-08:14

*and here's a Hitler. Whatever you fucking need. Let's go! Get motivated behind this, let's go!*<sup>1</sup>

*PES3: You know how I describe **the economic and social classes** in this country? The upper class keeps all of the **money**, pays none of the **taxes**. The middle class pays all of the **taxes**, does all of the **work**. The poor are there ... just to scare the shit out of the middle class. Keep 'em showing up at those **jobs**.*<sup>2</sup>

1992 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC texts, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around a) aversion to inquiry regarding the Kennedy assassination, b) patriotic symbols, c) saving the planet. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate a) propensity to inquiry regarding Jesus, b) the propagandistic nature of symbols, c) the inability to accomplish much less than saving the planet.

In terms of PEP texts, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda induced a) attitudes towards the Persian Gulf War b) conceptualization of divisions within society, c) under-reporting of white crime. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions on a) pro-war reporting by the mass media, b) conflict theory, c) over-reporting of black crime.

In terms of PES texts, the operative group beliefs are centred around the political economic system in terms of a) the arms trade b) the sophistication of foreign arms, c) class. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating a) the consequences of the arms trade b) the suppliers of those foreign arms, c) the structural utility of classes.

The following statements were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1993:

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 08:15-09:10

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:11-7:51.

GUC1: *My favorite President, John F. Kennedy. My personal favorite President. Charming guy, great guy, good president. Fucked Marilyn Monroe. President of the United States and fucked Marylyn Monroe. What do you want? I know some **people give him shit** about that. Yeah, like you wouldn't have. No, you would've been too busy studying the **Bill of Rights and the Constitution**, yeah. Yeah, you wouldn't have wanted a piece of Marilyn, not you. No, you're **too patriotic**. Yeah, fuck you. If you looked at her, you'd have been just like JFK. You'd be there in the Oval Office, Marilyn across the desk, your dick up her ass, looking out watching the monument, going: 'It doesn't get much better than this, does it?' President of the United States, fucking Marilyn Monroe. 'My finger on the fucking button, telling fucking Russians to get their missiles out of Cuba in twelve hours. It doesn't get better than this'. Yeah, but you wouldn't have done it. You wouldn't have went for that. No. You wouldn't want to feel that. **Fuck you. You would have done it.**<sup>1</sup>*

PEP1: *Of course, we had to face **their 'Doomsday Machine'**. We had to face their 'Weapon of Death': the SCUD missile. That's right. Yeah. If K-Mart was a weapons dealer, they would make the SCUD missile. Yeah, it's kinda like the fucking Smart bomb. It's kinda like the Smart Bomb. But what you do, you fire it out of the trunk of your car, then you go home and turn on CNN **to see where it landed**. So it's kinda, it's kinda like the fucking Smart Bomb, in a way. Like, if you can't afford a fucking Smart Bomb, you get a SCUD missile. I love that threat too. **'The fourth largest army in the world**. The fourth largest army in the world.' Oh, Oh, No. Not number four. **How scary** are you if you're fucking **number four**? Not to mention if two of these guys would have had outfits that matched, maybe, maybe I would have been a little more afraid. This was the shittiest dressed fucking army I've ever seen in any war anywhere. Their outfits were shit. Terrible outfits.<sup>2</sup> Come on. **The war was over in 100 hours**. The ground war. (...) The ground war lasted 100 hours. A hundred fucking hours. I've had fucking **parties that went on longer than that** folks.<sup>3</sup>*

PES1: *I hate Russians. They're scum. They want to be us, but they'll never be us. They're jealous of us. They hate us. Because we are living their fucking dream. We're living the whole world's dream. **We run this fucking planet now**. We do. America owns the world. We have the food. That's right, we have the food. That's right. We have the **weapons**. We have the **army**. You gotta be nice to us, because first of all, you'll go hungry, and then we'll kick your fucking ass. So it's not a good idea to piss us off. That's why **Russia is kissing our ass**. They know.<sup>4</sup>*

1993 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of the GUC texts, the operative group belief is the general uncritical consensus around the inappropriateness of Kennedy's extra-marital affair,

<sup>1</sup> Sam Kinison. *Live from Hell*. 1993. Interval: 4:00-5:08.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Kinison. *Live from Hell*. 1993. Interval: 1:27-4:26.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Kinison. *Live from Hell*. 1993. Interval: 6:50-7:47.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Kinison. *Live from Hell*. 1993. Interval: 0:05-0:54.

juxtaposed with the contrary empirical rational propositions indicating typical alpha-male behaviour.

In terms of the PEP1 text, the operative group belief is the propaganda induced fear-mongering around Iraq's military capabilities, juxtaposed with the contrary empirical rational proposition on its demonstrated military competitive disadvantage. In terms of the PES2 text, the operative group belief is centred around the standing of post-Soviet Russia, juxtaposed with the global hegemon role played by the US in international affairs.

The following statements were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1994:

GUC1: *That's some amazing shit to me. Like **black people in the Olympics** representing America. That's like weird. You realize, no matter how fucked up this country has been racially, there's always been black people in the Olympics, no matter how far back you go. They had black people in the Olympics **in the twenties**. In the twenties! Now, a brother was at the **back of the bus in the sixties**. In the twenties, the brother must have been inside the engine of the bus ... on the conveyer belt chasing a piece of chicken.*<sup>1</sup>

GUC2: *One thing if I had to like **anything about jail**, 'cause jail is a fucked up place to be, is that when a brother goes in there and uses his time wisely. You know, pick up a book, read. You know, don't give a fuck what it is. Ain't read anything all their life, it could be Mary Had A Little Lamb. But they try hard. Me-ri hh-ad a lil leam. 'Man, how many lambs did the bitch have? This shit is frustrated'. And it's fucked up though when they **read one book** and get out and **try to educate you on some shit**. You ever seen that mofucker? You ain't seen in a while and you come up to him, you like: 'Man, where've you been?' He like: 'Oh man. These people that had me incarcerated over some things I had done back in the past. But what I found is if I utilize my talent and my mind, I can grow as one human being. See, that's where I'm at with mind. I think we, in order to grow, we gotta love the brother man and the other man. I think it's very important to do that. Basically, what I'm trying to say is, **you got five dollars on you I can borrow?**'*<sup>2</sup>

GUC3: *We trivialize everything in this country. **Women's issues?** With all the **serious inequities** being heaped on women, the inequality in pay, the brutalization at the hands of incomplete male monsters, what do we focus*

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Big Ass Jokes*. HBO stand-up special. Atlanta, Georgia. 1994. Interval: 6:30-7:00.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. New York City. 1994. Interval: 15:45-17:01

on? **The freak show, the bullshit:** Clarence Thomas and the pubic hair and the coke, the paranoid feminist groups telling you to beware of everything male, and everything comes down to male sexual aggression. The dreaded Heimlich, come on. **The New England Patriot's locker room situation.** This is Lindbergh baby headlines in this country for two months. Why? A couple of second stringers dangled their johnsons in some female reporter's face. She's so traumatized she has to move out of the fucking country. There's that Margaret Bourke-White spirit huh? (...) Come on. Peel back the mask, it's Camille Paglia.<sup>1</sup>

PEP1: I miss television. A rapidly changing medium. **Most people** have now crazy glued down the scan button on the remote control and the **average American attention span** is that of a ferret on a double espresso. We have an amazing proliferation of television channels now. In the latter part of last year, we were introduced to the 24 all cartoon channel. Thank you for taking a stand in life. The 24 hour science fiction channel. Of course, **to make room for these** on the dial they got **rid of the Literacy Channel**, and the What's Left of Fucking Civilization Channel. A lot of infomercials out there.<sup>2</sup>

PEP2: I know the **gun lobby** has done a brilliant job of **attaching guns to apple pie, God, and motherhood**. But you know **that's bullshit**, as much as I know it's bullshit. If you let the mothers of this world vote on guns tomorrow, they will be nothing more than a sad memory. And don't give me that stuff about God and guns. I've read the Bible. I now **God didn't carry a gun**. And don't tell me it was ancient time and guns didn't exist. He was God. I think **he could have invented one** had he wanted to, alright?<sup>3</sup>

PEP3: And the media was getting jokes in on us and shit. Wasn't it? Media think they slick. **White media had some jokes for our ass**. 'Oh my god. Oh. My. God. They just looted another supermarket. I can guarantee you if you come down here all the chicken is gone. All the watermelon and malt liquor is gone'. That's all they showed that night was black people coming out of the stores with shit. Black people, black people, coming out of the store with shit. They even showed me one time coming out with some shit. You know, because I had to be down with my people. **But they ain't said shit** about the Mexicans. Nothin. And to tell the truth, come one man, Mexicans got them some shit. I love the Mexican, Ala la Vista, and Chavez to you. But you got you some shit. And the Mexicans didn't even know what the call was about. They just saw an opportunity to get some free shit.<sup>4</sup>

PES1: I heard some people moan though. It's funny to me how reflexively protective we are of **the Kennedys**. They really are **our royalty**. It always amazes me. And I'm not sure it's warranted, because there's a faction of that family that has a track record like Jimmy Page okay. They might as

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 37:04-41:37

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 6:43-7:35

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 41:40-42:43

<sup>4</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. 1994. Interval: 2:53-8:51.

*well go ahead and name their next grandchild Alleged. And you know something? Teddy, Teddy Kennedy is the worst of the lot. This guy has that Melvin Dummar credibility. At this point in his life he can't look a fucking Cyclops in the eye. And, you know, we still protect him. **We're like little serfs down in the field picking truffles for that evenings feast.** You look up, Teddy's hanging naked off the drawbridge, sucking Altered States solutional paste out of some young wenches Meade cup. **'Oh don't look! That's the Kennedys fucking again. Don't look. Don't look.'** (...) Now, you can moan. But I think I'm on the right side of that one. Although I realize by saying that out loud on national TV I risk becoming the first guy to ever get assassinated by a Kennedy.<sup>1</sup>*

*PES2: I don't even believe in abortion, but more importantly, I don't believe in the right to a life without any rights. And I think many people in the **right-to-life movement** should get a fucking life before they begin to tell other people what to do with theirs. (...) And you know something ... and you know something? The right-to-life people would have a lot more credibility with me if so many of them weren't cross and roll with the **National Rifle Association okay.** We have got a serious gun problem in this country folks. And until we confront it we will never be considered a great civilization.<sup>2</sup>*

*PES3: Look at Los Angeles, where I live. There's a dysfunctional little metropolis. This place is the gunfight at the I'm Not Ok Corral. LA makes Blade Runner look like a Norman Rockwell litho. **Tensions** are so high between the **cops and the civilians** in LA, I'll be honest with you, I'm not mocking this up for joke, I'm **scared shitless** of these guys. I get pulled over by a cop in LA, I don't even fuck around. I just wind the window down and blow the guy, okay? I don't want anybody **misinterpreting** my body language, or getting a **bad read** on my intentions. 'Give me that officer, go ahead write that right on top of my head. Alright'.<sup>3</sup>*

1994 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC statements, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around a) the acceptance of black athletes in US society, b) the incarceration of members of the black community, c) the trivialization of women's issues. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate a) the persistent racism towards blacks in US society, b) the failure of post-jail rehabilitation, c) the accomplishments of women in typically male-dominated fields.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 29:25-31:30

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 40:30-42:43

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 48:12-49:30.



In terms of PEP texts, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda induced a) interest in a proliferation of nugatory television channels b) gun lobby's alliance with Christianity, c) the over-reporting of black crime. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions on a) disinterest in literacy b) accounts of God in the Bible, c) the under-reporting of crime by other minorities.

In terms of PES texts, the operative group beliefs are centred around the political economic system in terms of a) the Kennedys as royalty b) the right-to-life movement c) police brutality. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating a) Kennedy admiration as serfdom, b) their alliance with the gun lobby, c) the behavioural consequences of police brutality.

The following statements were selected for GUC and PEP categories for the year 1995:

GUC1: *Okay. I hate high fashion. I hate it. I hate supermodels as celebrities. I hate the fact that **we reward people for being genetic freaks**. I really do. I think it's awful. I just think it's abominable that, you know, the crisis of confidence that hits 13-14 year old girls when they go through it, it's just a crime. Reviving Ophelia. Read it, Good book. **14 million eating disorders in this country**, it makes me sick.<sup>1</sup>*

PEP1: *It makes me sick the way women are the victims of lookism. And that High Fashion just feeds into coveting and vanity and all that is evil. And I hate them. I will not back down on this. I don't care how unlikable it makes me seem to you. I hate models in general. And oh, when even **female journalists** will say: 'Cindy Crawford, one of the bigger models.' Fuck you! Fuck you! Shut up! I hate you, I know you're lying. Shut up! You know. And when there's statistics 'five-ten, one-twenty'. Fuck you. I hate you. And **stop making me feel bad about the way I look**, about myself. Stop it TV, and stop it movies. And until as women we all say 'No, we're not going to starve ourselves,' nothing's gonna change. So we're our own worst enemies a lot of the times. But I still ... blame men. Seriously. I'm such an eyesore when I land at LAX, that 'I'm here, I'm fine.' And they can kiss my fat ass. I swear to God. And I won't lose the weight. I promise you this. In my career I promise you because that would be a sellout. But I'm lazy too, yes. But I am very noble as well.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 17:02- 20:00.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 17:02- 20:00.

PEP2: *I hate E-Fashion File so much. And they have these runway shows. And then they have a commentator going: 'Return to glamour this season. A pretty face is your best asset this season.' As opposed to last season: when ugly girls had a free ride, all the way through; when back fat was all the rage. And by the way, I did star in the movie Back Fat directed by Ron Howard.*<sup>1</sup>

1995 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of the GUC text, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around aesthetic standards, juxtaposed with the contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate the magnitude of eating disorders.

In terms of the PEP text, the operative group beliefs are propaganda induced a) coveting and vanity, b) fashion reporting standards of beauty. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions on a) the repercussions in terms of female self-confidence, b) the absence of a variety of fashion reporting.

The following statements were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1996:

GUC1: *You see, that's that time you gotta spend with **children**. Or they grow up fucked up: **doing drugs and shit** instead of just jerking off all over themselves. That's what it's about. You don't stab fucking people. You don't want kids to end up like Jeffrey Dahmer. He didn't eat a sandwich; he ate Sal. Do you understand? **All this shit that goes on** and then I do a show like this, **they'll come out**: 'Oh, oh, oh. He said pussy again!' I tell a fucking dick joke and the people want to give me the electric chair. What the fuck is going on in this country? It's just unreal.*<sup>2</sup>

GUC2: ***Pro-Life?** You don't see **any of these white anti-abortion women volunteering** to have any black fetuses transplanted into their uterus do you? No. You don't see them adopting a whole lot of crack babies do ya? No. That might be **something Christ would do**.*<sup>3</sup>

GUC3: *But let's get back to this abortion shit. Now, **is a fetus a human being**? This seems to be the central question. Well, if a fetus is a human being, how come the **Census** doesn't count them? If the fetus was a human being, how come when there's a miscarriage they don't have a **funeral**? If a*

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 17:02- 20:00.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Dice Clay. *Assume the Position*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 39:55-41:50

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

*fetus is a human being, how come people say 'We have two children and one on the way' instead of saying 'We have three children'?<sup>1</sup>*

GU4: A lot of racial shit this year, lot of racial shit. What is the big thing? **O.J.** O.J. was big. That's right. Black people too happy, white people too mad. The **white people like** 'Bam, this is a bullshit.' I ain't seen white people that mad since they cancelled M.A.S.H. Black people way too happy. 'Hey, we won, we won! Yes! We won!' What the fuck did we win? Every day I look at the mailbox for my O.J. prize: nothing. Nothing. **They go:** 'Ooh, **that was all about race.**' That shit wasn't about race. That shit was about **fame.** 'Cause if O.J. wasn't famous, he'd be in jail right now. If O.J. drove a bus ... **If O.J. drove a bus,** he wouldn't even be O.J. He'd be Orenthal the Bus Driving Murderer. **They all go:** 'Oh, the jury was so stupid.' Get the fuck out of here, man. 'It's so stupid, how could they not ...?' White people would have done exact same shit, ok? The exact same shit! Because **if that was Jerry Seinfeld** charged with double murder and the only person that found the bloody glove happened to be in the Nation of Islam ... Jerry would be a free man, and eating cereal right now.<sup>2</sup>

PEP1: That's right man. Now we've got the **War on Drugs.** Bullshit! The war on drugs is bullshit, it is the way to get more **motherfuckers in jail,** that's all it is ... yes! That's all it is! The **drug dealers don't really sell drugs.** The drug dealers ... offer drugs! I'm thirty years old, ain't nobody ever sold me drugs. Nobody has ever sold nobody in this room some drugs! You ever in your life not thinking about getting high and somebody sold you some fucking drugs? Hell, no! The drug dealers offer, the go 'Hey Man you want some smoke, you want some smoke?' You say 'No', that's it! Now, Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand ... Shit! No, man, drug dealers don't sell drugs: **drugs sell themselves. It's crack. It's not an encyclopedia,** it's not a fucking vacuum cleaner. You don't really gotta try to sell crack, OK? I never heard a crack dealer go, 'Man, how am I gonna get rid of all this crack? It's just piled up in my house'.<sup>3</sup>

PEP2: What else is troubling me? **Mickey Mouse's birthday being announced on the television news** as if it's an actual event. I don't give a shit. If I cared about Mickey Mouse's birthday I'd have memorized it years ago and I'd send him a card: 'Dear Mickey, Happy Birthday. Love, George.' I don't do that. Why? I don't give a shit. Fuck Mickey Mouse. Fuck him in the asshole with a big rubber dick. Then break it off and beat him with the rest of it. I hope Mickey dies. I do. I hope he goddamn dies. I hope he gets a hold of some tainted cheese. And dies lonely and forgotten behind the baseboard of a soiled bathroom in a poor neighborhood. With his hand in Goofy's pants. Mickey Mouse. No wonder no one in the world takes our country seriously. We waste **valuable television time** informing our citizens of the age of an imaginary rodent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 19:00-25:05

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 5:45-07:00

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 13:14-14:14

PEP3: *Oh, they will rape you in jail, boy. See, the whole damn country is so damn conservative now. Everybody says: 'Jails ain't tough enough. Jails ain't tough enough. We gotta have the death penalty. **Jails ain't tough enough.**' No. Jails are fucked up, ok? **Don't believe the hype.** The problem is, the reason jails are so crowded, 'cause **life is fucked up too!** When people are broke, people are starving, life ... Shit, life is catching up to jail. Shit, **if you live in an old project, a new jail ain't that bad.***<sup>1</sup>

PES1: *And you know, in this country now there are a lot of people who want to **expand the death penalty to include drug dealers.** This is really stupid. Drug dealers aren't afraid to die. They're already killing each other every day on the streets by the hundreds. Drive-bys, gang shootings, they're not afraid to die. The death penalty doesn't mean anything unless you use it on people who are afraid to die. **Like the bankers who launder the drug money.** The bankers who launder the drug money. Forget the dealers. You want to slow down the drug traffic, you gotta start executing a few of these fucking bankers. **White middle class republican bankers.** And I'm not talking about soft American executions like lethal injection. I'm talking about fucking crucifixion folks. Let's bring back crucifixions. (...) And I'll guarantee you one thing: you start executing, you start nailing one white banker per week to a big wooden cross on national TV, you're gonna see that drug traffic begin to slow down pretty fucking quick. Pretty fucking quick. You wouldn't even be able to buy drugs in schools and prisons anymore.*<sup>2</sup>

PES2: *I honestly believe if you make the death penalty a little more entertaining and learned to market it correctly, you just might be able to raise enough money to **balance the stupid fucking budget.** Balance the stupid fucking budget. And don't forget, the polls show the American people want capital punishment and they want a balanced budget. And I think, **even in a fake democracy,** people ought to get what they want once in a while, just to feed **this illusion that they're really in charge.** Let's use capital punishment the same way we use sports and television in this country: to distract people and take their minds off how bad they're being fucked by **the upper 1%.***<sup>3</sup>

PES3: *Now, there's one thing you might have noticed I don't complain about: politicians. Everybody complains about **politicians.** Everybody says they **suck.** Well **where do people think these politicians come from?** They don't fall out of the sky. They don't pass through a membrane from another reality. They come from American parents and American families, American homes, American schools, American churches, American businesses and American universities. And they're elected by American citizens. This is the best we can do folks. This is what we have to offer. It's **what our system produces: garbage in, garbage out.** If you have selfish*

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 16:16-18:52

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

*ignorant citizens, if you have selfish, ignorant citizens, you're going to get selfish, ignorant leaders. And term limits ain't going to do you any good. You're just going to wind up with a brand new bunch of selfish, ignorant Americans. So maybe, maybe, maybe it's not the politicians who suck. Maybe something else sucks around here, like, the public. Yeah, the public sucks. There's a nice campaign slogan for somebody. **The public sucks.** Fuck hope. Fuck hope. Because if it's really just the fault of these politicians then where are all the other bright people of conscience? **Where are all the bright honest intelligent Americans** ready to step in and save the nation and lead the way? We don't have people like that in this country. Everybody's at the mall, scratching his ass, picking his nose, taking his credit card out of his Fannie pack and buying a pair of sneakers with lights in them.<sup>1</sup>*

*PES4: I'd like to officially tell the folks at McDonald's: 'You know what? You guys don't have to advertise as much as you do. Ok. We get it. Yeah. You're the folks who sell hamburgers. Thank you very much. We understand completely, there's no need for the incessant 24 hour commercials radio ads, buses.' It's just insane. They don't have to advertise as much. I mean, I don't know why they do that. It's not like when I wake up in the morning and if don't see an ad from McDonald's I'm not confused. I'm not sitting there going 'Hey, did McDonalds go out of business? Where's the commercials?' They don't have to do it. I mean, all they have to do is stop one day like every four months, you know, that's it. Their sales aren't gonna go down. They'll **save millions of dollars** and then maybe they can put that money back into the system, you know? Maybe **pay** their minimum wage help **an extra buck** an hour, how about that you know? Yeah, spread the wealth. That way the next time I go into McDonalds I don't have to deal with some understandably pissed off 19 year old kid who's making after-taxes \$2.10 an hour to stand over a fucking 900 degree Fryalator all day, you know, sitting there going: '**can somebody explain to me again why I shouldn't be selling drugs?**'<sup>2</sup>*

1996 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC statements, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around: a) serious violent crimes in society, b) pro-life members un-altruistic behaviour, c) the stage when the foetus can be considered a human being, d) the O.J. Simpson trial being about race. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate: a) hysteria for comedic impropriety, b) the altruism of Jesus, c) the non-treatment of foetuses as human beings

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 26:52-30:06

<sup>2</sup> David Cross. *Comedy Half Hour*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 5:19-7:48

both by government and custom, d) the outcome of the trial if O.J. Simpson was not a celebrity.

In terms of PEP texts, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda induced: a) acceptance for the War on Drugs, b) coverage of Mickey Mouse's birthday, c) fear that jails are not 'tough enough'. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions on: a) drugs being sold in the absence of selling, b) Mickey Mouse being an wholly imaginary character, c) the hype around jail conditions.

In terms of PES texts, the operative group beliefs are centred around the political economic system in terms of a) severe punishment for drug dealers b) false democracy, c) the absence of altruistic, honest politicians, d) the magnitude of McDonald's advertising spending. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating: a) the absence of punishment for bankers who launder drug money, b) how entertainment is used to distract the majority from inequality, c) the absence of an altruistic, honest public, d) how minimum-wage labour encourages involvement in crime.

The following statements were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1997:

GUC1: ***White people**, when y'all get mad at us, please stop **saying** this shit: 'why don't you go back to Africa?' What? How the fuck we going to go back to some shit we ain't never been to? **Y'all act like** we were born with maps of that mofucka in our head. Like we'll just land over there: 'Take me to Shambuku's house.' 'Now go down three elephants, make a left at the lion, the nigga over there, he over there.' We don't ask y'all to **go back to England**. Y'all ain't **from this mofucka** either. Yeah so 'why don't you go to bloody England, done in gale cocksucker'.<sup>1</sup>*

GUC2: *How many y'all believe in aliens? I think there's some aliens for real. How many y'all believe? Smart motherfuckers. Rest of y'all arrogant as a motherfucker. You know what I'm saying? 'Cause you got to be out your fucking mind to think we the only shit in the universe. You look at all the*

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 9:04-12:05

diverse life on this one planet: birds, snakes, alligators, lions, tigers and bears, oh my! I mean, look at the diversity just amongst human beings. Like God gonna create all this life here and then just say: 'Alright, everything else will be lights. Light it up for them at night.' Hell yes there's some motherfucking **aliens out there**. Reason they don't come here: **bad news travel fast**. We known throughout the universe as the fucked up planet. That's why motherfuckers say they seen a UFO, but they don't say it landed, came in the house, cooked at dinner. Them motherfuckers ain't landing; shit, they be on the spaceship man this is probably just the fucked up planet tour. They get a little pamphlet and shit. Cost 500 kugels to come to this motherfucker. Motherfucker sitting on the spaceship looking out the window: 'hey come on let's go down there let's mess with them.' 'Shut the fuck up. They **fight over black and white**. We **purple**. What the fuck you think they gonna do to us? Now look your ass out the window and let's go'.<sup>1</sup>

GUC3: Here's how you evolve an idea. I'll give you an example. Why is the **Drug Czar** in this country? Well, let's go back. Why do we have a Drug Czar in this country, a)? B) **Why is he a cop?** Why isn't he a guy in recovery, who's had an alcohol and or drug addiction and overcome it? And why doesn't he help people with the same problem with **compassion rather than condemnation**? Why do we put people who are on drugs in jail? They're sick. They're **not criminals**. Sick people don't get healed in jail. See it makes no sense. And if we evolve the idea, you see, the planet might be more compassionate and something like heaven might dawn. Heaven might dawn or something weird like that. You see? That's how you evolve an idea.<sup>2</sup>

PEP1: But anyway, if any of you all have been watching **Public Access** lately and seen the footage that they are running of the Bradley tanks shooting fire into the [Branch Davidians, Waco Texas] compound. You've seen that? Well, I'll tell you it's an interesting story to me because, first of all, it goes against **the party line** that we were all told. That they were shooting tear gas into the compound to 'convince' the women and children to leave. While also busting down the walls, which, I don't know if a kid was hit with a wall, if that would help him. Kids are resilient, they're pretty adaptive. 'Oh mommy, I'm alright, let's get out of here though.' But, the implications are fucking harrowing. If you've seen the footage, the Bradley tank shoots fire, and the implications basically are that: **the FBI, the ATF up to Janet Reno including President Clinton** are uhm, **liars** and murderers. Yeah, and the fact that no major news source has picked up on this story would lead me, well, let's conclude together, that they're the **propaganda arm of the elite few** who actually run this fucking country. And we are lied to on a regular fucking basis so that we will remain in the dark, a docile apathetic herd of fucking cattle that doesn't know the true agenda of this country. So I thought it was fascinating.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 46:30-47:56

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 56:12-57:06

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 49:30-51:01

PEP2: *It's time to evolve ideas. That's where we're at. And we can do it. I know we can do it. 'Cause I've done it. It's happened in my life. My life's changed a lot. We can do it man. That's why you know this whole thing about the Branch Davidian, **the whole lie** about: 'Well, we broke down the compound because we heard **child abuse** was going on.'* You know, why aren't there Bradley tanks knocking down **Catholic Churches** if that's the case? If child abuse is in fact your concern, is what my point is.<sup>1</sup>

PEP3: *Then there's some other **bullshit they're pimping on our kids** man. This gangster-rap shit. We losing too many good brothers over some bullshit, you know? I worked with Tupac and Biggie. Both of them good young brothers, lost in some craziness. Gangster-rap? Ain't no such thing as a fucking gangster-rapper. The two don't go together. It's an **oxymoron**. The first code of being a gangster is what? **Silence**. If you're a rapper, you talk too goddamn much. Homeboy you never shut up. You **telling all the damn business** in the song: 'Had to drop a nigga with my line, they put him in a chalk line, me, Mookey, Earl'. 'You name-dropping motherfucker! Now we got to kill your ass'. Real gangsters don't go platinum. You'll never see John Gotti come and pick up a damn Grammy. (...) They're always hollerin 'West side. East Side. West Side.' Niggas dying over a block they don't even own. Nigga you're renting. You paying rent nigga.*<sup>2</sup>

PES1: *That's what fundamentalism breeds though: no irony. You see, they take the word literally. Fundamentalists, yeah. Well, once again, I recommend a **healthy dose of psilocybin mushrooms**. Three weeks ago two of my friends and I went to a ranch in Fredericksburg in Texas and took what Terence McKenna calls a heroic dose: five dried grams. Let me tell you: our third eye was squeegeed quite cleanly. Wow. And I'm glad they're against the law. Do you know what happened when I took them? I laid in a field of green grass for four hours going 'My god, I love everything.' The heavens parted, God looked down, and rained gifts of forgiveness onto my being, peeling me on every level, psychically, physically, emotionally. And I realized our true nature is spirit, not body. We are eternal beings and God's love is unconditional. And there's nothing we can ever do to change that. It is only our illusion that we are separate from God or that we are alone. In fact, the **reality** is we are one with God and he loves us. Now, if that isn't **a hazard to this country**, you see my point. How are we gonna keep building **nuclear weapons**, you know what I mean? What's gonna happen to **the arms industry** when we realize we're all one? It's gonna fuck up **the economy**. The economy that's fake anyway. Which would be a real bummer. You see why the **Government's** cracking down on the idea of experiencing unconditional love.*<sup>3</sup>

PES2: *But I have this theory: that whoever's **elected**, whoever runs the **media gauntlet**, and whoever, you know, you run the media gauntlet and you realize who's gonna play the game or not. And that's who we eventually*

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:00-1:16:29.

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 29:45-31:20

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 27:50-32:12



*vote on: people who've already sold out every idea of democracy and who are going to be the puppet lapdogs of **the elite few who actually run this country**, the major **corporations**, and the families, the **few families** who own them all. I believe when they're elected President, they're taken to a room, a smoky room. There's twelve guys with cigars, all industrialists, and a screen comes down. And they go: 'Roll the tape'. And what the new President sees is footage of Kennedy's assassination only from an angle we've never seen it. Ha, it looks like the cameraman was right over grassy knoll actually. The screen goes back up, the lights come on, the industrialists go: 'Any Questions?' And the new president goes 'What do you all want me to say?' and they go 'Here's your agenda my buddy friend. You can play your little puppet fucking role and your **first mission** is to bomb Iraq to make people think we are a tough nation.'*<sup>1</sup>

*PES3: I don't know why they mad at us. If anybody should be mad, we should be mad at their ass. You know what I'm saying? I give **white people** props on this. When y'all have **hostages**, y'all go get 'em. I don't give a fuck if it's two. You'll have meetings: 'Look here Jim. Bob and Suzy are trapped. It's over in the Middle-East. And we're gonna have to go over there'. 'Are you sure you want to cause an international incident over two people?' 'I don't give a good goddamn if it's one. They're white. We're white. By God, go get 'em. They're Americans. Bring 'em home.' Technically, **we've been hostages in this country for 450 years**. Not one canoe with a nigger with a spear has shown up to pick us the fuck up.'*<sup>2</sup>

1997 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC texts, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around: a) white calls for blacks to return to Africa, b) the existence of intelligent extra-terrestrial life, c) drug enforcement headed by a policeman. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate: a) calls for whites to return to Europe, b) that intelligent extra-terrestrial life would detect violence on planet Earth, c) that drug use is a health issue not a crime issue.

In terms of PEP texts, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda induced: a) acceptance for the party line on the storming of the Branch Davidian camp, b) allegations of child abuse to justify intervention, c) fearmongering of gangster-rap.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 52:27-53:44

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 14:15-18:29

These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions on: a) news media acting as a propaganda arm of the elite, b) the absence of intervention where child abuse has been demonstrated, c) the contradictory nature of the phrase itself.

In terms of PES texts, the operative group beliefs are centred around the political economic system in terms of a) the absence of widespread fellowship, b) Presidential election platforms, c) Government rescue of US hostages. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating: a) the structural necessity of the absence of widespread fellowship, b) systematically unfulfilled electoral promises, c) blacks as hostages in the US since the slave trade.

The following statements were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1998:

GUC1: *If you're in America, you're a racist. **We're** brought up from the beginning to **think in generalizations. We never look** at the individual. We rarely look at the individual. I'm a racist. I know I'm a racist. You know how I know? 'Cause the other day I caught myself being racist against myself. There's **so much shit** getting on, I got mixed up. Forgot **whose team** I was on and shit. One time I was reading the paper man, this story came on about this guy was suing a department store 'cause they wouldn't let him play Santa Claus, you know, 'cause he's black. And I was actually like relieved when the department store beat him. That's bad. But I wasn't ready for that. **I wasn't ready for the idea of a black Santa Claus man.** That shit would suck. We wouldn't get our presents till the 28<sup>th</sup> 29<sup>th</sup>: 'Ahh, **sorry I'm late kids.** Santa got caught up with some pussy in Vegas. Whoa. I had to sell some toys to get back shit. Where them cookies at?'<sup>1</sup>*

GUC2: *'Dry clean only' is definitely the only **warning label** that human beings actually respect. They look at **cigarettes**: 'This will give you cancer, kill you, the kids, everything.' 'Ahh, screw it. It's good. I'll do **whatever the hell** I want'. 'Don't drink this medicine and operate heavy machinery.' 'Oh, glug, glug, glug, who cares. That's for **people who** don't know what the hell they're doing. **I'm a pro**'. But if you have something that's dry-clean-only and somebody goes to put it in the washing machine: 'Don't put it in the washing machine! It's dry clean only! **Are you crazy?** Are you out of your mind?'<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. 1998. Interval: 21:50-25:50

<sup>2</sup> Jerry Seinfeld. *I'm Telling You for the last Time*. 1998. Interval: 54:22-56:20

PEP1: *They always tell you how the medicine works on **TV in the commercials**. That's my favorite part, with the guy that says: 'Here's the human body' and there's always this guy... **no face, mouth open**. This is how drug companies see **the public**.*<sup>1</sup>

PEP2: *Remember a couple of months ago when they had all the floods in Louisiana? My wife and I were watching this **on CNN**, and I told her, I said: 'You watch. They're going to find the biggest, stupidest idiot they can find in the whole State. And they're going to show him walking chest deep in water down Main Street'. **And they did**. And it was my wife's cousin Danny. Walking chest deep in water, holding an umbrella. I was just looking at her going 'That's got to make you proud right there, doesn't it? That's your bloodline walking down the street'. But then I started thinking about my kids, and it made me kind of worried, 'cause it's their bloodline too.'*<sup>2</sup>

PES1: *I don't deal with **police**. My house got robbed in New York. I didn't even call the police. I wanted to. But I couldn't. My crib is too nice. It's not that it's too nice. But it's too nice for me. You know how the police are in New York. Soon as I opened the door they're like: 'Hah. He's still here. Open and shut case Johnson. Apparently, this black guy broke in and hung up pictures of his family everywhere. Never seen anything like it.' Don't deal with them man. I had to bail a friend of mine out of jail one time, you know that was horrible. I was scared. I had to walk right into **the belly of the beast**. I tried to look as non-threatening as possible. 'Hi, I'm here to bail out my buddy.' 'Oh, ok, well, while you're here, you do **fit a description**. If you walk this way we can process you.' It's how they always get us. Fitting those damn descriptions.'*<sup>3</sup>

PES2: *There's too much shit out there to stress you out. This whole world is just drug infested, hate infested, drug infested world. Hate drugs. I heard **the worst drug story**. You know what my friend told me? You know what he's dealing with? His **landlord is hooked on crack**. That's terrible. That's pressure. If your landlord is hooked on crack that means you've gotta have the rent. He'll come around. Knock Knock Knock: 'You got the rent?!' 'It's not even due yet. It's the 10<sup>th</sup>.' 'Come on. I need it. Well, let me just get \$20 dollars of it now, and then just give me the rest at the end of the month.' Every couple of hours: 'Hey, look, I'm gonna need some more of the rent. This building's falling apart. Things came up.' Comes home early from a party, **landlord's in the crib** going through his shit. 'What are you doing in my house?' 'Ahhh. Where's the sink? I came to fix it.' 'It's in the kitchen.' 'I thought it was in the drawer. I'll fix it tomorrow when I come for the rent.'*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry Seinfeld. *I'm Telling You for the last Time*. 1998. Interval: 28:31-30:07

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Foxworthy. *Totally Committed*. 1998. Interval: 08:00-9:07

<sup>3</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 2:18-08:12.

<sup>4</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 15:48-17:35.

1998 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC texts, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around: a) racism in America, b) indifference to personal health related product warning labels. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate: a) the reflexive acceptance of majority cultural icons, b) adherence to product integrity warning labels.

In terms of PEP texts, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda induced: a) attitudes towards pharmaceutical commercials b) news coverage of natural disasters. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions on: a) the representation of pharmaceutical companies' target market b) biased footage selection.

In terms of PES texts, the operative group beliefs are centred around the political economic system in terms of a) police racial profiling b) landlord-tenant relations. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating: a) the re-victimization black victims, b) the abuse of property rights.

The following statements were selected for GUC, PEP and PES categories for the year 1999:

GUC1: *And **everybody's talking about** gun control: 'Got to get rid of the guns'. Fuck that. I like guns. You got a gun, you don't have to work out. I ain't working out. I ain't jogging. You got pecs, I got Tecs. Fuck that shit. You don't need no gun control. You know what you need? **We need some bullet control**. We need to control the bullets. That's right. I think all bullets should cost \$5 thousand dollars. \$5 thousand dollars for a bullet. You know why? Cause if a bullet cost \$5 thousand dollars, there'd be no more innocent bystanders. It'd be it. Every time someone gets shot, people will be like: 'Damn, he must have did something. Shit they put \$50 thousand dollars' worth of bullets in his ass.' And people will think before they kills somebody if a bullet cost \$5 thousand dollars: 'Man, I would blow your fucking head off, if I could afford it. I'm gonna get me another job, I'm gonna start saving some money, and you're a dead man. You better hope I can't get no bullets on layaway'.<sup>1</sup>*

GUC2: *I got a proposition for you: I think if **white people are going to** burn down black churches, then **black people ought to** burn down the House Of*

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 05:27-07:08

Blues huh? What a fucking disgrace that place is: the House Of Blues. They ought to call it: The House of Lame White Motherfuckers. Inauthentic, low frequency, single digit, lame white motherfuckers. Especially these male movie stars who think they're blues artists. You ever see these guys? Don't you just want to puke in your soup when one of these fat, balding, overweight, over aged, out of shape, middle-aged male movie stars with sunglasses jumps on stage and starts blowing into a harmonica. It's a fucking sacrilege. In the first place, in the first place, white people got no business playing the blues ever, at all, under any circumstances. Ever, ever, ever. What the fuck do **white people have to be blue about?** **Banana Republic** ran out of khakis? **The espresso machine** is jammed? **Hootie & the Blowfish** are breaking up? Shit, white people ought to understand their job is to give people the blues not to get them. And certainly not to sing or play them.<sup>1</sup>

GUC3: Clinton damn near got impeached. For what? For what? Lied about a blowjob so his wife wouldn't find out. Is that against the law? Do you need the Supreme Court for that one? You could have took that one to The People's Court! Could have took that one to Judge Judy. She'd have knocked it out in a half hour, plus commercials. <sup>2</sup> See, people, **everybody expects this holy behavior**, because he's the President. Expect him to behave this holy way. He's just the President. **He ain't Reverend Clinton**. It ain't Pastor Clinton. It ain't Maharajah Clinton. It is just Bill Clinton. He's just a man. A man's gonna be a man. A man is basically as faithful as his options. That's how faithful a man is, no more, no less.<sup>3</sup>

PEP1: But while individual Americans have become softer, America itself has only become stronger. I don't want to get too George M. Cohan here, but you gotta marvel at how in one short century the US went from being a backwater hick joke to a '**Beacon of Hope**'. You know, when we're not **propping up fascist dictators**, like Pinochet, Somoza, Noriega, Duvalier, Trujillo, and Marcos, we are a **true symbol of freedom**.<sup>4</sup>

PEP2: Where did this sudden fear of germs come from in this country? Have you noticed this? The **media constantly running stories** about all the latest infections, salmonella, ecoli, hanka virus, bird flu and **Americans panic easily**. So now everybody's running around scrubbing this and spraying that and overcooking their food and repeatedly washing their hands, trying to avoid all contact with germs. It's ridiculous and it goes to **ridiculous lengths**. In prisons, before they give you a lethal injection, they swab your arm with alcohol. It's true. It's true. It's true. Well they don't want you to get an infection, and you can see their point. Wouldn't want some guy to go to hell and be sick. Would take a lot of the sportsmanship out of the whole execution.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 19:38-21:30

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 14:38-19:30

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 14:38-19:30

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 0:38-2:09

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 09:30-10:23

PEP3: Cause you do know folks, living in this country, you're bound to know, that every time you're exposed to **advertising** you realize once again that America's leading industry, America's most profitable business, is still the **manufacture packaging, distribution and marketing of bullshit**. High quality, grade 'A', prime cut, pure American bullshit. And the sad part is, is that **most people seem to have been indoctrinated to believe** that bullshit only comes from certain places, certain sources: advertising, politics, salesmen. Not true. **Bullshit is everywhere**. Bullshit is rampant. Parents are full of shit, teachers are full of shit, clergymen are full of shit and law enforcement people are full of shit.<sup>1</sup>

PES1: This entire country, this **entire country** is completely full of shit. And always has been, from the Declaration of Independence of the Constitution to the Star Spangled Banner. It's still nothing more than one big steaming pile of red, white and blue all-American bullshit. Because, think of how we started. Think of that. This country was **founded by** a group of **slave-owners** who told us: 'All men are created equal.' Oh yeah, all men, except for Indians and niggers and women right? Always like to use that authentic American language. This was a small group of **unelected, white male, land holding, slave owners** who also suggested their class be the only one allowed to vote. Now that is what's known as being stunningly and embarrassingly full of shit.<sup>2</sup>

PES2: One thing Clinton did I didn't like: raise taxes. Taxes all high and shit. You know what's fucked-up about taxes? You don't even pay taxes. **They take tax**. You get your check, money gone. That ain't a payment; **that's a jack**. Got all these taxes: city tax, state tax, **Social Security tax**. You don't get the money until you're 65. Meanwhile, the **average black man** dies at 54. Shit, we should get Social Security at 29. What the fuck, man? We don't live that long. Hypertension, high blood pressure, NYPD, something will get you. (...) You know what's worse than taxes? What's worse than taxes? **Insurance**. You got to have some insurance. You got to. They shouldn't even call it insurance. They just should call it **'in case shit'**. I give a company some money in case shit happens. Now, **if shit don't happen**, shouldn't I get my money back?<sup>3</sup>

PES3: You know I don't like doctors. 'Cause they don't cure shit. They don't cure nothing. Same diseases been hanging out since I was a kid, man. What's the last shit a doctor cured? Polio. You know how long ago polio was? That's like the first season of Lucy. (...) That's right, they don't cure shit. The same diseases been hanging out since I was a kid. (...) That's right, man. That's right, we got AIDS out there. You think they're gonna cure AIDS? No. They can't even cure athlete's foot. They ain't curing AIDS. Shit, they ain't **never curing AIDS**. Don't even think about that shit. They ain't curing it, 'cause there ain't **no money in the cure**. The **money's in the**

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 47:29-49:04

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 47:29-49:04

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 26:29-27:18

*medicine. That's how you get paid, on the comeback. That's how a drug dealer makes his money, on the comeback. That's all the **government is**: a bunch of motherfucking drug dealers on the **comeback**. They ain't curing no AIDS. That's all it is. You think they're gonna cure AIDS? They're still mad at all the money they lost on polio. (...) They can, but they won't. So what they will do with AIDS is the same thing they do with everything else. They will figure out a way for you to live with it. They don't cure shit, they just patch it up. Get you to the next stop, so they can get **more of your money**.*<sup>1</sup>

1999 SC<sup>2</sup> Analysis: in terms of GUC texts, the operative group beliefs are the general uncritical consensus around: a) gun control, b) the white House of Blues, c) morality in politics. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions that indicate: a) the necessity for bullet control, b) the usurpation of minority culture, c) that the Presidency is not a moral institution.

In terms of PEP texts, the operative group beliefs are the propaganda induced: a) image of the USA being a 'Beacon of Hope', b) health panics by the media, c) credulity in advertising. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions on: a) the US's support for authoritarian regimes, b) extreme health precautions, c) credulity in every societal institution.

In terms of PES texts, the operative group beliefs are centred around the political economic system in terms of a) white, land-owning slave-owners founding the country, b) taxes and insurance as mandatory levies, c) the health-care industry's mandate. These are juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational propositions indicating: a) restrictions on suffrage, b) the injustice of mandatory payments, c) that healthcare's business model necessarily favours lengthy treatment over complete remission.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 27:20-32:17

## 6. Discussion

This chapter proceeded in chronological order, examining the  $SC^2$  of select comedians, starting in 1990 and ending in 1999. The most content significant examples were included for analysis and discussion, following the methodological guidelines laid out in Chapter 8. The stated goal was to assemble 10 years of  $SC^2$  to test the formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$  and the guiding hypothesis H1. In terms of the sample itself, it was not elicited according to rankings or significance, because, as noted by Meier *et al.*, there are “simply too many comics that are important to the tradition of stand-up comedy and the culture it stands to change to address them all, and any attempt to rank them in order of significance is highly subjective at best.”<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the limitations, the results of the qualitative analysis can answer the questions set at the outset of this chapter. The significant examples of the satirical content of stand-up comedy in the decade 1990-1999 were reproduced and analyzed above. They were deemed significant for the purposes of this analysis and are 81 in total; that is, 81 statements out of 568 which are included in the Appendix. The significant portions of the  $SC^2$  were emphasized in bold in order to identify the components of the statements used to test the model, and therefore support or refute the guiding hypothesis. The model stated that the satirical content of stand-up comedy would consist of operative group beliefs juxtaposed with contrary empirical rational arguments/propositions,  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ . The analysis has demonstrated that the symbolic formula, developed through an interdisciplinary literature review, is supported by the findings. Operative group beliefs, which are statements consisting of complex symbols, display themselves as integral and structural components of  $SC^2$ . Example after example has shown that they are systematically juxtaposed with other

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<sup>1</sup> 2017:xiv.



sets of statements, themselves complex symbols, that contain a contrary empirical or rational proposition.

Furthermore, the satirical content of stand-up comedy (SC<sup>2</sup>) does indicate the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus where operative group beliefs (OGBs) are targeted and undermined by virtue of the association or juxtaposition with contrary empirical rational propositions (CERPs). And the thematic distribution covers many elements of the political economic system: politics, industry, and propaganda. This chapter offered a unique and original data set and used evidence in order to test the leading hypothesis 1 (H1), namely: *that a major indicator suggesting the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus is the satirical content of standup comedy, which manifests itself in relation to it*; a fairly straightforward hypothesis generated by an interdisciplinary literature review. That data and content supports the hypothesis, insofar as the evidence is valid. The reviewed satirical content of US stand-up comedy in the 1990-1999 decade indicates, repeatedly, the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus in that in every example operative group beliefs are identified and contrary empirical rational propositions undermine their validity. A clear example is found in Bill Hicks' satire against propaganda regarding the storming of the Branch Davidians compound in Waco Texas. Known as the 'Waco Siege', it took place between February-April 1993 and received extensive media coverage at the time.<sup>1</sup> Hicks points at the "Public Access footage" of the "Bradley tanks shooting fire into the compound," which "goes against the party line that we were all told. That they were shooting tear gas into the compound to 'convince' the women and children to leave. While also

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:00-1:16:29.

busting down the walls, which, I don't know if a kid was hit with a wall, if that would help him. Kids are resilient, they're pretty adaptive."<sup>1</sup> Hicks adds that

the implications are fucking harrowing. (...) the implications basically are that: the FBI, the ATF up to Janet Reno including President Clinton are uhm, liars and murderers. Yeah, and the fact that no major news source has picked up on this story would lead me, well, let's conclude together, that they're the propaganda arm of the elite few who actually run this fucking country. And we are lied to on a regular fucking basis so that we will remain in the dark, a docile apathetic herd of fucking cattle that doesn't know the true agenda of this country. So I thought it was fascinating.<sup>2</sup>

Hicks concludes the set with the following {OGB,CERP} set:

this whole thing about the Branch Davidian, the whole lie about 'Well, we broke down the compound because we heard child abuse was going on.' You know, why aren't there Bradley tanks knocking down Catholic Churches if that's the case? If child abuse is in fact your concern.<sup>3</sup>

The repeated indication of a sphere of general uncritical consensus, in all the instances reproduced above cannot, therefore, be considered a chance occurrence. If the model offered here is valid, then with a moderate degree of confidence it can be predicted that the satirical content of stand-up comedy will follow a sequence whereby operative group beliefs are targeted and undermined by contrary rational empirical propositions. And the contextual affinity between the SC<sup>2</sup> content and the findings of the literature covered in the preceding chapters cannot be considered accidental: there is a causal relationship between the symbolic manipulations of propaganda and the symbolic constructions of satire. The perspectives reproduced in this chapter show a contextual affinity with the five realms of literature analyzed thus far: Language; Political Economy; Ideology; Propaganda; Satire. And the affinity manifests itself in terms of the syntheses of the theoretical literature on language, political economy, ideology, propaganda and the general uncritical consensus.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:00-1:16:29.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:00-1:16:29.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:00-1:16:29.

As this research project has noted, the language faculty allows its holders to, among other things: atomize the world into symbols; evoke cognitive images of the world through those symbols; rearrange those symbols to imagine alternate versions of the world; play with cognitive symbols to produce laughter (humour).<sup>1</sup> And although this project does not examine the fourth phenomenon, the re-imagination of alternate versions of the world is present in SC<sup>2</sup>. For instance: “Those guys were in hog heaven out there, you understand man? They had a big weapons catalogue opened up. (...) Weapons for all occasions. And everybody got excited about the technology. And I guess it was pretty incredible watching a missile fly down an air-vent, pretty unbelievable. But couldn’t we feasibly use that same technology to shoot food at hungry people?”<sup>2</sup>

As Chapter 3 noted, at all three levels of analysis, micro, macro and global, differences in wealth and power, that is, differences in advantages, were found to produce visible material consequences: substantial disparities in wealth that, in turn, produce and reproduce great riches one end, extracted at “an immense human cost”<sup>3</sup> on the other. And therefore, the political economy falls short of the repeatedly propagandized ideal of equality. As noted by George Carlin, “this country was founded by a group of slave-owners who told us: ‘All men are created equal.’ Oh yeah, all men, except for Indians and niggers and women right?”<sup>4</sup> And given that, as we have seen, old themes persist under new guise, elections fall short of the democratic ideal as well, for “who we eventually vote on, people who’ve already sold out every idea of democracy and who are going to be the puppet lapdogs of the elite few who actually run this country, the major corporations, and the families, the few families who own them all.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 4; Chapter 7, Section 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval:07:45-09:40.

<sup>3</sup> Baptist, 2016:122.

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 47:29-49:04

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 52:27-53:44

But as with any ideal, to be shared it has to be disseminated, and when it is widely disseminated, it becomes an ideology. As observed in Chapter 4, contemporary political economic ideology rests on two conceptual pillars: democracy and capitalism. But while the ideology of democracy offers the illusion of popular democratic control, the ideology of capitalism offers the illusion of a free market for the benefit of consumers. As George Carlin explained, “even in a fake democracy, people ought to get what they want once in a while just to feed this illusion that they’re really in charge.”<sup>1</sup> And the benefits to consumers are illusory as well, because, as Chris Rock pointed out, “there ain’t no money in the cure. The money’s in the medicine. That’s how you get paid, on the comeback. (...) They don’t cure shit, they just patch it up. Get you to the next stop, so they can get more of your money.”<sup>2</sup>

From a bird’s-eye view, individuals, for the most part, form their opinions under the influence of broadcasted efforts at communication. As indicated in Chapter 5, the mass media are not democratic institutions, and have been described as communication tools in the hands of elites, that use them overwhelmingly to propagate “ruling ideas”, to marginalize dissent, and sustain the status quo.<sup>3</sup> As Bill Hicks concluded, “the fact that no major news source has picked up on this story would lead me - well, let’s conclude together - that they’re the propaganda arm of the elite few who actually run this fucking country. And we are lied to on a regular fucking basis so that we will remain in the dark, a docile apathetic herd of fucking cattle that doesn’t know the true agenda of this country.”<sup>4</sup> A point on which George Carlin would concur, given how “sports and television [are used] in this country: to distract people and take their minds off how bad

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 27:20-32:17

<sup>3</sup> See Bernays, Lasswell, Lazarsfeld, Carey, Ferguson, Bagdikian, McLuhan, C.W. Mills, all referenced in Chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 49:30-51:01

they're being fucked by the upper 1%.”<sup>1</sup> It is in light of this state of affairs that Professor Harwood Childs remarked that “Americans are the most propagandized people of any nation.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, if the majority of symbols by which people make sense of their lives are manipulated systematically by the main distributors of communications in society (the mass media), then what is the general outcome? As noted in Chapter 6, the outcome is a general uncritical consensus about the status quo. In the SC<sup>2</sup> content significant sample, the often quoted outlet is CNN, and the outcome is described as follows: “I watch too much news. I don’t know if you’ve ever ever ever watched CNN longer than say ... 20 hours in one day. I’ve gotta cut that out. You ever watched CNN headline news for any length of time? It’s the most depressing fucking thing you will ever do. ‘War, famine, death, aids, homeless, recession, depression, war, famine, death, aids...’ Then you look out your window and [hear birds whistling]... where is all this shit happening man?”<sup>3</sup> Or as Eddie Griffin would have it: “‘Cause when a nigga fuck up, the picture come up all day, every day. Five o’clock news: the nigger that fucked up. Six o’clock the nigga that fucked up. Ten o’clock the nigga get fucked up. CNN twenty-four hours a day, the nigga that fucked up.”<sup>4</sup> And Dennis Miller would also agree, because

on a deep level we look at the world around us and we think it’s a fucking mad house and we’ve lost complete control. We’re scared out of our wits. We watch CNN daily and we see things we have no idea how to get our head around. The children in Somalia, the atrocities in Bosnia, Califragilisticexpialidocious. I think this stuff gets us right here.<sup>5</sup> We think ‘My God. We’ve lost it.’ So what we do is we take all the little things, and we trump them up into things that are bigger than they actually are.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Carey, 1997:14.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval:03:40-05:40.

<sup>4</sup> Eddie Griffin. *One Night Stand*. 1992. Interval: 2:25-9:51.

<sup>5</sup> Indicating his gut. Reminder: this dissertation does not cover performativity and performance theory, because it focuses on the symbolic role of language in satirical stand-up comedy. Therefore references to gestures and the paratextual are for the most part omitted.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don’t They*. 1994. Interval: 32:07-37:00

Against this backdrop, the satirical content of stand-up comedy covered in this chapter emerges as a symbolic attack against uniformity, against conformity and against the general uncritical consensus. And while scholars a' la Boorstin insist that "though we may suffer from mass illusions, there is no formula for mass disenchantment. By the law of pseudo-events, all efforts at mass disenchantment themselves only embroider our illusions;"<sup>1</sup> the satire theory covered in Chapter 7 allows scholars of propaganda to disagree with this perspective. In satirical stand-up comedy there is a formula for disenchant, and the formula has been tested. This is not to say that it works for everyone all of the time, but almost certainly disenchantment will be proportional to consumption/exposure to satire: the greater the exposure, the greater the disenchantment. In line with Shaftesbury's insight on "the heavier the weight [of spiritual tyranny] the bitterer the satire."<sup>2</sup>

The theoretical literature on humour and satire offers many affinities with propaganda studies. Remarkable congruities were observed. Contemporary mass-mediated society is characterized by a sphere of general uncritical consensus (Mary Douglas' "dominant structure of ideas," "mesh of structured concepts") sustained by propaganda (Shaftesbury's "spiritual tyranny") in the service of a status quo of political economic inequality. Satire challenges the propaganda via the employment of humour in the service of undoing structured concepts, by "plant[ing] seeds of doubt in the mortar of people's apathy or inattention to things,"<sup>3</sup> thereby exposing the "inadequacy of realist structurings of experience"<sup>4</sup> and releasing the existing cognitive pressures the

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<sup>1</sup> Boorstin, 1961:260.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Chapter 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

“spiritual tyranny.”<sup>1</sup> The general uncritical consensus is in fact sustained daily by the mass media:

all you ever hear about in this country are differences. That’s all the media and the politicians are ever talking about: the things that separate us, things that make us different from one another. That’s the way the ruling class operates in any society: they try to divide the rest of the people, they keep the lower and the middle classes fighting with each other, so that they, the rich, can run off with all the fucking money. (...) You know how I describe the economic and social classes in this country? The upper class keeps all of the money, pays none of the taxes; the middle class pays all of the taxes does all of the work; the poor are there ... just to scare the shit out of the middle class. Keep ‘em showing up at those jobs.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence then strongly suggests that the satirical content of stand-up comedy is congruent with a specific theory of democracy. As reviewed in Chapter 3, political science literature singles out four main theoretical traditions in the study of American politics: theories of Majoritarian Electoral Democracy; theories of Majoritarian Pluralism; theories of Biased pluralism; and theories of Economic-Elite Domination.<sup>3</sup> These four different traditions offer “different predictions about which sets of actors have how much influence over public policy: average citizens; organized interest groups, mass-based or business-oriented; and economic elites.”<sup>4</sup> And the evidence presented in this chapter, much like the data set Gilens *et al.* rely on, strongly aligns with Economic-Elite Domination theory, and therefore, with Conflict Theory more generally. Economic-Elite Domination theory, which is supported by empirical data, suggests that in the United States “the majority does not rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes. When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias built into the U.S. political system, even when fairly large

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:11-7:51.

<sup>3</sup> Gilens *et al.* 2014:564.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it;"<sup>1</sup> which coincides with the general perspective reflected in the satirical content of stand-up comedy in the 1990-1999 decade.

## 7. Conclusion

Chapter 8 explained the methodology and offered a formula to test this research project's main hypothesis, given that satirical statements are complex symbols that consist of other symbols. Satirical statements may consist of facts and assertions of facts. They generally target beliefs, which in turn reduce to phrases containing propositions that have relations of truth or falsehood to facts. Given that they are communicated, that is, externalized via words, and operate in informed settings, they interact with beliefs, that is, generally held beliefs, operative group beliefs. Satirical statements, particularly the ones catalogued and examined in this chapter, are products of the language faculty, and as such evoke images in the mind of receivers and "mold our notions of reality,"<sup>2</sup> notwithstanding the fundamental vagueness of externalized language, since communication is a "more or less affair,"<sup>3</sup> in which the speaker produces external events and hearers seek to match them as best they can to their own internal resources.

In the main, the evidence analyzed in this chapter supports H1 because the satirical content of stand-up comedy repeatedly indicates the presence of a sphere of general uncritical consensus. Satire manifests itself in relation to it. Therefore, from a content perspective, the study of satire belongs in the field of propaganda studies. As the literature review has demonstrated, the scholarship on humour and satire on its

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<sup>1</sup> Gilens et al. 2014:576.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, 2007:23. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Berwick *et al.*, 2016:85.



own does not explain neither why nor how “widely shared social opinions” are produced; unlike the present inquiry, which takes account of how mass propaganda, informed by political and economic imperatives, is involved in the management of public opinion in order to manufacture consent or fabricate demand. After all, in keeping with Harold Lasswell, propaganda is “the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols.”<sup>1</sup>

As a whole, this chapter contends that in the absence of a context for satire where political economic symbolic manipulations are taken into account, it is impossible to adequately explain its main target. By contrast, including the general uncritical consensus in the set dynamic, the satirical content of stand-up comedy is better explained. In fact, the thematic heading “the artillery of dissensus versus the general uncritical consensus” expresses the set dynamic {OGB,CERP} in light of chapters 2-7. The key characteristic is that it this set dynamic “operates outside the rules of serious discourse,” where, as Lord Shaftesbury would have it, thinkers are more at ease: “’Tis the habit alone of reasoning, which can make a reasoner. And men can never be better invited to the habit, than when they find pleasure in it;”<sup>2</sup> therefore “we shall grow better reasoners, by reasoning pleasantly and at our ease; taking up, or laying down these subjects, as we fancy.”<sup>3</sup>

However, the content analysis has both analytical strengths and weaknesses. One weakness stems from the ineluctable impoverishment of language when it is rendered

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<sup>1</sup> With customary lucidity, Lasswell explained how propaganda became a key practice in democratic societies, where rule by force was unavailable because civil rights had been secured by the population: “The ever-present function of propaganda in modern life is in large measure attributable to the social disorganization which has been precipitated by the rapid advent of technological changes. (...) Literacy and the physical channels of communication have quickened the connection between those who rule and the ruled. (...) Most of that which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion. Democracy has proclaimed the dictatorship of palaver, and the technique of dictating to the dictator is named propaganda.” 1927:631.

<sup>2</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:70.

<sup>3</sup> Shaftesbury, 1773:77-78.

in visual form; i.e. in writing. A myriad of elements are lost: voice, timing, pauses, pitch, tone, etc; elements that enrich interpretations when hearers match them to their own internal, cognitive resources. And although the anti-propagandistic merits of SC<sup>2</sup> are manifest, they are only symbolic, immaterial. The merits are limited. Symbolic struggles can affect the way *Homo sapiens* interprets the world, and the way *Homo sapiens* engages with it is influenced by those very symbolic constructions. In short, though SC<sup>2</sup> might change the way hearers think, it should not be assumed to inevitably change

the way [people] behave. [Because] you know, it's been slow going. But remember: it took us 40 million years just to develop a thumb. And, no doubt, it will take us another 40 million to get it out of our ass. Of course, that's just my opinion. I could be wrong. Good night ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 2:15-4:16

## CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

*"All high humour rests on  
a real basis of thought."*

Stephen Leacock<sup>1</sup>

*"taking the emotion out of words  
and substituting a clear logical significance  
will stand a man in good stead  
if he wishes to keep his head  
amid the welter of excited propaganda."*

Bertrand Russell<sup>2</sup>

*"...the kind of  
pithy and irrefutable prose  
that's essential to open minds..."*

Barry Crimmins<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Inferences

The previous chapter catalogued, quantified, reproduced and examined the satirical content of select stand-up comedy produced by American comedians over the course of 10 years, 1990-1999. The content was reduced from the corpus to the significant sample by way of explicit methodological exclusions and analyzed via qualitative decomposition, whereby the statements were split and the two parts tested against the set formula. The results strongly suggest that the satirical content of stand-up comedy does in fact manifest itself in reaction to the general uncritical consensus; in other words, the satirical content of stand-up comedy indicates the presence of and reacts against the effects of mass propaganda. Satire manifests itself in the juxtaposition between operative group beliefs, disseminated by propaganda, and contrary empirical rational propositions, offered by the satirist. Therefore, stand-up satire can be reduced to a symbolic confrontation, whereby a statement or set of statements is undermined by another. Satire can thus be thought of, in aggregate, as a symbolic interaction whereby a

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<sup>1</sup> 1935:88.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 1956:187.

<sup>3</sup> Crimmins, 2007: [Link](#).

set of critical symbols are deployed against generally accepted ones; hence the artillery of critique against the general uncritical consensus. The general uncritical consensus can be conceptualized as a sphere populated by statements of various kinds, and stand-up satire as an exercise by which those statements are attacked and undermined. It is however by virtue of the attack that the necessity of those statements is undermined, and likewise by virtue of the attack the existence of the sphere is revealed.

This symbolic interaction involves basic properties of the language faculty, as is the case in expressed language more generally. However, the leading characteristics at play are those that enable hearers to recognize that those thoughts they hear “they could have expressed themselves,”<sup>1</sup> underlining agreement with the rational empirical content of CERP. The production of satire and reception of satire are “moments” in which image-evoking is at play and the symbolic nature of language comes into full view. The moment of stand-up satire is when the speaker produces meaning with sound, and hearers interpret and ‘visualize’ those meanings with their own internal resources, because all “communication is a more-or-less affair, in which the speaker produces external events and hearers seek to match them as best they can to their own internal resources.”<sup>2</sup> And despite the different visualizations that hearers might produce in their distinct minds relative to the particular  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$  set, the audience will recognize the evoked image in a manner that allows them to partake in the shared meaning. After all, the semantic property of the meaning-making faculty, language, is a biological underpinning, a main characteristic of the *Homo sapiens* species in general. And the minds of hearers do in fact “digest the impressions”<sup>3</sup> that are generated by the language faculty.

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, 2016:7.

<sup>2</sup> Berwick, 2016:84-86.

<sup>3</sup> Cabanis, 1802, as quoted in Staum, 2014:202.

As the findings of this research project suggest, the ability of *Homo sapiens* to “mentally decompose the world around us into a vocabulary of discrete symbols, which we can combine and recombine in our minds to imagine alternate worlds,”<sup>1</sup> entails a strong myth-making faculty. *Homo sapiens* construct symbols to interpret and transform the world, but there is no necessity to those symbolic constructions. Stated otherwise, the language faculty allows to recombine symbols to create alternate explanations for the world, but in the absence of specific conceptual tools, like evidence-based thinking, the probability of producing inaccurate or biased interpretations is invariably high. History is a testament to the propensity of myth-making by *Homo sapiens*.

Turning to the contemporary world, there are concrete incentives that encourage the continued dissemination of myths (termed “operative group beliefs” in this dissertation) and especially political economic ones. In hierarchically structured societies, where elite minorities enjoy exponentially privileged political economic positions, and with the mass media under the control of those same concentrations of capital, it is not surprising that public discourse is saturated with propaganda, both commercial and political, designed in the main to serve the status quo: to preserve those positions of advantage. Hence Adorno’s point that the “culture industry”, a convenient way of conceptualizing the modern mass media as a whole, with its constant day-by-day stream of words and images, brings about a “general uncritical consensus.”<sup>2</sup>

The statements that populate the sphere of general uncritical consensus are forcefully exposed in SC<sup>2</sup>, as their “necessity” is undermined. As Mary Douglas opined, jokes “challenge the relevance of the dominant structure,”<sup>3</sup> and do so by showing that “realist structurings [sic] of experience” have “no necessity (...) that a particular

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<sup>1</sup> Tattersall, 2010:400.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno, 2001:100.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas, 1968:373.

ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective.”<sup>1</sup> In this project, CERPs show that OGBs have “no necessity.” Therefore, one could postulate that the language faculty does not only lead to mythmaking, but also endows *Homo sapiens* with the means to challenge any statement in the sphere of general uncritical consensus, and any behaviour it inspires. This is not to say that satirical texts are “true” in the ontological sense. But it suffices that CERPs undermine OGBs to demonstrate the lack of their necessity.

## 2. Limitations

Written language is the visual rendition of acoustic signals that carry meaning. Every type of written language is arbitrary in one sense, because no particular visual rendition is “necessary.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, although no one visual rendition – from Japanese Hiragana character sets to the Arabic script to the Alphabet – is “necessary”, some are more useful or practical than others. As Havelock correctly pointed out, the Greek alphabet, by including visualizations for vowels, was more useful than the Phoenician alphabet,<sup>3</sup> which in turn was more practical than Egyptian hieroglyphs. And despite the advent of writing, language is ineluctably based on acoustic externalization (although the language faculty can still function in non-acoustic ways, such as with sign language). After all, when *Homo sapiens* read, they “hear” the sentences in their mind, which also explains why hearing-impaired students exhibit low performance in reading and writing compared to their hearing peers.<sup>4</sup> The poor tests scores are not the fault of hearing impaired students. The knowledge system is at fault, because it is founded upon

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas, 1968:365

<sup>2</sup> Though, as Ryerson University Professor Dr. Jamin Pelkey notes, “in other ways, all writing systems are also profoundly iconic and deeply diagrammatic, both of which are quite the opposite of ‘arbitrary.’” (Dissertation review note, 18.5.2018)

<sup>3</sup> Havelock, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Qi *et al.* 2012.

acoustic signals. The same goes for numbers. When *Homo sapiens* process numbers in their minds, they “read” the sequences and “hear” them in their minds. When you read these words, you hear a voice in your head; but if you have never heard a voice aloud before, how can you “hear” this sentence in your head? This forcefully underscores the dependency of writing upon the acoustic externalization of language, which limits the findings of this research project.

The live experience of speech in the presence of the speaker is the richest experience. And every other rendition, though augmenting the reach of communication, sacrifices other elements. Acoustic signals are information rich, and when they are scaled down to visual form in writing, they lose important dimensions: tone, intensity, volume, timing, etc. These elements render spoken language the very rich medium of meaning-making and expression that it is. But in the transcription process, these rich inputs are inevitably lost.

Another limitation is sample uncertainty: was any significant content left out in the period under scrutiny? The answer is, “probably.” As Meier and Schmitt noted in the most recent scholarly analysis of stand-up comedy:

there are simply too many comics that are important to the tradition of stand-up comedy [that] (...) any attempt to rank them in order of significance is highly subjective at best (...) and it would be just as difficult to catalog and adequately consider every theme used to wrest laughs from and change the minds of audiences.<sup>1</sup>

And, although imperfect, this research project has attempted to capture the whole sample of specials in the period under scrutiny as best as possible. Comics with more than two specials have been accounted for with reasonable confidence, while comics with non-major productions may have eluded sampling efforts and have passed, so to speak, under the radar. This limitation could alter the findings. If other comics who

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<sup>1</sup> Meier et al.,2017:xiv.

produced satire in the same timeframe will be examined in future research, it will be a welcome addition to the present study.

Another limitation of this research project is inherent in the sample itself: the duration and language under scrutiny. There is much more content beyond the 1990-1999 decade that could reinforce or even undermine the results of this research project. And perhaps systematic research on satire in other languages could also support or refute the conclusions generated by this research project. Moreover, this project is confined to the English language. This particular meaning making and sharing system, with its own syntactical and grammatical properties, might exhibit idiosyncratic characteristics that determine or influence the possibilities of  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ , apart from cultural factors. However, the findings of this research project can be deemed reliable insofar as they are replicable: any investigator who tackles the same subject matter in the same interval, and catalogues the satirical content of stand-up comedy, will, by way of textual content analysis, generate similar findings.

### 3. Scholarly Contributions

This project's main contribution to the scholarship is the demonstration that satirical stand-up comedy content is valuable politically. It shows how satire undermines propagandistic statements, or sets thereof, that have no necessity. Sets of propagandistic statements are found often in instances of political persecutions, and McCarthyism is a good example. As Noam Chomsky pointed out, McCarthyism did

intimidate people, tremendously (...) and people were just scared out of their wits. They couldn't do anything. The House of Un-American Activities Committee, if people were called, they just trembled in fear, 'what can you do?' But in the 1960s, people like Abbie Hoffman started just making fun of them, and they collapsed. It's a very thin structure of



power. I mean, as soon as you submit it to ridicule or you dismiss it, it can collapse.<sup>1</sup>

The “very thin structure of power” refers to power over opinions, in the tradition of David Hume. And given that, along with Hume, “the governors have nothing to support them but opinion,”<sup>2</sup> it is in the field of public opinion, imagined as a large set of shared statements, that the satirical content of stand-up comedy can and does exercise its power. And therefore, this project contributes to the scholarship, via a body of findings and a comprehensive literature review, by refuting, for instance, Christie Davies’ claim that “jokes never do have any macro-consequences [because] jokes are an extremely weak force in a world dominated by very strong social and political forces.”<sup>3</sup> Jokes, on the contrary, do have consequences at the symbolic level, at the level of opinion. And if those consequences are transferred from the realm of opinion to the material world, then they can have consequences. Interestingly, according to industry polls, “25% of Millennials say comedy helps them shape their political beliefs” while “53% say comedy makes them think and gives them perspective.”<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, research on millennials’ attitudes vis à vis the mainstream media has shown opposite results: a national survey on news engagement carried out by Professor Paula Poindexter at the University of Texas, Austin, has found that “Millennials describe news as garbage, lies, one-sided, propaganda, repetitive and boring.”<sup>5</sup> Quite the contrast compared to comedy. Thus, to dismiss the “power” of satire simply because a joker can be killed by a rocket, as Davies’ claim implies, is fallacious. The rocket can destroy the satirist, but not the point that the satirist has made. It is therefore at the symbolic level that satire’s power should be

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, 2018: Interval 4:00-4:38.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, 1889:109-110.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, 2017:239.

<sup>4</sup> Cook, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> 2012.

evaluated. As demonstrated by McLennen and Maisel, satire influences public perception, because, among other things, “satire’s ability to shape public opinion is a consequence of heightened distrust of mainstream news.”<sup>1</sup> And as they correctly conclude, satire exposes “lies, deception, logical fallacies and abuses of power”<sup>2</sup> and “still offers a space for rebellious critical thinking and collective enjoyment.”<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the findings of this research project are replicable because the methodological approach was systematic rather than anecdotal. A recent example of the latter is Aarons et al.’s analysis of Sarah Silverman’s stand-up comedy, which they describe as one that “takes on the function of political activism.”<sup>4</sup> Though their contribution is noteworthy, it is confined by the limits of what case studies can provide. They argue that Silverman’s satire follows the tradition of Lenny Bruce. But they do not place Silverman’s satire within a larger context that accounts for the demand for satire and the magnitude of the confrontation. Further, their analysis is not systematic as they examine anecdotes: Silverman’s content is extracted from comedy routines without a rigorous method, and only to support the comparison between her work and Lenny Bruce’s pioneering satire. On the other hand, this dissertation’s contribution is at, so to speak, a higher level of abstraction, and contributes to the scholarship by providing a plausible context for the manifestation of SC<sup>2</sup>, which includes Silverman’s.

The specific concrete contributions that this project offers to the community of scholars who investigate “the relationship between comedy – stand-up or otherwise – and the rhetoric of social change”<sup>5</sup> are mainly four: data-related; concept-related; domain-related; and framework-related.

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<sup>1</sup> McLennen *et al.* 2014 :11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 200.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Aarons *et al.* 2017:154.

<sup>5</sup> Meier *et al.* 2017:xiii.

In terms of data, the main contribution is an original set of findings, based on the transcribed, categorized and analyzed satirical content of 35 comedians in the specific interval, examined in Chapter 9. This new set of data, no matter how limited, is useful from a scholarly point of view because it also lends itself to re-examinations and re-evaluations for future research purposes. The major characteristics of the data are the frequency and intensity of category hits that support the set formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ . In the period, 66 stand-up comedy specials were identified for a cumulative running time of 2910 minutes. Within the total running time, the content significant sample<sup>1</sup> was found in 5430 sentences. The five most prolific producers of  $SC^2$  by word count are Bill Hicks (14812), George Carlin (14602), Dennis Miller (10221), Chris Rock (8163) and Eddie Griffin (4999). In terms of the type of  $SC^2$  content that is relevant for this research project, 203 statements were found to tackle the General Uncritical Consensus, 137 were found to tackle the Political Economic System, and 128 Political Economic Propaganda. George Carlin was found to lead the content significant standings with 164 category hits, followed by Bill Hicks with 143, Dennis Miller 97, and Chris Rock 79. A total of 81 statements out of 568 were analyzed in particular, and the results indicate that the symbolic formula  $SC^2=\{OGB,CERP\}$ , developed through an interdisciplinary literature review, is supported by the findings.

At a minimum then, the data strongly suggests that the selected  $SC^2$  has a manifest anti-propaganda dimension. This dimension exhibits a strong affinity with a particular tradition of scholarly research, conflict theory, and yet, this affinity has gone unmentioned and has been left unexamined by satire research, as far as I have been able

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<sup>1</sup> The content significant sample excludes all statements that do not tackle political-economic topics, such as animal jokes, sexual jokes, relationship jokes, etc.

to ascertain by reviewing the most prestigious literature.<sup>1</sup> And the conflict is symbolic because SC<sup>2</sup> deals with ideas and reveals the presence of the sphere of general uncritical consensus. One can imagine the general uncritical consensus as a giant underwater sea monster,<sup>2</sup> and SC<sup>2</sup> as arrows that are fired underwater. When the arrows successfully hit the sea monster, it bleeds a cloud. Although the monster is not revealed in its entirety, there is evidence of puncture. SC<sup>2</sup> indicates the presence of a manufactured sphere of general uncritical consensus. And clearly, although no single satirist can attack the entire deep sea monster, as a whole, SC<sup>2</sup> can be imagined as a line-up of satirists shooting harpoons at it. Thus, the artillery of critique versus the general uncritical consensus.

Only John Morreall, in passing, observed specifically that humour might have an “anti-brainwashing”<sup>3</sup> function. Along the same lines, Hurley et al. argued that “humour involves a mental space that contains a false belief, a mistaken construction, and hence indicates that some is the maker of that mistake [and] (...) surprise is the response when a specific expectation is broken, and the recognition that a committed active belief is false is exactly that.”<sup>4</sup> However, Hurley et al. do not examine political humour, satire, and therefore cannot place their insight of humour as a correction mechanism for false beliefs within a wider framework that explains (or attempts to explain) the existence of “false active beliefs.” The same goes for Quirk’s recent analysis of Mark Thomas’ and Stewart Lee’s stand-up comedy, whereby she mentions, but only in passing, how propaganda implicates audiences in powerful narratives, and integrates her analysis

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<sup>1</sup> Klaehn *et al*, 2010:10. [Link](#). Conflict theory refers to a specific theoretical tradition within the social sciences deriving from Marxist thought, (class conflict, social inequality and ideological domination); neo-Marxist thought (Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Althusser); and radical mass media criticism.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Walsh Matthews offered the “deep sea monster” metaphor during the dissertation review phase, and it is quite fitting to render the idea of the general uncritical consensus.

<sup>3</sup> Morreall, 1983:107.

<sup>4</sup> Hurley, 2011:288.

with Walter Lippman's concept of the "pseudo-environment" created by the mass media. Although Quirk correctly concludes that "the patterns by which people arrange their experience of the world have a direct influence on their behaviour and the way they function in society,"<sup>1</sup> she does not analyze stand-up from a macro-perspective, and thus does not offer macro-generalizations. But her contribution is valuable because it dispels the misconception that comedy only "preaches to the converted," and underscores its power to "engage audiences in processes of thought: to define, query or problematize mainstream notions of normal."<sup>2</sup>

The concept-related contribution is for the most part terminological. Ever since Samuel Johnson warned that "comedy has been particularly unpropitious to definers"<sup>3</sup> many theorists have offered a multitude of definitions of various kinds. This project, after a substantial literature review, offered a new conceptualization of the relation between the terms laughter, humour, comedy and satire in Chapter 7. Laughter is the physiological event, that can be stimulated physically (tickling) or mentally (symbolically). The mental, symbolic, stimulation of laughter is humour; therefore, humour is related to the language faculty and is unique to *Homo sapiens*. Other animals laugh, but their cue is not humour. Humour is thus species-specific. Comedy (in general, not just stand-up) is a series of instances designed to evoke humour linked together by a storyline or narrative. And satire is a series of instances of humour in which the purpose of the statements is social criticism. As Aarons et al. remind us, "social criticism (...) is the purpose of all satire."<sup>4</sup> This conceptualization of the four terms contributes to the scholarship on humour and comedy, given that as late as 2016 scholars still at times exhibit some terminological uncertainty, defining comedy vaguely as "material whose

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<sup>1</sup> 2016 :257.

<sup>2</sup> 2016:269.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Wilkie, 2017 :221.

<sup>4</sup> Aarons *et al.* 2017:154.

primary purpose is one of funniness [...] whereas a humorous situation is something that can have just happened without a deliberate intention.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, if humour is defined as the symbolic stimulation of laughter (by way of contrasting or incongruous symbols internal to the mind, regardless of intentionality) this definition is functional and better supported by the literature on language and cognition. This concept-related contribution places satire in the realm of inductive reasoning, as opposed to deductive reasoning. And the frequency in the use of arguments from analogy against propaganda is a testament to the inductive reasoning nature of satirical stand-up. A good example is found in this instance of SC<sup>2</sup> by Eddie Griffin:

White people are always talking about ‘my country.’ White people this ain’t y’all country. Y’all annexed it. You stole it from the Indians. I know you said you ‘discovered’ it. You know how they use them slick ass words: ‘We discovered it!’ How do you discover some shit a motherfucker already lives at? Using that analogy, when I get off stage I’m gonna discover somebody’s car. Police like: ‘did you steal it?’ ‘No, I discovered it. I gave the indigenous driver a reservation in the trunk’.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of this project’s domain-related contribution, it is a result of an interdisciplinary effort: five realms of inquiry are brought together to posit that from a linguistic, political-economic, and social point of view, SC<sup>2</sup> acts like the artillery of critique against the general uncritical consensus. When Hurley *et al.* contend that humour plays an important cognitive role in keeping “data integrity in our knowledge representation [by ensuring] that we reduce the likelihood of making faulty inferences and fatal mistakes,”<sup>3</sup> this project adds the plausible social context in which this phenomenon occurs. The context is one in which our shared “knowledge representation” is invariably influenced by propaganda and thus becomes the “general uncritical consensus.” As Bill Hicks said, “to me, the comic is the guy who says, ‘Wait a

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Lockyer, 2016 :153.

<sup>2</sup> Griffin, 2011: Interval 25:00-25:47.

<sup>3</sup> 2011:289.

minute' as the consensus forms ... he's the antithesis of the mob mentality."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the findings strongly suggest that the study of satire belongs in the field of propaganda studies, and that the most fruitful avenue for inquiry is placing satire studies within the conflict theory tradition of sociological research.<sup>2</sup> Because the main argument offered here is that structurally, the aggregate demand for SC<sup>2</sup> is stimulated by the dominion exerted by mass media over mass opinions. Given that elite "control of society, while certainly manifest in material modes of production, is culturally embedded and naturalized in the minds of the people via its hegemony over discourse,"<sup>3</sup> the SC<sup>2</sup> cannot be fruitfully understood unless the political economic repercussion of mass communication are taken into account. Mass propaganda and satire are inextricably entwined, hence the artillery of critique versus the general uncritical consensus.

This project's framework-related contribution is an improvement in the understanding of the relationship between humour and political consciousness. The findings of this research project indicate that the satirical content of stand-up comedy challenges propaganda, and that given the frequency of category hits, public discourse is, so to speak, saturated with propaganda. Therefore, it is possible to disagree with Judith Yaross Lee's<sup>4</sup> premise, offered at the outset of the most recent scholarly compendium on the political aspects of stand-up comedy. Lee argues that free democratic societies "have less need than a monarchy for a social safety valve that restricts lower classes comic license to critique their social superiors."<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, as observed by Alex Carey, it is precisely in free democratic societies that propaganda

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Quirk, 2016:252.

<sup>2</sup> Klaehn *et al.* 2010:10.

<sup>3</sup> Theobald, 2006:26.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Yaross Lee is the Charles E. Zumkehr Professor of Communication Studies at Ohio State University, 2016 Fulbright Senior Professor of American Culture at Leiden University in the Netherlands, and Editor of *Studies in American Humour*.

<sup>5</sup> 2017:xvi.

techniques are deployed systematically and continuously, given that other methods of coercion and control are not available. Propaganda, Carey contends, plays a much more “important role (...) in technologically advanced democratic societies, where the maintenance of the existing power and privileges are vulnerable to popular opinion. In contrast, under authoritarian regimes power and privilege are not open and vulnerable to dissenting public opinion.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as Bertrand Russell noted, “immunity to eloquence is of the utmost importance to citizens of a democracy,”<sup>2</sup> given that the instruments to disseminate eloquence (propaganda), are firmly in the hands of privileged elites who have every interest to use them to preserve their own advantages. In authoritarian societies control over opinion is not that important, given that other means of coercion and control are available to the governors. But in free democratic societies, where enough civil rights have been won, the governors cannot simply club their way to consensus. As Lasswell explained in 1927, “most of that which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion. Democracy has proclaimed the dictatorship of palaver, and the technique of dictating to the dictator is named propaganda.”<sup>3</sup> The data and this project’s framework indicate that Yaross Lee’s premise about satire is fallacious. This does not, of course, prove that her conclusion is false; it proves only that she has given no valid reason for supposing it true.<sup>4</sup> Her argument is fallacious because it does not include propaganda and the general uncritical consensus in the equation. This underscores how placing

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<sup>1</sup> 1997:12.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, 2004:247.

<sup>3</sup> Lasswell, 1928:631.

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is intentionally modelled on Bertrand Russell’s critique of Plato’s knowledge from perception theory, whereby he concludes, “Plato’s arguments as regards all other knowledge are fallacious. This does not, of course, prove that his conclusion is false; it proves only that he has given no valid reason for supposing it true.” See Russell, 2005:155. The same conclusion applies to Yaross Lee’s “safety-valve” argument.



satire in the scholarly domain of propaganda studies is a fruitful method for inquiry that delivers rich results.

But more importantly, this research project, as a whole, offers a plausible context for the manifestation of satirical stand-up comedy, because it includes properties of the language faculty, the structure of the political economy, insights from ideology and propaganda studies, and satire theory, as a backdrop to the content. As the present inquiry indicates, when SC<sup>2</sup> is placed within this explanatory context, it is possible to appreciate how, although intermittently, satirists succeed in grasping the essence of a political system that, as Ferguson notes, “few political scientists describe correctly.”<sup>1</sup> The examined congruities are a testament to the successful grasping of the essence of the political system; one that is in line with Elite-Domination theories of American democracy.<sup>2</sup> The limited evidence presented here strongly suggests that frequent exposure to satire, among other things, is an indispensable ingredient in any adequate intellectual diet, given the avalanche of manufactured symbolic arrangements that populate public discourse.

To recap, in 2011 leading comedy scholars singled-out two shortcomings in stand-up comedy research. The first shortcoming suggests a theoretical void: that although “a number of different disciplines take comedy as their subject matter, the opportunities afforded to the inter-disciplinary study of comedy are rarely, if ever, capitalized on.”<sup>3</sup> The second, a methodological void: there is a “lack of literature on ‘how’ to analyse stand-up comedy.”<sup>4</sup> This research project examined the relationship between political consciousness and satirical content in stand-up comedy in an attempt to redress these two shortcomings. It did so by offering a new theoretical model and a

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Gilens et al. 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Lockyer *et al.* 2011:99.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

new set of longitudinal data: the political-economic content of American stand-up comedy over the course of a decade 1990-1999. This dissertation therefore attempted to redress the two identified shortcomings in stand-up comedy research by capitalizing on the inter-disciplinary study of what scholars describe as a “huge cultural phenomenon”<sup>1</sup> and by offering a new method to analyze it. In this sense, this dissertation claims to have made “a significant contribution to knowledge in the field”<sup>2</sup> thus fulfilling the PhD dissertation requirement.

#### 4. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on this research project’s scholarly contributions, it is possible to make one basic suggestion for future research. The objective is to consolidate the basic hypothesis, which traces back to Lord Shaftesbury’s intuition. In *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury noted a relationship that can be called Shaftesbury’s Law of Pressure (LoP):

Tis the persecuting spirit has raised the bantering one (...) For [satire] will naturally fall heaviest where the constraint has been severest. The greater the weight is, the bitterer will be the satire. (...) That this is really so may appear by looking on those countries where the spiritual tyranny is highest.<sup>3</sup>

LoP has two variables: Spiritual Tyranny on one side and Satire on the other. The law contends that one variable, satire, is directly proportional to the other, spiritual tyranny: therefore the greater the tyranny the greater the satire. If the terms are updated for contemporary democratic societies - propaganda replacing tyranny and stand-up comedy satire replacing satire - the law would be expressed as: the greater the pressure of propaganda, the greater the production of stand-up satire in reaction to the propaganda.

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<sup>1</sup> Lockyer *et al.* 2011 :100.

<sup>2</sup> Ryerson University *et al.* 2017:16. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> 1773:72

The idea of symbolic pressure in society was also noted by Freud, who observed that “[satirical] jokes are especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority. The joke then represents rebellion against that authority; a liberation from its pressure.”<sup>1</sup> But with contemporary advanced research methods scholars can test Shaftesbury’s hypothesis scientifically. Using the marketing’s sector GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as a propaganda intensity stimuli, and satire production GDP as artillery feedback, a hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression can be used to more fully explore the various factors that best explain the various booms in comedy. Regressions are the standard method of causal analysis in the field of media effects, and display very strong outcomes and validity in the social sciences, from Gilens’ *Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness* study,<sup>2</sup> to Amy Becker et al.’s analysis of the impact of exposure to President’s jokes at the White House Correspondent’s dinner.<sup>3</sup>

As reported by industry observers, in 2015 comedy was experiencing a “second boom”<sup>4</sup> in terms of talent pool, number of shows, number of fans. “A peak that hasn’t been seen since the first comedy boom, which lasted from 1979 to about 1995.”<sup>5</sup> If a regression analysis can determine a causal relation between marketing GDP and the various booms in satirical stand-up comedy, while ensuring that other variables, such as demand for non-political comedy, are minor contributors to the overall growth, this will further support and consolidate the theoretical framework offered in this dissertation. And conversely, if regression analysis determines that propaganda GDP growth does not correlate with the growth in demand & supply of satirical stand-up, the result would

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, 1960:125

<sup>2</sup> Gilens, 2005. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> Becker *et al.*, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Fox, 2015: [link](#).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

undermine this dissertation's main theoretical contribution. Given the constant stream of propaganda that creates a "target rich environment"<sup>1</sup> in contemporary society, this dissertation emphasizes the institutional (structural) explanation for the manifestation of stand-up satire, because it fits the available evidence better. However, I'm not dedicated to it. If future scholarship amassed evidence in support of alternative explanations, I would accept them. As Richard Klein explained, but in another context, I too "want to be right, but I care much more that someone can be."<sup>2</sup>

A final suggestion for further inquiry involves the effects of exposure to satire on a person's outlook, how the degree of exposure correlates with an overall attitude of scepticism towards major contributors to the general uncritical consensus: political propaganda, advertising, religion, conventional wisdom, etc. This line of inquiry can test Leacock's hypothesis on the pedagogical dimension of humour: given that we "enrich our power of expression by perpetual and renewed comparisons, (...) humour – meaning the feeling of it – can be intensified by cultivation; and humour – meaning the expression of it and conveyance to others – can be taught, and native faculty heightened by effort and instruction."<sup>3</sup> This pedagogical dimension of satire would bolster its worth, if, along with Russell, the scholarly community recognizes that "experience in the technique of taking the emotion out of words and substituting a clear logical significance will [serve people well] if they wish to keep their head amid the welter of excited propaganda."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Borowitz, as quoted in Provenza, 2010:274.

<sup>2</sup> 2008:267.

<sup>3</sup> Leacock, 1938:111. [Link](#).

<sup>4</sup> Russell, 1956:187.

## APPENDIX 1: SC<sup>2</sup> 1990-1994

1990

### George Carlin - Doin It Again

[SPF] Don't you think it's a little bit strange that Ronald Reagan had an operation on his asshole and that George Bush had an operation on his middle finger?<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] Some people are really fucking stupid. Did you ever notice that, how many really stupid people you run into during the day? Goddamn there's a lot of stupid bastards walking around. Carry a little pad and pencil with you, you'll wind up with 30 or 40 names by the end of the day. Look at it this way: think of how stupid the average person is, and then realize half of them are stupider than that.<sup>2</sup>

[PF] You'd be listening to some guy and say 'this guy is fucking stupid.' Then there are some people, they are not stupid, they are full of shit. (...) Then there are some people they're not stupid, they're not full of shit, they're fucking nuts. Dan Quayle is all three. All three. Stupid. Full of shit. And fucking nuts. And where did he get that wife of his? Have you taken a good look at that Marylin Quayle? Where did he get her? At a Halloween party or something? She looks like Prince Charles for chrissakes. Let me ask you something. Does he actually have to fuck that woman? God help him I wouldn't fuck her with a stolen dick. That's my political humour. People like it when you're topical. Oh, some people don't like you to talk like that.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] It's time for me to get a little drink of water. Figure this stuff is safe to drink. Actually, I don't care if it's safe or not. I drink it anyway. You know why? 'cause I'm an American and I expect a little cancer in my food and water. That's right. I'm a loyal American and I'm not happy unless I've let government and industry poison me a little bit every day. Let me have a few hundred thousand carcinogens here.<sup>4</sup>

[PG] Oh, some people would like to shut you up for saying those things. You know that. Lots of people. Lots of groups in this country want to tell you how to talk. Tell you what you can't talk about. Sometimes they'll say you can talk about something, but you can't joke about it. They say you can't talk about it because it's not funny. Comedians run into that shit all the time. Like rape, they say 'You can't joke about rape. Rape's not funny.'<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] I say fuck you, I think it's hilarious. How do you like that? I can prove to you that rape is funny. Picture Porky Pig raping Elmer Fudd. See, hey, why do you think they call him Porky? I know what you're gonna say: Elmer was asking for it. Elmer was coming on to Porky, Porky couldn't help himself, he got a hard on, he got horny, he lost control, he went out of his mind. A lot of men talk like that, a lot of men think that way, they think it's the woman's fault, they like to blame the rape on the woman, they say 'hey she had it coming. She was wearing a short skirt.' These guys think women ought to go to prison for being cock-teasers. Don't seem fair to me. Don't seem right. But you can joke about it. I believe you can joke about anything.<sup>6</sup>

[PG] Now I probably got the feminists all pissed off at me because I'm joking about rape. Feminists want to control your language. Feminists want to tell you how to talk.

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 03:25-03:35

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 21:47-22:14

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 22:21-24:07

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 19:40-20:01

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 24:07-25:28

<sup>6</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 24:07-25:28

And they're not alone. They're not alone, I'm not picking on the feminists. They got a lot of company in this country. There's a lot of groups, lot of institutions in this country want to control your language: tell you what you can say and what you can't say. Government wants to tell you some things you can't say because they're against the law, or you can't say this because it's against the regulation. Or here's something you can't say because it's a secret. You can't tell him that because he's not clear to know that. Government wants to control information and control language because that's the way you control thought. And basically that's the game they're in. Same with religion. Religion is nothing but mind control. Religion is just trying to control your mind, control your thoughts, so they're gonna tell you some things you shouldn't say because they're sins.<sup>1</sup>

[PG] Same with political groups of all kinds, political activists, anti-bias groups, special interest groups, are gonna suggest the correct political vocabulary. The way you ought to be saying things, and that's where the feminists come in. now, as I said, I got nothing against the feminists. (...) In fact, I happen to agree with most of the feminist philosophy I have read. I agree for instance that for the most part, men are vain, ignorant greedy brutal assholes you just about ruined this planet (...) So I agree with that abstract, that man, men, males have pushed the technology that just about has this planet in a stranglehold. Mother Earth, raped again. Guess who? Hey, she was asking for it.<sup>2</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] I also happen to like it when feminists attack these fat ass housewives who think there's nothing more to life than sitting home on the telephone drinking coffee watching TV and pumping out a baby every nine months. What's the alternative to pumping out a unit every nine months? Pointless careerism? Pointless careerism? Putting on a man tailored suit with shoulder pads and imitating all the worst behavior of men? This is the noblest thing that women can think of? To take a job in a criminal corporation that's poisoning the environment and robbing customers out of their money? This is the worthiest thing they can think of? Isn't there something nobler they could do to helping this planet heal?<sup>3</sup>

[PG] You don't hear much about that from these middle-class women. I've noticed that most of these feminists are white middle-class women. They don't give a shit about black women's problems, they don't care about Latino women. All they're interested in is their own reproductive freedom and their pocketbooks.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] But, when it comes to changing the language, I think they make some good points, because we do think in language. And so the quality of our thoughts and ideas can only be as good as the quality of our language. So maybe some of this patriarchal shit ought to go away.<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Another woman's issue: prostitution. I do not understand why prostitution is illegal. Why should prostitution be illegal? Selling is legal. Fucking is legal. Why isn't selling fucking legal? You know, why should it be illegal to sell something that's perfectly legal to give away? I can't follow the logic on that at all.<sup>6</sup>

[PES] Of all the things you can do to a person, giving someone an orgasm is hardly the worst thing in the world. In the army, they give you a medal for spraying napalm on

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 27:58-30:40

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 27:58-30:40

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 30:54-33:36

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 30:54-33:36

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 30:54-33:36

<sup>6</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 34:45-35:29

people. In civilian life you go to jail for giving someone an orgasm. Maybe I'm not supposed to understand it.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] There's something else I don't care for. These organ donor programs. That shit bother you a little bit? Sounds like Joseph Mengele's been sitting on some of those meetings or something. Organ donor programs. Thing that bothers me the most about them is they're run by the Motor Vehicle Bureau. I figure hey shit you gotta wait on the line that long for a kidney fuck it do without. It's the Motor Vehicle Bureau in most States who sends you the little card you're supposed to carry right next to your wallet. Right next to your driver's license, in your wallet. Little card. You're supposed to fill it out and on it you're supposed to list the organ's you're willing to give in case you die. Are these people out of their fucking minds or something? Do you honestly believe that if a paramedic finds that card on you in an automobile accident he's gonna try to save your life? Bullshit, he's looking for parts man! Absolutely. 'Look Dan, here's that lower intestine we've been looking for. Never mind the oxygen this man's a donor.' Bullshit, they want something of mine they can have my rectus and my anus. That's all I'm giving.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] Here's another bunch of macho asshole bullshit floating around in this country. People taking about 'oh, pull the plug on me. If I'm ever like that, if I'm comatose, if I'm like a vegetable pull the plug on me.' Fuck you, leave my plug alone.' Get an extension cord for my plug. I want everything you got: tubes, cords, plugs, probes, electrodes, IV, you got something, stick it in me man!<sup>3</sup>

[PG] There's a different group to get pissed off at you in this country for everything you're not supposed to say. Can't say fruit, can't say faggot, can't say queer, can't say Nancy-boy, can't say Panzy. Can't say nigger, boggie, jig, jigaboosie, skinhead (...) There is absolutely nothing wrong... there is absolutely nothing wrong with any of those words in and of themselves. They're only words. It's the context that counts. It's the user. It's the intention behind the words that makes them good or bad. The words are completely neutral. The words are innocent.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] I get tired of people talking about bad words and bad language. Bullshit. It's the context that makes them good or bad. The context that makes them good or bad. For instance, you take the word nigger. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the word nigger in and of itself. It's the racist asshole that's using it that you ought to be concerned about. We don't care when Richard Pryor or Eddie Murphy say it. Why? 'Cause we know they're not racist. They're niggers. Context. Context. We don't mind their context because they're black.<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] I don't like words that hide the truth. I don't like words that conceal reality. I don't like euphemisms or euphemistic language. And American English is loaded with euphemisms. Cause Americans have a lot of trouble dealing with reality. Americans have trouble facing the truth. So they invent a kind of soft language to protect themselves from it. And it gets worse with every generation. For some reason it keeps getting worse. I'll give you an example of that. There's a condition in combat, most people know about it, it's when a fighting person's nervous system has been stressed to its absolute peak and maximum, can't take anymore input. The nervous system has either snapped or is about to snap. In the First World War that condition was called

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 34:45-35:29

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 42:46-43:55

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 44:15-44:43

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 45:51-48:37

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 45:51-48:37

'shellshock.' Simple, honest, direct language. Two syllables. 'Shellshock.' Almost sounds like the guns themselves. That was 70 years ago. Then a whole generation went by and the Second World War came along, and the very same combat condition was called 'battle fatigue.' Four syllables now. Takes a little longer to say, doesn't seem to hurt as much, fatigue is a nicer word than shock. Shellshock, battle fatigue. Then we had the war in Korea 1950, Madison avenue was riding high by that time, and the very same combat condition was called 'operational exhaustion.' Hey we're up to 8 syllables now. And the humanity has been squeezed completely out of the phrase, it's totally sterile now. 'operational exhaustion'. Sounds like something that might happen to your car. Then of course came the war in Vietnam, which has only been over for about 16-17 years. And thanks to the lies and deceits surrounding that war I guess it's no surprise that the very same condition was called 'post-traumatic stress disorder.' Still 8 syllables, but we've added a hyphen. And the pain is completely buried under jargon. Post-traumatic stress disorder. I'll bet you if we'd have still been calling it shellshock some of those Vietnam veterans might have gotten the attention they needed at the time. I'll bet you that. I'll bet you that. But, but it didn't happen. And one of the reasons, one of the reasons, is because we were using that soft language. That language that takes the life out of life.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] Poor people used to live in slums. Now the economically disadvantaged occupy substandard housing in the inner cities. And they're broke. They're broke. They don't have a negative cash flow position. They're fucking broke. Because a lot of them were fired. You know fired? Management wanted to curtail redundancies in the human resources areas. So many people are no longer viable members of the workforce. Smug, greedy, well-fed, white people have invented a language to conceal their sins, it's as simple as that. The CIA doesn't kill anybody anymore, they neutralize people, or they depopulate the area. The government doesn't lie. It engages in disinformation. The Pentagon actually measures nuclear radiation in something they call 'sunshine units.'<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] Israeli murders are called commandos. Arab commandos are called terrorists. Contra killers are called 'freedom fighters.' Well if crime fighters fight crime and firefighters fight fire, what do freedom fighters fight? They never mention that part of it to us do they? Never mention that part of it.<sup>3</sup>

### **Bill Hicks – Dangerous**

[PES] First thing I noticed when I came here was the homeless situation. Now, I'm no bleeding heart, ok, but when you're walking down the streets of New York City and you're stepping over a guy on a sidewalk, who, I don't know, might be dead, does it ever occur to you to think "wow, maybe our system doesn't work?" Does that question ever bubble up out of you? I mean if there was only a couple of bums I'd think "well, they're fucking bums." But there's thousands of these fucking guys, I mean I'm running like a bum hurdle down the fucking street: The 100 Yard Bum Hurdle.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] And I had no idea there was thousands of these guys. (...) Man, some of these guys, they look healthy, I don't get it. They're just fucking bums, you know what I mean? The very idea they want me to just give them the hard earned money .... my folks send to me every week, fuck! You leach! Get a job man. My dad works 8 hours a day for this money. The nerve of these people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 48:38-51:30

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 52:35-53:47

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Doin It Again*. HBO. 1990. Interval: 52:35-53:47

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*, 1990. Interval: 00:01-06:34.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*, 1990. Interval: 00:01-06:34.



[GUC] I've noticed a certain anti-intellectualism in this country. Have you noticed that? Ever since around 1980 coincidentally enough. Last week I was in Nashville, Tennessee, after the show I went to a Waffle House. I'm not proud of it, but I was hungry. And I'm sitting there and I'm eating and I'm reading a book, right, I'm alone, I don't know anybody, I'm eating and I'm reading a book. Fine, right? The waitress comes over to me: what you reading for? I said: "Wow, I've never been asked that. God danged it you stumped me. Not what am I reading, but what am I reading "for"? I guess I read for a lot of reasons, but one of the main ones is so I don't end up being a fucking waffle waitress.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] George Bush says "we are losing the war on drugs." You know what that implies? There's a war being fought, and people on drugs are winning it. What does that tell you about drugs? Some creative people on that side, they're winning the war and they're fucked up!<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] Hey I don't get it because alcohol and cigarettes are drugs. So the war is taking a definite ceasefire here isn't it. Yeah, alcohol and cigarettes kill more people than crack, cocaine, heroin combined.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] You never see a positive drug story on the news do ya? No. Always negative. News are supposed to be objective and it's supposed to be The News. But every drug story is negative. Well, hold it, I've had some killer times on drugs. I'm not promoting it, but I'm not denying it. Let's hear the whole story. Same LSD story every time: "A young man on acid thought he could fly jumped out of a building. What a tragedy." What a dick. Don't go blame acid on this guy. He thought he could fly, why didn't he take off from the ground first and check it out. (...) I'd like to see a positive LSD story, would that be newsworthy, just once? Hear what it's all about: "Today a young man on acid realized that all matter is merely energy condensed to a slow vibration, that we are all one consciousness experiencing itself subjectively. There's no such thing as death, life is only a dream and we are the imagination of ourselves. Here's Tom with the weather."<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] It's not a war on drugs. It's war on personal freedom is what it is. Okay? Keep that in mind at all times, thank you. They lump all drugs together, it's not gonna work: pot and crack. Hey hey hey, don't put pot in the drug category. It's an herb man. Like tea. Not only do I think pot should be legalized, I think it should be mandatory."<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] I think the world is falling apart out there. Do you feel that way? Did you watch this shit, you watch the flag-burning thing? Wasn't that great? Whoa, if everyone showed their true colors then didn't they? Retarded nation that we are. Scary. People acted as though the Supreme Court approved of flag-burning. "Does that mean we have to burn our flags?" No, No, No. It's not what they said. They said that perhaps if somebody wants to burn a flag he perhaps doesn't need to go to jail for a year. (...) People snapped over this. Did you watch that? People just went: "Hey buddy, let me tell you something, my daddy died for that flag." This, really? Wow, I bought mine. They sell them at K-Mart and shit. Yeah. "He died in the Korean War for that flag." Oh, what a coincidence, mine was made in Korea.<sup>6</sup>

[PES] I generally love my job. You know what's great about being a comic? It's that I have no boss. There's a definite plus in a lifestyle huh. (...) I always used to get from bosses: "Hicks! How come you're not working?" I go "there's nothing to do." And they go

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 06:35-09:56.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 28:02-30:40.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 28:02-30:40.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 28:02-30:40.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 28:02-30:40.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 35:30-38:30.

“Well, you pretend like you’re working.” Yeah, why don’t you pretend I’m working? You get paid more, then you fantasize buddy. Hell, pretend I’m mopping. Knock yourself out. I’ll pretend they’re buying stuff, we can close up!”<sup>1</sup>

### **Barry Crimmins – AntiWar Rant**

[SPF] There’s been a lot of good news lately that we may have overlooked. George Bush endorsed Margaret Thatcher and after 11 and a half years she only lasted 4 more days.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] Ronald Reagan’s nervous. This Milly Vanilli has him on edge. ‘Damn, right when my book came out. They’re gonna get on to all of us yeah.’ Ronald Reagan yeah his book came out, it’s being outsold by Bush’s dog’s book. Probably because it’s more likely that that Bush’s dog wrote the book. They have given Reagan an award for the book, it’s the best new work of non-non-fiction. ‘When I liberated the Sandinista camps at the end of World War II.’<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] + [PES] I’ve never been a supporter of Saddam Hussein. Nor have I supported, unlike the US government, I’ve never supported Saddam Hussein. Nor have I supported the Shah of Iran, [Yitzhak] Shamir, Sharon, Suharto, Chiang Kai-shek, [Alfredo] Cristiani, (...) the Somozas, the Duvaliers, Marcos, [Fulgencio] Batista, Diem, Rios Montt, [Alfredo] Stroessner Pinochet, [Vinicio] Cerezo, Park Chung-hee, General Zia, the Sultan of Brunei, Assad, King Fahd, Franco, [Jonas] Savimbi, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, P. W. Botha, Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, or George Bush! I’m sorry if time constraints didn’t allow me to get to your favorite mass murderer.<sup>4</sup>

[SFP] + [PEP] + [PES] We do not support these people because they are killers. And we’re opposed to killing. And we’ve been opposed to killing much longer than George [H.W.] Bush has been outraged by something. George Bush who suddenly has found out that chemical weapons are immoral, maybe because there’s not much to defoliate in the Middle-East. I’m not sure. George Bush [Impersonating Bush] ‘Chemical weapons are immoral, you know, come on, you should kill people with good conventional weapons. Not a chemical weapon. Only DOW only Union Carbide should murder, that should be left in their hand. Chemical weapons are otherwise wrong’.<sup>5</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] We knew Saddam Hussein was a madman when he sent out children to fight in human waves years ago, but George Bush helped funnel them aid at that point. George Bush cast the tie-breaking vote to keep chemical weapons in the US murder arsenal. And we should hold him culpable for that. Has anyone ever noticed that every time George Bush’s popularity goes down Saddam Hussein gets a little crazier that day. ‘Bush you’re down five points. He’s wacky. You’re down 7 points. He’s Hitler. You’re down 12 points. He’s gotta a bomb, everybody! He’s gotta a bomb.’ Who the hell doesn’t have a bomb? Bush, you’re crazy, you’ve got zillions of bombs. I’m worried about that too. Israel has a bomb, South Africa has a bomb. I’m panicked about that too. They’re talking about, they talk one minute about how insane Hussain is with this bomb, like he’s gonna put it in his teeth and swim over here, and the next minute they talk about how it might be sane to use a pre-emptive nuclear strike so he does not use nuclear force. Get a glove, get in the game.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Dangerous*. 1990. Set Interval: 39:30-40:40.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:00:23-00:31

<sup>3</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:00:33-01:07

<sup>4</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:01:13-02:05

<sup>5</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:02:06-02:41

<sup>6</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:02:42-03:52

[SPF] + [PES] Bush is talking, you know, how about his hanging around with Assad? [Impersonating Bush] 'Well, this is part of our madman conservation program. In ten years if they threaten us with another peace dividend we can start to expose his atrocities'. We've drawn a line in the sand and we've told the whole world that we'll pay any price rather than develop a sane energy policy.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] + [GUC] This war is Bush's energy policy, he'll get a bunch of kids killed and then they won't use oil after that will they? No they won't. And there's another point that's never made in the US mainstream media. They never seem to tell us this point: that that oil belongs to the Arabs, ok? That's their oil. If we're concerned about oil what we should stop doing is using so much oil. That's what we can control.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] I'm concerned Saddam Hussein is gonna make a big mistake and put Panamanians in his human shield. Then Bush will strike for sure. It's 'naked aggression' over there but in Panama no, that was cool, 'we had on loin cloths. It said 'just cause' right across the manhood region.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] I'm also tired of the media talking, of course we know that Iraqis control their State media, we know that. But they're always kind of [Impersonating news anchor] 'Iraqi State-Sponsored TV, hehehe. We'll be right back after this word from Mobil.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] How many of you 6 months ago gave a good god damn about Kuwait? Did you care about Kuwait? All of a sudden 'oh poor Kuwait'. Kuwait, when they got attacked I was nearly as upset as when Morton Downey went off the air. A de facto slavery over there. Hussein is wrong to attack other nations, but Kuwait? I'm gonna tell people they should be killed for Kuwait: a family owned oil company with a flag? I don't think so.<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] All Congress cares about is Bush as a big distraction. He comes in, speaks to Congress: 'Yay. There he is. The guy that got the S&L's off the front page. Yee-ha!'.<sup>6</sup>

[PEP] I'm tired of being called a radical. I don't think I'm radical. I don't think you're radical. I don't think we're radical. What's so radical about what we want? We want peace, we want economic justice, we want civil rights, we want jobs, we want hope, we want public transportation. I'm a radical? No, I'm not a radical. I don't have 400 thousand troops assembled in a desert wearing scuba-diving suits to bring me more oil than I'm already choking to death on. That's radical."<sup>7</sup>

[PEP] + [SPF] They minimize this war, they say it's not gonna be another Vietnam, that they will minimize the casualties. Yeah, they'll minimize the US casualties which means they're gonna maximize the Iraqi casualties, and that is obscene and that is wrong. They tell us it's not another Vietnam and then they wheel out Henry Kissinger to tell us about it. Henry Kissinger! If it's not another Vietnam, why would they bring Henry Kissinger? What, was Goebbels unavailable that day? Goering wasn't around? They bring out Kissinger, and he talks like he's really sane. [Impersonating Kissinger] 'We must be very careful, or war will be averted. We must give the atrocities time to take effect. If we do not act correctly, tens of thousands of innocent lives will be saved, and it will bring needless suffering to the clients of Kissinger and Associates.' Well, we're sick of him."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:03:55-04:16

<sup>2</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:04:23-04:49

<sup>3</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:05:24-05:40

<sup>4</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:05:43-05:55

<sup>5</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:06:01-06:26

<sup>6</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:07:16-07:24

<sup>7</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:07:30-07:56

<sup>8</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:08:28-09:31

[PES] + [GUC] We're sick of the Pentagon, so greedy they have an extra side on their building. We don't need stealth bombers. What do they do? They fly around and you can't tell they're there. Well, why don't you just say you have them?"<sup>1</sup>

### **Dennis Miller – Black and White**

[SPF] What's new in the world? Washington D.C. Mayor Marion Barry. Can you believe he got off? Surprising because I'd always heard that ordinarily when you do that much blow you can't get off. And kind of ironic that he and Ed Koch both stepped on in the same year seeing as Koch's slogan was "How am I doing?" and Barry's was "How much am I doing?" And you know, he's thinking about running again. Talk about balls the size of Elfis Antari. He's got a new campaign slogan "No blow. No hookers. Just good government."<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] well, Germany has gotten back together last week. If there is a man amongst you who sees why these two should not be joined together let him speak now or forever hold his peace in the ready position with the safety off. Germany. Food, folks and the Fuhrer. I don't know, I view the reunification of Germany in much the same way I view a possible Dean Martin Jerry Lewis reconciliation. I haven't really enjoyed any of their previous work and I'm not sure I need to see the new shit right now.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] And now that that wall has come down in Berlin isn't it about time we did something about that barrier between Virginia and West Virginia? And isn't it time for the West Virginians to start sharing some of their rapid advancement sin the field of musketree. 'You know you poke the ball down twice with the steel rod. Thank you Jessep.' Hey I've been to West Virginia. Be glad you live on this side of the culture warp.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] I think the only more backward place I've ever been is Tulsa Oklahoma. Have all this nouveau gauche oil money flowing around down there local citizenry is comprised of the cast of extras from the grapes of wrath. They're not quite sure what to do with their new found petro dollars. So you see a lot of 450 SLs with six flags amusement park bumper stickers on them. These are the sort of people who send in the 3 dollar for the written transcripts of that day's Sally Jesse Raphael show.<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] A lot of terrorism in the air, but you know when you walk through the air terminal and see the crack security people manning the perimeter, I think we all sleep the sleep of angels huh? Came into Pheonix the other day, the woman working the x-ray machine had the attention span of Boo Radley, she's sitting their like Captain Pike from Star Trek. She had a channel flicker she's watching baggage from other airports for Christ's sake you know.<sup>6</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] You know I read in this article that the New Kids do 12 million dollars a month in merchandising. 12 million. Isn't that one of the Biblical signs of Armageddon? You know what the saddest part about the New Kid on the block phenomenon is? It's that one New Kid who has now taken it upon himself to become the bruited new kid on the block. He's always hunched over with that shitty nanny goat facial hair, you know, got the baseball hat on sideways, that flip chapeau insolence of youth you know. He's always glaring at you with that rebel without a clue look.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Crimmins. *Anti-War Rant*. 1990. Interval:09:32-09:44

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 7:56-8:38

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 8:41-11:30

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 8:41-11:30

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 8:41-11:30

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 16:40-17:15

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 20:25-22:20

[SPF] See, they want to put Reagan's head on Mount Rushmore now. Couple of snags in the plan. They're not sure granite is a dense enough material to accurately portray the former President's head.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] We have a new president now. George Bush. I find Bush an interesting dichotomy in that he is anti-abortion and yet pro-death penalty. Huh, I guess it's all in the timing, huh George?<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] I saw Quayle speaking on abortion the other day. Said there are only two reasons to have one: one if her health is threatened, or two if she doesn't want to have the baby. And I think the kid nailed down the position there. You don't see muh of the Quayle-meister anymore do you? They got the kid on the short leash don't they? Quayle functions as the open box of Arm & Hammer baking soda in the rear of the Bush administration. Sort of like the Barney Fife of Washington D.C. They give him that one bullet for his shirt pog and hope he doesn't hurt himself out there. I don't even see him anymore, I think I saw him last week in one of those magazine ads for Amaretto.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [SPF] I guess it was kind of preordained we had another Republican administration, the Democrats didn't really throw too much up against them. Michael Dukakis obviously a good man caring father sensitive husband I guess all those things seemed to matter more than whether or not you'd make a good President but I don't think he ever had a chance in that area. I think he lacked that certain shallow charisma we seem to look for in our leaders.<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] + [PES] + [GUC] I don't even know why Dukakis would want to lead this country right now, he seemed to live in such a uptight reactionary pain in the ass haven right now I mean. If Joseph McCarthy was alive today I swear he'd be a little squeamish about what's going on. Everybody has an opinion, and everybody is completing unbending on that opinion. I think what we're seeing is the fascism of absolute freedom.<sup>5</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] Now fur, I don't believe in fur, I don't wear fur, but it stops right there. Because I am pro-choice across the board and I'm beginning to think that the number one endangered species in this country is somebody who retains their freedom of choice. I have nothing against these fur people but I think... these fur people, we're gonna have to get it through their head that personal likes and dislikes are merely opinions and not laws of the land. Fur farms aren't the way to go, nobody wants to see these animals stuck in these traps, the traps should be reserved for social activists but there are ... I have seen people in New York City step over fellow human beings laying in their own piss, to spit on somebody who's wearing chinchilla. And you know, now they pretend to spit on you if you wear fake fur. I mean, how far do we go with this madness? Maybe if we refocused a little of this house pet energy into tiding up the human condition, we'd all be a little better off. But you know, you take a look at these people, you take a look at these people and you see they're so glazed over with fanaticism there's no talking to them. You take a deep look in the eye and you can see somewhere along the line they have been so horribly hurt or disappointed by their fellow human beings, that they've chosen to become way, way too cordial with the animal kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

[GUC] I guess the other big problem confronting this country now is the sword of Damocles like specter, dark presence posing doom presented at us by ... the evil one,

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 24:37-24:47

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 25:37-25:50

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 25:53-26:34

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 27:09-27:33

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 27:58-28:21

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 28:22-29:52

Satan's son... Andrew Dice Clay. Oh isn't this a bunch of crap? Don't we look for things to bother ourselves about. Is anybody here that threatened by this man? Is anybody in this room so non-ego formed as an adult that they're afraid that listening to his record album will make them kill another human being? I mean, come on, isn't his worse sin that it's a tad innocuous? Nursery rhymes with the word pussy in it? come on folks it's Fonzie with Turret's syndrome, we gotta take it easy, just lighten up. I'll tell you why America loves this story, because it gives certain Americans the opportunity to speak for other Americans, and no matter what they say about baseball, this is the national past-time. Don't you hate it when the liberal intelligentsia in this country comes down from this tete-a-tete they're having with the burning bush on the mountain top, deigned to speak for what they construe to be the unwashed stupid masses. 'Well you know I can see through Andrew Dice Clay but then again I have a bachelor in communication from Tallahassee Juco but those people the cattle I don't think they get it, I best tip them to my personal wisdom'. That is such a narcissistic bullshit attitude. These are the same people who worry about album lyrics. You know folks, if your kid is capable of being pushed over the brink by anything Gene Simmons has to say, you're just not doing your job as a fucking parent alright? Something was gonna get this kid eventually alright? A low flying traffic copter, delinquent tax returns, something.<sup>1</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] There seems to be an intrusive nature to religion now in this country that I don't quite understand. There isn't an hour of the day where a television preacher doesn't bully his way into your living room. I see through these guys like used Neutrogena. You know they say they don't favor any particular denomination, but I think we've all seen their eyes light up at tens and twenties.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] I think the thing I find most cloying about Christianity is it's only after many of these people have painted themselves into irrevocable moral corners then and only then do they turn their life over to Christ. Nobody goes to Christ on prom-night. It's only when they fucked it up so horribly that nobody down here will talk to them anymore.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] Charles Colson this guy was the biggest prick on the planet for forty-five years. He gets popped for Watergate, they're leading him into Leavenworth's where he's about to be sodomized for the next decade, all of a sudden he 'found Christ.' I guess Christ didn't see him first huh? 'Oh no. Here comes that asshole Colson. He probably wants to turn his life over to me. Taxi!'<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] Now 7eleven has bowed to pressure from the moral majority and removed Playboy and Penthouse from their newsstands. I guess to be fair you have to look at it from the fundamentalist perspective. What they're saying is they don't want pornography out in the open because what it does is it forces a certain type of literature on somebody in a public place. It would be like .... Oh I don't know, say like ....putting the Bible in everybody's hotel room or you know something crazy like that.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] The entire American legal system is out of hand, upside down, Koyaanisqatsi, it's all based on the premise of trial by jury, the only way you can get on a jury is if you prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that you don't know shit about the case you're about to try. Consequently, we have people's lives being determined by twelve people in a

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 31:47-33:50

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 34:15-34:36

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 35:13-35:30

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 35:36-35:57

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 36:02-36:30

room whose main goal in life is to wrap it up in time to get home to watch Alice reruns on the superstation, because they think Flow was a real hoot.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] You know what I'm amazed at folks? The success of the organ donor programs. People are pretty frivolous about giving this shit away aren't they? Imagine how sheepish you'd feel if you got to the next life and they told you you're gonna need your body again. But you already held a garage sale. You're walking around eternity like some beat up Mr. Potato Head, about the only thing you can do is wait for the guy to die who you gave it to and ask for it back. Trust me he's not going to be half as accommodating as you were. 'what's that man? You want your eyes back? Yeah I'm over here.'<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] I guess the new trend in American advertising now is the half hour talk show in the form of an ad. There are two of these. Either we have the two British guys who are the masters of cleaning and polishing anything in the universe except their own fucking teeth. Or you have the little oriental real estate magnate, Tom Woo, who is leveraged half of Beverly hills using nothing more than Belair coupons you know. I'm beginning to believe Tom though because when you look like that you don't get bikini chicks running around your pad unless you have beaucoup bucks alright. This is real estate for people whose concept of real estate is hotels are red and houses are green.<sup>3</sup>

**1991**

### **Bill Hicks – Relentless**

[PEP] I don't fit in anywhere. That's my problem. You know my problem? I watch too much news. I don't know if you've ever ever ever watched CNN longer than say ... 20 hours in one day. I've gotta cut that out. You ever watched CNN headline news for any length of time? It's the most depressing fucking thing you will ever do. WAR, FAMINE, DEATH, AIDS, HOMELESS, RECESSION, DEPRESSION, WAR, FAMINE, DEATH, AIDS .... Then you look out your window and [impersonates birds whistling]... where is all this shit happening man? Ted Turner is making this shit up. Jane Fonda won't sleep with him. He runs to a typewriter: By 1992 we will all die of AIDS. Read that on the air. I don't get laid, nobody gets laid.<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] We had this big war thing happen, dunno if you caught any of that. It was a very stressful time for me, the war, I'll tell you why. I was in the unenviable position of being for the war, but against the troops. Not the most popular stance I've ever taken on an issue, I must say. I don't choose wisely always, and yet, I'm committed. First of all, this needs to be said: there never was a war. How can you say that Bill? Well, a war is when two armies are fighting. So you see, right there, we can all agree, it wasn't exactly a war.<sup>5</sup>

[SPF] And President Bush, a complete surprise, he turned into a demon man. When he first President they called him "The Wimp President". I mean this was the cover of Newsweek. "Wimp President." Apparently this stuck in this guy's craw. The guy turned into a fucking demon man. [Impersonating a middle-eastern accent, *IMEA*] "We surrender." [Impersonating George H.W. Bush, *IGB*] "Not good enough". [*IMEA*] "We run away." [*IGB*] "Too little too late... we're having way too much fun."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 37:26-37:50

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 39:28-40:15

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *Black and White*. HBO. 1990. Interval 44:13-45:00.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval:03:40-05:40.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval:06:19-07:41.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval:06:19-07:41.

[PEP] + [PES] Those guys were in hog heaven out there, you understand man? They had a big weapons catalogue opened up. [Impersonating Army Officials] "What does G-12 do Tommy? Well it says here it destroys everything but the fillings in their teeth. Helps us pay for the war effort." "Well shit pull that one up." "Pull up G-12 please." [Impersonating rocket sound] Shhhhhhuuuu.... Boom! ... Cool! So what does G-13 do? Weapons for all occasions. And everybody got excited about the technology, and I guess it was pretty incredible watching a missile fly down an air-vent, pretty unbelievable. But couldn't we feasibly use that same technology to shoot food at hungry people? You know what I mean? Fly over Ethiopia. He needs a banana. Shhhhhhuuuu. [Impersonates missile bana flying right into Ethiopian open mouth. Ethiopian waves to plane. Waves thank you.] The Stealth Banana. Smart Fruit. And I watched the Iraqi technology, man I've never felt so good about myself. I look at fucking bellbottoms in my closet, and go that ain't that fucking bad man. What was the technology they were buying? Are those available still now? They could get harder shit off the streets of New York right now man. Don't you think one of the key pre-requisites of a weapon systems is, I don't know, the ability to aim the fucking thing? I don't know a lot about the military and yet I would feel that would be key.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] I guess the most amazing thing about the war, obviously, the disparity in the casualties. Iraq 150 thousand casualties. USA ... seventy-nine. Let's go through those numbers again. They're a little baffling at first glance. Iraq 150 thousand, USA ... seventy-nine. Seventy-nine? Does that mean if we had sent over 80 guys we still would have won that fucking thing, or what?<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] + [PG] Once again though I was watching CNN man, it blew it all, all the anxiety. Remember how it started? They kept talking about the Elite Republican Guard in these hushed tones, remember that, like they were the boogie man. "Yeah, we're doing well, but we have yet to face the Elite Republican Guard." Yeah like these guys are ten feet tall desert warriors, never lost a battle, they shit bullets. Well after two and a half months of continuous carpet-bombing not one reaction at all from those fuckers, they became simply the Republican Guard. Not nearly as elite as we may have led you to believe. And after another month of continuous bombing and not one reaction at all, they went from the "Elite Republican Guard" to the "Republican Guard" to "The Republicans made this shit up about there being Guards out there." We hope you enjoyed your fireworks show.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] People said Huh-huh Bill, Iraq had the fourth largest army in the world. Yeah well maybe but you know what, after the first three largest armies there's a real big fucking drop-off, okay? The Hare Krishnas are the fifth largest army in the world. And they've already got our airports, so who is the greater threat?<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] People that bug me in the States, people that said "hey, the war made us feel better about ourselves." Really? Who are these people with such low self-esteem they need a war to feel better about themselves? I saw them on the news waving their flags, I recommend instead of a war to feel better about yourself, perhaps ... sit-ups, maybe a fruit-cup, six to eight glasses of water a day, I'm not telling you how to live, I'm just recommending there's perhaps a better way to feel better about yourself and we can avoid a conflagration. Merely a suggestion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval:07:45-09:40.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval:10:25-11:01.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval:11:05-12:22.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval: 12:25-12:49.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval: 12:52-13:39.



[PEP] No one knows what pornography is. That's the problem. The Supreme Court of the United States says pornography is any act that has no artistic merit and causes sexual thoughts. That's their definition: no artistic merit, causes sexual thoughts. Hmm. That sounds like every commercial on television to me. You know, when I see those two twins on that Double-Mint commercial ... I'm almost embarrassed to tell you all this ... I'm not thinking of gum. Double Your Pleasure! Ya, Honey where's the Rigley's? I feel like chewing something.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] But you see, once again, my voice, the voice was not heard, my voice was not heard. The question were not asked that I wanted to see asked. And once again the issue just went berserk. 'Pornography causes sexual thoughts.' No one asked these four questions: yeah? And? So? What? When did sex become a bad thing? Did I miss a meeting? 'Bill, we had a big vote. Fuckins is out. You were asleep.' 'Can I still vote?' 'Playboy, pornography causes sexual thoughts. Penthouse, pornography causes sexual thoughts. Madonna videos, pornography causes sexual thoughts. You know what causes sexual thoughts? I'm gonna clear the air for you tonight. I'm gonna end this debate hopefully once and for all while on this planet because outer space awaits our presence. We are better and more unique creatures than this and all eternity is our playground so let me go ahead and clear this one issue up once and for all and let's move on to real issues. Can we? Great. Here's what causes sexual thoughts. You ready? Drumroll .... Having a dick.<sup>2</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] Christians who kill. Ah, we're about out of ideas on this planet aren't we? That's why I love people like George Bush, or this guy Pat Robertson, this televangelist in the States. These are 'Christians for stronger nuclear armament.' Oh what a great deal of faith. Because I know if Jesus were here, he'd probably have an Uzi on him. Don't you think he would? Yeah he would. 'The prince of peace is back ... but he's pissed off'.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] You know, I don't know what you all believe in, and I don't really care. But you have to admit, beliefs are odd. A lot of Christians wear crosses around their neck. You think when Jesus comes back he ever wants to see a fucking cross? It's kinda like going up to Jackie Onassis with a little sniper rifle pin. Hi there Jackie, just thinking of John. We loved him.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] See I just don't agree with everything I hear just because I hear it over the TV. Sometimes I gotta ask myself how I feel about things that way I can get a closer reading of what's true. Drugs have done good things for us, that's my belief. Drugs have done good things for us. Hard to believe I'm saying this. Drugs have done good things for us. 'What do you mean Bill?' Well, if you don't believe drugs have done good things for us do me a favor then. Go home tonight take all your albums your tapes and your CDs and burn them. 'cause you know what, the musicians who made that great music that has enhanced your lives throughout the years ... real fucking high on drugs ok. The Beatles were so high they let Ringo sing a couple of tunes man."<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] Let's look at it another way then. These musicians today who don't do drugs and in fact speak out against them 'We're Rock against Drugs' boy they suck. Ball-less, soul-less, spiritless little corporate fucking puppets suckers of Satan's cock each and every one of them. (...) 'We're Rock Against Drugs' because that's what George Bush would want. (...) 'We're rock stars who sell Pepsi-Cola products. (...) 'We're rock stars who sell

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval: 28:24-30:36.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval: 30:40-33:00.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval: 36:09-36:42.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval: 37:05-37:55.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991, Interval: 45:33-46:27.

Taco Bell products' (...) Let me tell you something right now and you can print this in stone and don't you ever forget it. Any, any performer who ever sells a product on television is for now and all eternity removed from the artistic world. I don't care if you shit Mona Lisas out of your ass on cue, you've made your fucking choice. 'Oh come on it's just a good product, it's just (...)' Shut that big scaly pepper down your mouth. Shut it."<sup>1</sup>  
[PEP] All my point is, is that there's a lot of ways to look at the world. You know what I'm saying? Why pick the way you learn over TV? Because it's usually wrong. You ever see a good drug story on the news? Never. News is supposed to be objective, isn't it supposed to be The News? But every drug story is negative. Well hold it. I've had some killer fucking times on drugs. Let's hear the whole story. Same LSD story every time we've all heard it. 'Young man on acid thought he could fly. Jumped out of a building. What a tragedy.' What a dick. If he thought he could fly why didn't he take off from the ground and check it out first. You don't see ducks lined up to catch elevators to fly south. He's an idiot. He's dead. Good. There's one less moron in the world. Wow, what a fucking tragedy huh? I guess I'm one car length up in traffic tomorrow. How about a positive LSD story, that would be newsworthy. Don't you think? Anybody think that? Just once, to hear a positive LSD story. 'Today a young man on acid realized that all matter is merely energy condensed to a slow vibration. That we are all one consciousness experiencing itself subjectively. There is no such thing as death. Live is only a dream. And we are the imagination of ourselves ... Here's Tom with the weather'.<sup>2</sup>

### **Jim Carrey – Unnatural Act**

[GUC] Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jim Carrey and how are you this evening? All-righty then. I grew up in Canada. Is there anybody here from Canada? You know, I used to get really upset when I told people where I came from, down in Los Angeles, because I always got the same response: 'Canada? Wow. Must have been cold?' Now I just go along with them: 'Yes, Canada. It was a frozen hostile wasteland. And there was much work to be done, if we were to survive the elements. After boring a whole through the ice, to find food, my good friend Nantuk and I, would build an igloo, to protect ourselves, from polar bears and flying hockey pucks. Then we would drink a lot of beer and when Nantuk was ready he would tell me the story of the Great Moose who said to the little squirrel: 'Hey Rocky, watch me pull a rabbit out of my hat'.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] Maybe one day when I'm finished singing the gospel, I'll go even further and become...a real holy man. And I'm not talking about the holy man you see on TV. Those TV evangelists. They aren't holy men, they're just ambitious. I saw one guy that was so ambitious that he actually became jealous of the Lord. You could tell, it came out half way through his sermon. 'When I was a child-uh! I wanted to be the savior of the world-uh! Then they told me that Jesus-uh was the son of God-uh. Then I realized: it's all who you know!' Very petty. Petty people.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] You can't be like that if you want to be a holy man. And you gotta be sure of yourself, when you make a decision you cannot waver in any way, you gotta stick with it. You never see Gandhi during a hunger strike, sneaking into the kitchen in the middle of the night. 'Gandhi ...what are you doin' down here?' 'Ummm...I thought I heard a

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval: 47:10-48:58

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Relentless*. 1991. Interval: 57:34-59:27

<sup>3</sup> Jim Carrey. *The Unnatural Act*. Showtime. 1991. Interval: 1:40-3:31

<sup>4</sup> Jim Carrey. *The Unnatural Act*. Showtime. 1991. Interval: 12:35-13:22

prowler! And I was going to hit him in the head with this giant bowl of potato salad.' He would never put himself in that position, ya know?<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] And you gotta control your temper constantly you cannot fly off the handle at any moment you gotta stay right in the center. Jesus was very composed his whole life, right until the end. If that was me, I'd be going "Great! Just beautiful. You guys are gonna get it. Wait 'til my father hears about this!' It'd be a whole different book man.<sup>2</sup>

### **Bill Hicks – One Night Stand**

[GUC] + [PEP] So I don't drink. I don't do drugs. Anymore. I used to take drugs and I quit. But I'll tell you something: I have nothing against drugs whatsoever. That's kinda weird huh? You never heard that one. Used to take drugs, quit, and have nothing against them. Wow. I've never heard that. Let's hear more. Ok. I'll tell you something else. I know this is not a very popular idea. You don't hear it very often anymore, but it's the truth. I have taken drugs before and uh ... I had a real good time. Sorry. Didn't murder anybody. Didn't rob anybody. Didn't rape anybody. Didn't beat anybody. Didn't lose ..hmm... one fucking job. Laughed my ass off, And went about my day. Sorry. Now, where's my commercial? Shit I'll be the guy holding that skillet in that commercial, man. That ain't a brain, that's breakfast! Let's eat! What have we been up, five days now? I'm fucking starving! I find that commercial a tad insulting to my intelligence. You know, the one 'here's your brain'. I've seen a lot of things on drugs but I have never ever, ever looked at an egg and thought it was a fucking brain. Not once. I have seen UFOs split the sky like a sheet but I have never looked at an egg and thought it was a fucking brain. Not once. I have had seven balls of light come off of a UFO lead me onto their ship explain to me telepathically that we are all one and that there's no such thing as death. But ... I've never looked at an egg and thought it was a fucking brain. Now, maybe I wasn't getting good shit.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] That's what I hate about the war on drugs. I'll be honest with you. What I can't stand is all day long we see those commercials 'here's your brain, here's your brain on drugs, just say no, why do you think they call it 'dope'?' And then the next commercial is ... 'This Bud's for you. Come on everybody let's be hypocritical bastards. It's ok to drink your drug. Hahahah. We meant those other drugs, those untaxed drugs. Those are the ones that are bad for ya. Nicotine, alcohol, good drugs. Coincidentally, taxed drugs. Oooh, how does this fucking work? Thank god they're taxing alcohol man, it means we got those good roads we can get fucked up and drive on. Thank god they're taxing this shit man. We'd be doing donuts in a Wheatfield now. Thank god we're on a highway. This is a good drug.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] 'Cause I'll tell you something, I'll be honest man. If I were going to legalize a drug it sure wouldn't have been alcohol. Sorry, there's better drugs and better drugs for you. That's a fact. You may stop your internal dialogue. 'but bill, alcohol is an acceptable form...' Shut the fuck up. You're wrong. K? K. Shit man not only do I think marijuana should be legalized, I think it should be mandatory. I'm a hardliner. Think about it man, you get in traffic behind somebody. Eurrerr, Eurrerr. Shut up and smoke that. It's the law. Puff puff. Oh sorry, I was taking life seriously. Oh man, who's hungry?' That would be a nice world wouldn't it? Quiet, mellow, hungry, high people everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Carrey. *The Unnatural Act*. Showtime. 1991. Interval: 13:23-14:01

<sup>2</sup> Jim Carrey. *The Unnatural Act*. Showtime. 1991. Interval: 14:04- 14:43

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 7:40-09:50.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 09:53-10:57

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 10:59-12:15

[GUC] Pot is a better drug than alcohol. Fact. Fact. Stop your internal dialogue. 'But Bill alcohol is a ....' Shut up. You're wrong get over it. K? K. I'll prove it to you man. You're at a ball game or a concert and someone is really violent and aggressive and obnoxious. Are they drunk or are they smoking pot? Which is it? They're drunk. I've never seen people on pot getting in a fight because it's fucking impossible. 'Hey buddy!' 'Hey what?' 'Hey.' 'Hey.' End of argument.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] We need a new enemy. 'Cause uhm we're so miserable in our own lives. We gotta keep pointing fingers. Blaming. 'Drugs, yeah, drugs are the enemy. What were we thinking?' People forget about drugs man, people forget, they think drugs don't do anything good for us. How many people here believe drugs don't do anything good for us? Someone must. Chicken shits. Yeah, I know, 'cause now they got a beer. 'I don't, gulp.' If you believe drugs don't do anything good for us, do me this favor will ya: go home tonight, take all your albums, and tapes, k?, and burn em. 'cause you know what? The musicians who made all that great music ... real fucking high on drugs. Shit the Beatles were so high they let Ringo sing a couple of tunes. Tell me they weren't partying. 'We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow...' We all live in ... you know how fucking high they were when they wrote that song? (...)They were real high. Great music, they were high. Drugs had a positive effect. Shall I walk you through it again?<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] Gotta have an enemy though, because we're so miserable, we gotta keep blaming someone right? Let's blame some more stuff. Drugs, good. Rock'n'roll. Every few years rock'n'roll becomes the big enemy doesn't it. Like this Judas Priest trial. Did you follow this? You know the story? Two kids, big fans of Judas Priest, listed to this album and then went out and killed themselves. And the parents sued the band Judas Priest. Ok. First of all, two kids big fans of Judas Priest commit suicide. Wow. Two less gas station attendants in the world. I don't want to sound cold or anything but uhm we didn't lose a cancer cure here. And hey most stations are self-service now anyway. We saved them a long troublesome job search. But, they tried to prove there were subliminal messages on this album telling you to kill yourself. Now, I may be naïve but uhm, what performer wants his audience dead? I'm having trouble with the hole fucking theory. What are these guys in the band doing? 'I'm fucking sick of it, I am fucking sick of it. I'm sick of the touring, I'm sick of making 400 thousand dollars a fucking night, I'm sick of the free drugs, the free booze, and the groupies blowing me dawn to fucking dusk. I'm in a rut and I want out. We got all those concerts coming up I know it sucks. Unless. Ian, Nigel, come here. I just had a fucking idea man. What if, Ian, let's just say, what if, open your mind real wide now, what if we kill the fucking audience? Could I go back to my day job? I can sell shoes again.' It just doesn't make a lot of sense when you talk it through."<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] But every few years they try to nail Rock'n'Roll. Remember this shit? If you play certain rock albums backwards, there are satanic messages? Let me tell you something: if you're sitting around in your house playing your albums backwards ... you are Satan. You needn't look any further. And don't go ruining my stereo to prove a fucking point either.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] Because, listen I got an idea. It's time to make a bold admission alright. 'cause in the last 10 years we've seen the rise of conservatives and fundamentalists and other forms of .... Fascists ok... who tell us what to believe and what to think. I got a bold admission if you're one of those people, you ready for it? They say Rock'n'Roll is the d

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 12:49-13:36

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 14:47-16:03.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 16:10-18:37

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 18:38-19:01

evil's music. Well let's say that we know for a fact that Rock'n'Roll is the devil's music, and we know that it is, for sure, okay? At least he fucking jams! If there's a choice between eternal hell and good tunes, or eternal heaven and new kids on the fucking block .... I'm gonna be surfing on the lake of fire rockin out! Did you know if you play New Kids On The Block albums backwards ... they sound better? Gives them that edge they're missing. Puts some hair on their balls."<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] But we gotta have an enemy, Rock, drugs, we're so miserable what's the enemy? Got it. Pornography. That's it. Yeah... oohhh.... tremor through the room. The problem with pornography basically is this: no one knows what it is. Other than that, we got a real good grasp on the situation. We know it's bad, we just can't figure out what the fuck it is. Supreme Court says pornography is "any act which has no artistic merit and causes sexual thoughts." That's their definition: no artistic merit, causes sexual thoughts. Hmm... sounds like almost every commercial on TV to me. You know when I see those two twins on that Double Mint commercial? I'm almost embarrassed to tell you this ... I ain't thinking about gum. 'Double your pleasure, Double that fun.' 'Yeah honey, where's the Rigley's? I feel like chewing on something.' Every commercial.<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] But you, know what does that say about us man, "causes sexual thoughts" as a subject of fear? Causes sexual thoughts. Yeah, so? And what? When did sex become a bad thing? Did I miss a meeting? Playboy! Pornography causes sexual thoughts. Penthouse! Pornography causes sexual thoughts. You know what causes sexual thoughts when it's all said and done? Let's cut to the chase 'cause I'm tired of the debate, ok? I'll clear it up for you right fucking now. Here's what causes sexual thoughts: having a dick. End of story. I can speak for every guy here tonight ... and ... ok I will. In the course of our day anything can cause a sexual fucking thought. You can be on a train and it's rocking kind of nice, pants are a little tight, oh my god I got a woody. I got a woody on the L train. What are we gonna do, ban public transportation?<sup>3</sup>

[PG] And I find it ironic that people who are against sexual thoughts are generally these fundamentalist Christians who also believe you should be fruitful and multiply. Pfffft, seems like they would support sexual thoughts you know. Perhaps even a centerfold in the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] + [SPF] It's just a strange world. I don't know what we choose, why we choose the things we do as a collective, have you ever wondered that you know what I mean? The fact that we live in a world where John Legend was murdered, yet Milli Vanilli walks the fucking planet you know. Bad choice. Just from me to you, wasn't a good one. But in that way we always kill the guys who try and help us. Isn't that strange? And we let the little demons ruck amok. Always. John Lennon murdered. John Kennedy murdered. Martin Luther King murdered. Gandhi murdered. Jesus murdered. Regan ... wounded. You know? Bad fucking choice.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] But even though that's the case we live in a world where good men are murdered and little demons run amok I'm sorry I still believe in it. In fact, I had a vision of a way we can have no enemies ever again if you're interested in this. Anybody interested to hear this? It's kind of an interesting theory. All you have to do is make one decisive act and we can rid the world of all our enemies at once. Here's what we do: you know all that money we spend on nuclear weapons and defense every year? Trillions of

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 19:37-20:41

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 20:46-22:06

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 23:10-24:23

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 24:25-24:41

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 25:40-26:20

dollars. Instead, if we spent that money feeding and clothing the poor of the world, which it would pay for many times over not one human being excluded, not one, we could as one race explore outer space together in peace forever.<sup>1</sup>

**1992**

**Bill Hicks – Revelations**

[SPF] Every time I'm here something weird happens. This time Bush lost. Cool. People asked me where I stood politically. You know, it's not that I disagreed with Bush's economic policy or foreign policy, it's that I believe he was the child of Satan sent here to destroy planet Earth. Yeah, I'm a little to the left there, I was leaning that way I think.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] Ya you know who else is gone? Little Quayle boy. Little Damian. Is that guy Damian? Tell me those blank empty eyes aren't gonna glow red in the future. [Impersonating Quayle] "Stop making jokes about me. I'll spell potato any way I fucking want. Writers in LA, let's nuke them. Bush was a pussy. He helped me back." Frightening people man.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] + [PES] Bush tried to buy votes towards the end of the election. Went around, you know, selling weapons to everyone. Getting that military-industrial complex vote happening for him. Sold 160 fighter jets to Korea, then 240 tanks to Kuwait, and then goes around making speeches why he should be commander in chief, because: [Impersonating Bush] "We still live in a dangerous world." Thanks to you, you fucker. What are you doing? Last week Kuwaitis had nothing but rocks. Quit arming the fucking world man."<sup>4</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] You know we armed Iraq. I wondered about that too, you know, during the Persian Gulf war, those intelligence reports would come out: [Impersonating army official] "Iraq, incredible weapons. Incredible weapons." How do you know that? "Huh, well .... We looked at the receipt. But as soon as that check clears we're going in. What time's the bank opening? Eight? We're going in at nine. We're going in for God and Country and Democracy and here's a fetus and he's a Hitler. Whatever you fucking need. Let's go! Get motivated behind this, let's go!"<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] You know what's funny about this, every one of your papers says that you guys [U.K.] sold Iraq "machine tools." Which Iraq then converted ... into military equipment. I have news for you folks: a cannon is a machine tool. Your Orwellian language notwithstanding, it's a fucking machine, it's a tool.<sup>6</sup>

[PEP] Our papers in the States have the same thing. We sold Iraq ... "farming equipment." Which Iraq then converted ... How did they do this? Simsalabim, Simsalabim, Ohh, Simsalabim, Sim Sim Salabim, wow! It was a chicken coup, it's now a nuclear reactor. This war is for Alladin. Farming equipment, which they converted into military equipment. Ok, you got me. I'm curious. Exactly what kind of farming equipment is this? Oh, ok. It was stuff for the farmers of Iraq. Yeah. What? Oh, yeah, one of the things we gave them for the farmer, was a new thing we came up with, called the Flame-throwing rake. No. It was for the farmer. See, he'd rake the leaves and then turn around and ... But do you know what the Iraqis did with that? There are no trees in Iraq

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *One Night Stand*. HBO. Chicago. 1991. Interval: 26:24-27:07

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 06:12-07:33.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 06:12-07:33.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 07:35-08:14

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 08:15-09:10

<sup>6</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 09:32-12:28

what are you sending them rakes for you asshole. We could have done our research better perhaps yes. What else did you sell them? Ok. Uh. One of the other things we gave them, there's a new thing, for the farmer, the Armored Tractor. No. Farmers when they farm look over their shoulders at times they won't see a tree and hit it maybe and there'd be a wasp nest in the tree and the wasp would come in and sting them. So we put 4 inches of armor all over the tractor and a turret [gun] to shoot pesticide on the wasp. But do you know what the Iraqis did with that? You can't trust 'em.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] I'm so sick of arming the world and then sending troops over to destroy the fucking arms. You know what I mean? We keep arming these little countries then we go and blow the shit out of them. We're like the bullies of the world you know. We're like Jack Palance in the movie *Shane*. Throwing the pistol at the shepherd's feet. 'Pick it up.' 'I don't want to pick it up mister, you'll shoot me.' 'Pick up the gun.' 'Mister, I don't want no trouble. I just came downtown to pick up some hard rock candy for my kids. Some gingham for my wife. I don't even know what gingham is but she goes through ten rolls a week of that stuff. I ain't looking for no trouble mister.' 'Pick up the gun.' Bang Bang Bang. 'You all saw him. He had a gun'.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] Kennedy. I love talking about the Kennedy assassination, because to me it's a great example of a totalitarian government's ability to manage information and thus keep us in the dark any way they deem .... Oh, sorry, wrong meeting. Aw, shit. That's the meeting we're having tomorrow at the docks.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] I love talking about Kennedy. I was just down in Dallas Texas, you know you can go down there at the Dealey Plaza where Kennedy was assassinated and you can actually go to the sixth floor of the schoolbook depository. It's a museum called "The Assassination Museum." I think they named that after the assassination, I can't be too sure with the chronology here, but, anyway they have the windows set up to look exactly like it did on that day and it's really accurate you know. 'Cause Oswald is not in it. Yeah. Painstaking accuracy. It's true; it's called the Sniper's Nest. It's glassed-in; it's got the boxes sitting there. You can't actually get to the window itself. And the reason they did that of course they didn't want thousands of Americans tourists getting there each year going: "no fucking way. I can't even see the road. Shit they're lying to us. Fuck. Where are they? There's no fucking way. Not unless Oswald was hanging by his toes upside down from the ledge. Either that or some pigeons grabbed on to him, flew him over the motorcade, surely someone would have seen that. You know there was rumors of anti-Castro pigeons seen drinking in bars. Someone overheard them saying "Cuu, Cuu, Coup, Coup."<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] Unbelievable. And you know what's wild, people's attitudes in the States about it. Talking about Kennedy people come up to me "Bill, quit talking about Kennedy man. Let it go. It was a long time ago. Just forget about it." I'm like "Alright. Then don't bring up Jesus to me." As long as we're talking shelf-life here. "Bill, you know Jesus died for you.." Yeah, it was a long time ago, forget about it. How about this: get Pilate to release the fucking files. Quit washing your hands Pilate and release the goddam files. Who else was on that grassy Golgotha that day? "Bill, it was just... taking over of democracy by totalitarian government, let it go."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 09:32-12:28

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 12:30-13:57

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 14:00-16:16.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 14:00-16:16.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 16:22-17:23.

[SPF] + [PG] That's another good thing about Bush being gone. Because for the last twelve years of Reagan and Bush, we have had fundamentalist Christians in the White House. Fundamentalist Christians who believe the Bible is the exact word of God, including that wacky fire and brimstone Revelations ending, have had their finger on the fucking button for twelve years. 'Tell me when Lord. Tell me when. Let me be your servant Lord'.<sup>1</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] Fundamentalist Christianity. Fascinating. These people actually believe the world is twelve thousand years old. I swear to God. Based on what I ask them. [Impersonating Fundamentalist Christians] "Well, we looked at all the people in the Bible and we added them up all the way back to Adam and Eve, their ages, twelve thousand years." Well, how fucking scientific! Okay! I didn't know that you got into so much trouble there, that's good. You believe the world is twelve thousand years old? "That's right." Okay, I got one word to ask you, a one-word question, ready? Dinosaur. You know, if the world is 12 thousand years old, and dinosaurs existed, and they existed in that time, you think it would have been mentioned in the fucking Bible at some point. "And as Jesus and the Disciples walked to Nazareth but the trail was blocked by a giant brontosaurus with a splinter in his paw. And oh did the disciples run and shriek: "What a big fucking lizard Lord." But Jesus was unafraid and he took the splinter from the brontosaurus' paw and the big lizard became his friend. And Jesus sent him to Scotland where he lived in a loch for oh so many years, inviting thousands of American tourists to bring their fat fucking families and their fat dollar bills and Oh Scotland did praise the Lord. Thank you Lord, thank you Lord, thank you Lord. <sup>2</sup>

[GUC] But get this. I actually asked one of these guys, okay, dinosaur fossils, how does that fit into your scheme of life? Let me sit down and strap in. He says: "Dinosaur fossils? God put those here to test our faith." Thank God I'm strapped in right now here man. I think God put you here to test my faith dude. You believe that? "Uh-huh." Does that trouble anyone? The idea that God might be fucking with our heads? I have trouble sleeping with that knowledge. Some prankster God running around. [Impersonating God shoveling dirt and placing bones in the ground] "Hahaha, we will see who believes in me now. I am God. I am a prankster. I am killing me. Hahahaha" You know, you die and go to St. Peter. "Did you believe in Dinosaurs?" "Well, yeah, there were fossils everywhere." [Impersonates getting dropped to Hell] Aaaaahhh. 'You fucking idiot. Flying lizards? You're a moron. God was fucking with you.' 'It seemed so plausible, aaaahhhh'. 'Enjoy the lake of fire fucker'.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] Did you ever notice how people who believe in Creationism look really un-evolved? Did you ever notice that? Eyes real close together, eyebrow ridges, big furry hands and feet. "I believe God created me in one day." Looks like he rushed it. They believe the Bible is the exact word of God. Then, they change the Bible. Pretty presumptuous. "I think what God meant to say..." I've never been that confident. They actually have a Bible out, it's called the New Living Bible. It's a Bible updated in modern English. I guess to make it more palatable for people who read but it's really weird when you listen to it. "And Jesus walked on water. And Peter said: "Awesome". Suddenly we got Jesus hanging tanned across the sea of Galilee, Christ Bogus Adventure you know. Deuteronomy 90210 you know.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 17:29-18:00

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 18:04-19:48.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 19:50-21:25

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 21:25-23:48.



[GUC] Such a weird belief. A lot of Christians wears crosses around their necks. You think when Jesus comes back he's gonna want to see a fucking cross man? That's maybe why he hasn't shown up yet. [Impersonating Jesus] "But men are still wearing crosses. Fuck it. I'm not going Dad. No they totally missed the point. When they start wearing fishes I might show up again. Let me bury fossils heads with you dad. Fuck 'em, let's fuck with them. They're fucking with me. Give me that brontosaurus head dad." It's kind of like going up to Jackie Onassis with a rifle pin on. Just thinking of John. We love him. Trying to keep that memory alive baby.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] What happened was Oswald's gun went off causing an echo, to echo through the buildings of Dealey Plaza, and the echo went by the limo on the left, up into the grassy knoll, hitting some leaves causing dust to fly out, which 56 witnesses testified was a gunshot, 'cause immediately, Kennedy's head went over. But the reason his head went over is 'cause the echo went by the motorcade on the left and he went 'what was that?' So there, We have figured it out. Go back to bed America. Your government has figured out how it all transpired. Go back to bed America. Your government is in control again. Here. Here's American Gladiators. Watch this. Shut up. Go back to bed America. Here's American Gladiators. Here is 56 channels of it. Watch these pituary retards bang their fucking skulls together and congratulate you on living in the land of freedom. Here you go America. You are free, to do as we tell you. You are free, to do as we tell you.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] The news is just apocalyptic. Didn't you think with the Cold War being over things should've gotten better? How many of you all were as stupid as I in believing that? "Wow, it's over, 40 years of threat of nuclear weapons is over. Cool. Cool." Wrong! Now twelve different countries have nuclear weapons. It just got twelve times as bad. Fuck you. Life is harder now. Work more. Oops. Jobs are scarce. Fuck you. Hahaha.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] By the way, By the way, if anyone here is in advertising or marketing... kill yourself. Thank you. Just a little thought. I'm just trying to plant seeds. Maybe one day, they'll take root. I don't know. You try, you do what you can. Kill yourself. Seriously though, if you are, do. Aaah, no really, there's no rationalization for what you do and you are Satan's little helpers, okay? Kill yourself, seriously. You're the ruiner of all things good, seriously. No, no, this is not a joke, you're going, "there's gonna to be a joke coming," there's no fucking joke coming. You are Satan's spawn filling the world with bile and garbage. You are fucked and you are fucking us. Kill yourself. It's the only way to save your fucking soul. Kill yourself. Planting seeds. I know all the marketing people are going, "he's doing a joke..." there's no joke here whatsoever. Suck a tail-pipe, fucking hang yourself, borrow a gun from a Yank friend. I don't care how you do it. Rid the world of your evil fucking machinations. Machi... whatever, you know what I mean.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] I know what all the marketing people are thinking right now too, "Oh, you know what Bill's doing, he's going for that anti-marketing dollar. That's a good market, he's very smart." Oh man, I am not doing that, you fucking evil scumbags. "Ooh, you know what Bill's doing now, he's going for the righteous indignation dollar. That's a big dollar. A lot of people are feeling that indignation. We've done research. Huge market. He's doing a good thing." Goddammit, I'm not doing that, you scumbags. Quit putting a goddamm dollar sign on every fucking thing on this planet! "Ooh, the anger dollar. Huge. Huge in times of recession. Giant market. Bill's very bright to do that." God, I'm just caught in a fucking web. "Ooh, the trapped dollar, big dollar, huge dollar. Good market.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 21:25-23:48.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 25:25-26:00.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 31:50-32:13.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 32:18-34:35.

Look at our research. We see that many people feel trapped. If we play to that and then separate them into the trapped dollar..." God, how do you live like that? I bet you sleep like fucking babies at night, don't you? "What did ya do tonight honey?" "Oh, we made ah, we made ah, arsenic ah, childhood food now, goodnight."<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] Pot. Right. They lie about marijuana. They tell you pot smoking makes you unmotivated. Lie! When you're high you can do everything you normally do just as well, you just realize it's not worth the fucking effort. There is a difference. [Impersonating taking a drag] Puff puff. Sure I can wake up at dawn. Puff Puff. Go to a job I hate that does not inspire me creatively whatsoever. Puff Puff. For the rest of my life. Puff Puff. Or I can wake up at noon. Puff. And learn how to play the sitar."<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PG] Why is marijuana against the law? It grows naturally upon our planet. Doesn't the idea of making nature against the law seem to you a bit paranoid? You know what I mean? It's nature. How do you make nature against the fucking law? Grows everywhere, serves a thousand different functions, all of them positive. To make marijuana against the law is like saying God made a mistake. You know what I mean? It's like God on the seventh day look down at his creation: "There it is. My creation. Perfect and holy in all ways. Now I can rest.... Oh my Me. I left fucking pot everywhere. I should never have smoked that joint on the third day. That was the day I created possums. Haha. Still gives me a chuckle. If I leave pot everywhere that's gonna give humans the impression they're supposed to use it ... Now I have to create Republicans." And God wept.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] There is a point. Is there a point to all this? Let's find a point. Is there a point to my act? I'd say there is. I have to. The world is like a ride at an amusement park, and when you choose to go on it, you think it's real, cause that's how powerful our minds are. And the ride goes up and down and round and round; it has thrills and chills and it's very brightly colored and it's very loud and it's fun... for a while. Some people have been on the ride for a long time, and they begin to question: "Is this real, or is this just a ride?" And other people have remembered, and they come back to us, and they say, "Hey - don't worry, don't be afraid - EVER - because... this is just a ride." And we... KILL those people. "Shut him up! We have a lot invested in this ride - SHUT HIM UP! Look at my furrows of worry! Look at my big bank account, and my family! This just HAS to be real!" It's just a ride. And we always kill those good guys who try and tell us that, you ever notice that? And let the demons run amok. But it doesn't matter because... it's just a ride. And we can change it anytime we want. It's only a choice. No effort, no work, no job, no savings of money. A choice, right now, between fear and love. The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your door, buy guns, close yourself off. The eyes of love, instead, see all of us as one. Here's what we can do to change the world, right now, to a better ride: take all that money that we spend on weapons and defense each year, and instead spend it feeding and clothing and educating the poor of the world, which it would, many times over; not one human being excluded. And we could explore space, together, both inner and outer, forever, in peace.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 32:18-34:35.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 48:00 - 48:50.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 54:10 - 55:40.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Revelations*. 1992. Interval: 1:10:50 - 1:12:15.

## George Carlin – Jammin in New York

[GUC] Well, a lot of things have happened since the last time I saw you. I just want to talk a little bit about that War in the Persian Gulf. Big doings in the Persian Gulf. You know my favorite part of that war? It's the first war we ever had that was on every channel plus cable. And the war got good ratings too, didn't. Got good ratings. Well, we like war! We like war. We're a warlike people. We like war because we're good at it. And you know why we're good at it? Because we get a lot of practice. This country's only 200 years old and already we've had 10 major wars. We average a major war in this country every twenty years. So we're good at it! And it's a good thing we are, we're not very good at anything else anymore. Can't build a decent car. Can't make a TV set or a VCR worth a fuck. Got no steel industry left. Can't get healthcare for our old people. Can't educate our young people. But we can bomb the shit out of your country alright. We can bomb the shit out of your country alright. Especially if your country is full of brown people. Oh we like that don't we. That's our hobby.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] That's our new job in the world. Bombing brown people. Iraq, Panama, Grenada, Libya, you got some brown people in your country tell them to watch the fuck out! Or we'll god damn bomb them. Well, when's the last white people that you can remember that we bombed? Can you remember the last white people, any white people that we ever bombed? The Germans. The Germans are the only ones. And the only reason for that, they were trying to cut-in on our action. They wanted to dominate the world. Bullshit. That's our fucking job. That's our fucking job. Now we just bomb brown people, not because they're trying to cut in on our action, just because they're brown.<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] Now you might be noticing that I don't feel about that war the way we're being told we were supposed to feel about that war. The way we were ordered and instructed by the United States Government to feel about that war. See, my mind doesn't work that way. I got this real moron thing I do it's called thinking. And I'm not a really good American because I like to form my own opinion. I don't just roll over when I'm told to. It's sad to say but most Americans just roll over on command. Not me. Not me.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] I have several rules I live by. First rule, I don't believe anything the Government tells me. Nothing. Zero. And I don't take very seriously the media or the press in this country who in the case of the Persian Gulf War were nothing more than unpaid employees of the Department of Defense. And who most of the time function as a kind of unofficial public relations agency for the United States Government. So I don't listen to them, I don't really believe in my country. And I gotta tell you folks, I don't get all chocked up about yellow ribbons and American flags. I consider them to be symbols and I leave symbols to the symbol-minded.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] To me war is nothing but a whole lot of prick-waving. War is just a lot of men standing around in a field waving their pricks at one another. Simple thing. That's all it is. Men are insecure about the size of their dicks and so they have to go to war over it. That what all that asshole jock bullshit is all about. That's what all that adolescent macho-male posturing and strutting in bars and locker rooms is all about. It's called dick-fear. Men are terrified that their pricks are inadequate and so they have to compete to feel better and because war is the ultimate competition basically men are killing one another in order to improve their self-esteem. You don't have to be a history major or political scientist to see the bigger-dick foreign policy theory. It sounds like this: What?

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:32-2:32.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:32-2:32.

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 2:35-3:58.

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 2:35-3:58.

They have bigger dicks? Bomb them. And of course the bombs and the rockets and the bullets are all shaped like dicks. It's a subconscious need to project the penis into other people's affairs. It's called fucking with people.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] So, as far as I'm concerned, that whole thing in the Persian gulf, nothing more than a big prick-waving dick fight. In this particular case, Saddam Hussein had to challenge and question the size of George Bush's dick.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] And George Bush has been called a wimp for so long – wimp rhymes with limp – George has been called a wimp for so long he has to act out his manhood fantasies by sending other people's children to die. Even the name Bush, even the name Bush, is related to the genitals without being genitals. Bush is sort of a passive, secondary sex characteristic. If this man's name had been George Boner, well he might have felt a little better about himself and we wouldn't have had any trouble over there in the first place.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] This whole country has a manhood problem, big manhood problem in the USA, you can tell from the language we use. Language always gives you away. What did we do wrong in Vietnam? We pulled out. Not a very manly thing to do is it? When you're fucking people you gotta stay in there and fuck them good, fuck them all the way, fuck 'em till the end, fuck 'em to death, fuck 'em to death, stay in there and keep fucking them until they're all dead.<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] We left a few women and children alive in Vietnam and we haven't felt good about ourselves since. That's why George Bush had to say in the Persian Gulf "This will not be another Vietnam." He actually used these words. "This time we're going all the way." Imagine an American President using the sexual slang of a thirteen year old to describe his foreign policy.<sup>5</sup>

[SPF] If you want to know what happened in the Persian Gulf just remember the names of the two men who were running that war: Dick Cheney and Colin Powell. Somebody got fucked in the ass.<sup>6</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] Now to balance the scale I'd like to talk about some things that bring us together. Things that point out our similarities instead of our differences. Because that's all you ever hear about in this country are differences. That's all the media and the politicians are ever talking about, the things that separate us, things that make us different from one another. That's the way the ruling class operates in any society they try to divide the rest of the people. They keep the lower and the middle classes fighting with each other so that they the rich can run off with all the fucking money.<sup>7</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] Fairly simple thing happens to work. You know, anything different that's what they're going to talk about: race, religion, ethnic and national background, jobs, income, education, social status, sexuality, anything you can do to keep us fighting with each other so they can keep going to the bank. You know how I describe the economic and social classes in this country? The upper class keeps all of the money, pays none of the taxes; the middle class pays all of the taxes does all of the work; the poor are there ... just to scare the shit out of the middle class. Keep 'em showing up at those jobs.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 4:00-5:16.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 5:26-6:19.

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 5:26-6:19.

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 6:20-7:30.

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 6:20-7:30.

<sup>6</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 6:20-7:30.

<sup>7</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:11-7:51.

<sup>8</sup> George Carlin. *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:11-7:51.

[GUC] Bulimia, there's another All-American disease. This has got to be the only country in the world that could ever have come up with bulimia. Gotta be the only country where some people are digging in the dumpster for a peach pit, other people eat a nice meal and puke it up intentionally.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] We've got something in this country, you've heard of it, it's called NIMBY. Not in my backyard. People don't want anything, any kind of social help located anywhere near 'em. You try to open up a halfway house, try to open up a drug rehab or an alcohol rehab center, try to do a homeless shelter somewhere, try to open up a little home for some retarded people who want to work their way into the community. People say: Not in my backyard! People don't want anything near them. Especially if it might help somebody else. It's part of that great American spirit of generosity we hear about. Great generous American spirit. You can ask an Indian about that. Ask an Indian, if you can find one. You gotta locate an Indian first, we've made them just a little difficult to find. Or if you need current data select a black family at random, ask them how generous America has been to them. People don't want anything near them. Even if it's something they believe them.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] People don't want anything near them. Except military bases. They don't mind that do they? They like that. Give them an army base, give them a Navy base, makes them happy. Why? Jobs, Jobs, Self-interest. Even if the base is loaded with nuclear weapons they don't give a fuck. They say: "Well, I'll take a little radiation if I can get a job." Working people have been fucked over so long in this country, those are the kinds of decisions they're left to make.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] I've got just the place for low-cost housing. I have solved this problem. I know where we can build housing for the homeless: golf courses. Perfect! Golf courses. Just what we need. Just what we need. Plenty of good land, in nice neighborhoods, land that is currently being wasted on a meaningless mindless activity engaged in, engaged in primarily by white well-to-do male businessmen who use the game to get together to make deals to carve this country up a little finer among themselves. I am getting tired, really getting tired, of these golfing cocksuckers, in their green pants, in their yellow pants, and their orange pants and their precious little hats and their cute little golf carts. It is time to reclaim the golf courses from the wealthy and turn them over to the homeless. Golf is an arrogant elitist game and it takes up entirely too much room in this country. Too much room in this country.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] Think of how big a golf course is: the ball is that fucking big. What do these pin headed pricks need with all that land? There are over 17,000 golf courses in America. They average over 150 acres apiece. That's three million plus acres, 4820 square miles. You could build two Rhode Islands and a Delaware for the homeless on the land currently being wasted on this meaningless mindless arrogant elitist racist. There's another thing: the only blacks you'll find at country clubs are carrying trays. And a boring game, boring game for boring people. Did you ever watch golf on television? It's like watching flies fuck. And a mindless game. Mindless. Think of the intellect it must take to draw pleasure from this activity. Hitting a ball with a crooked stick and then walking after it. And then, hitting it again. I say 'pick it up asshole. You're lucky you found the fucking thing. Put it in your pocket and go the fuck home, you're a winner. You're a winner. You found it'. No. It'll never happen. No. No chance of that happening.

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. "Anorexia and Bulimia," in *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:10-1:25.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. "Not in my backyard," in *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:09-1:03.

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. "Not in my backyard," in *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 1:52-2:15

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. "Golf courses for the homeless," in *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 2:15-3:24.

Dorko in the plaid knickers is gonna hit it again and walk some more. Let these rich cocksuckers play miniature golf. Let them fuck with a windmill for an hour and a half or so. See if there's really any skill among these people. Now I know there are some people who play golf who don't consider themselves rich. Fuck 'em. And shame on them, for engaging in an arrogant elitist past-time.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PG] We're so self-important. So self-important. Everybody's gonna save something now. Save the trees, save the bees, save the whales, save those snails. And the greatest arrogance of all: Save the planet. What? Are these fucking people kidding me? Save the planet? We don't even know how to take care of ourselves yet, we haven't learned how to care for one another, we're going to save the fucking planet? I'm getting tired of that shit. Tired of that shit. Tired.<sup>2</sup>

[PG] I'm tired of fucking earth day. I'm tired of these self-righteous environmentalists. These white bourgeois liberals who think the only thing wrong with this country is there aren't enough bicycle paths. People trying to make the world safe for their Volvo's. Besides, environmentalists don't give a shit about the planet, they don't care about the planet. Not in the abstract they don't, not in the abstract they don't. You know what they're interested in? A clean place to live. Their own habitat. They're worried that some day in the future they might be personally inconvenienced. Narrow, unenlightened self-interest doesn't impress me.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] Besides, there is nothing wrong with the planet. Nothing wrong with the planet. The planet is fine. The people are fucked. Difference. Difference. The planet is fine. Compared to the people, the planet is doing great. Been here 4 and a half billion years. Did you ever think about the arithmetic? The planet has been here 4 and a half billion years, we've been here what a hundred thousand? Maybe two hundred thousand. And we've only been engaged in heavy industry for a little over two hundred years. Two hundred years versus four and a half billion. And we have the conceit to think that somehow we're a threat, that somehow we're gonna put in jeopardy this beautiful little blue-green ball that's just floating around the sun.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] The planet has been through a lot worse than us. Been through all kinds of things worse than us. Been through earthquakes, volcanoes, plate tectonics, continental drift, solar flares, sunspots, magnetic storms, magnetic reversal of the poles, hundreds of thousands of years of bombardment by comets and asteroids and meteors, worldwide floods and tidal waves, worldwide fires, erosion, cosmic rays, recurring Ice Ages, and we think some plastic bags and some aluminum cans are going to make a difference? The planet isn't going anywhere. We are. We're going away. Pack your shit folks. We're going away. And we won't leave much of a trace either, thank God for that. Maybe a little Styrofoam, maybe. Little Styrofoam. Planet will be here, we'll be long gone. Just another failed mutation. Just another closed-end biological mistake. An evolutionary cul-de-sac. The planet will shake us off like a bad case of fleas, a surface nuisance.<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] You wanna know how the planet is doing? Ask those people at Pompeii. Frozen into position from volcanic ash. How the planet's doing. Wanna know if the planet is alright, ask those people in Mexico City or Armenia or a hundred other places buried under thousands of tons of earthquake rubble if they feel like a threat to the planet this

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. "Golf courses for the homeless," in *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 0:10-1:51.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. "The Planet is fine," *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 1:17-7:37.

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. "The Planet is fine," *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 1:17-7:37.

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. "The Planet is fine," *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 1:17-7:37.

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. "The Planet is fine," *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 1:17-7:37.

week. How about those people in Kilauea Hawaii who built their homes right next to an active volcano and then wonder why they have lava in the living room. The planet will be here for a long, long, long time after we're gone, and it will heal itself and it will cleanse itself, because that's what it does. It's a self-correcting system. The air and the water will recover, the earth will be renewed, and if it's true that plastic is not degradable well the planet will simply incorporate plastic into a new paradigm: the earth plus plastic.<sup>1</sup>

### **Eddie Griffin – One Night Stand**

[PEP] Then I get into this mofucka, I'm watching on TV some white boy stole the car ran down the freeway and the police shot his ass. You ever see this shit? I knew the motherfucker was white when I watched it 'cause they didn't show no picture. 'cause when a nigga fuck up the picture come up all day, every day. Five o'clock news: the nigger that fucked up. Six o'clock the nigga that fucked up. Ten o'clock the nigga get fucked up. CNN twenty-four hours a day, the nigga that fucked up.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] And black people we don't do no shit like that. Police get behind us in a car we jump the fuck out 'I ain't got shit on me. Y'all calm the fuck down. I've seen the Rodney King video. And this little crazy white boy on the road 'come on fuckers, come on fuckers, come on fuckers. I'm fucking out of gas. Fucking ran out of gas man. I'm gonna have to shoot my way out of here dude. Police walk over 'booyea, booyea, let's go get some donuts.' Alright I'm checking out the Rodney King trial on television I know y'all seen it. Come on every night turn into a TV series. 'Now watch the Rodney King beating tonight seven thirty, eight thirty, nine thirty, whooping his ass just for you. They fucked that brother up. And now that it's ready to go to trial the police keep coming on TV 'we're not guilty.' Stevie Wonder can see these motherfuckers are guilty.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] 91 was a trip. You had Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill: black-on-black crime at the highest level. And I think both of them was telling the truth 'cause Clarence had pinched so many asses he just forgot about that one. You know Clarence pinch that ass. He married to a white woman. No ass at all. He showed up at the job seen that big fat black juicy ass, Payea! Welcome to the job baby.'<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] I was watching some funerals on television last night 'cause I got cable. It's like two thousand stations but only four of them show shit right. I'm watching this white funeral, I had never seen one of y'all funerals before. 'cause y'all never invited me. I will come if you ask. Y'all look awfully happy at y'all funerals. White women walked up to the casket with a rose. I figured out why y'all happy y'all got shit coming. Y'all waiting on that will to be ready. 'What the fuck did he leave me?' Black people we don't get happy because we know they ain't left us shit. If they left anything it's the motherfucking bill.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] I want to take this time out to thank the Caucasian people for inviting us here to America. I think that was real nice of y'all. Sent boats over to get us, gave us jobs when we got here, by God you're some nice motherfuckers. Y'all little too motherfucking nice. Even changed our motherfucking names. That's some bullshit. Change somebody's name. you got a brother six foot nine three hundred eighty three pounds, blacker than anything in this room, name Shocker. Some redneck 'your name's going to be Rodney

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. "The Planet is fine," *Jammin in New York*. 1992. Interval: 1:17-7:37.

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Griffin. *One Night Stand*. 1992. Interval: 2:25-9:51

<sup>3</sup> Eddie Griffin. *One Night Stand*. 1992. Interval: 2:25-9:51

<sup>4</sup> Eddie Griffin. *One Night Stand*. 1992. Interval: 2:25-9:51

<sup>5</sup> Eddie Griffin. *One Night Stand*. 1992. Interval: 2:25-9:51

boy.' 'No. my name's shocker!' 'Say your name's gonna be Rodney goddamn it!' 'No. my name's Shocker proud African black man motherfucker.' Whut-tiesch! 'Shit! Call me Steve. Call me Bob.'<sup>1</sup>

[PES] What's in a motherfucking name? 'Cause pain will make you forget shit. But that's alright Caucasians your time's coming. Look around. We ain't gonna use no whip we just gonna knock y'all the fuck out. 'Bow! What's your name?' 'Shocker, Shocker's a good name. call me Shambuku, Now get out there and pick that motherfucking cotton. Can I have some suntan lotion I'm gonna peel!'<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] I wanna tell you Caucasian people something here: listen up rednecks, I had a vision. God is my witness: the niggers are taking over. They're taking over. Every time I turn on my TV set there's Bill Nigger Cosby, Arsenio Nigger Hall, Michael Nigger Jackson, Bobby Nigger Brown, MC Nigger Hammer. Be on the lookout. They got a covert action people. Listen up. I keep their game. I know all their slang talkage. Hip-hop chilling, that means 'Kill Whitey.' I ain't bullshitting boy they got a covert action. It's called 'Instant Niggers'. They take a drop of nigger blood put it in your coffee, one sip and your hair sucks up to your head, your lips get big, your nose opens wide, and you catch a beat every now and then.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] George is fucking this country up man. That's 'cause this country was built on drugs. It's built on drugs 'cause you can only fuck something up by what you made it with. 'Cause when the pilgrims came over on the Mayflower, what flower grows in May? Marijuana. They had a boatload full of shit. That's why they ran in the Plymouth Rock. Like that was a destination.<sup>4</sup>

## 1993

### Sam Kinison – Live From Hell

[PES] I hate Russians. They're scum. They want to be us but they'll never be us. They're jealous of us. They hate us. Because we are living their fucking dream. We're living the whole world's dream. We run this fucking planet now. We do. America owns the world. We have the food. That's right, we have the food. That's right. We have the weapons. We have the army. You gotta be nice to us, because first of all, you'll go hungry, and then we'll kick your fucking ass. So it's not a good idea to piss us off. That's why Russia is kissing our ass. They know.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] They're fucked [Russia]. Be we helped them out. We said, 'what, you guys are hungry? Why didn't you say so?' We gave them one McDonald's. I love our sense of humour. (...) We also crack the World up. The world laughs at us. America, they're crazy bastards aren't they? We gave you McDonald's, shut the fuck up. You have your own McDonald's now. Ya, like they can afford it. They're paying two-hundred bucks for a loaf of bread over there. We gave them McDonald's like a BigMac is six grand in rubles by now. Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Griffin. One Night Stand. 1992. Interval: 15:49-17:10

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Griffin. One Night Stand. 1992. Interval: 15:49-17:10

<sup>3</sup> Eddie Griffin. One Night Stand. 1992. Interval: 17:13-20:13

<sup>4</sup> Eddie Griffin. One Night Stand. 1992. Interval: 20:20-22:54.

<sup>5</sup> Sam Kinison. "Why Russia is kissing our ass." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 0:05-0:54.

<sup>6</sup> Sam Kinison. "McDonald's in Russia." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 1:15-2:28.



[PES] I like how McDonald's uses us as guinea pigs. Hey, let's see if they'll eat shit on fucking bread. The McShit sandwich, shit! We'll try that in a few markets down South and see if it works.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] Remember Krushchev? That fucking bastard? I hated his ass, that's what started him. He was the ugliest asshole I'd ever fucking seen in my life. He was fucking scary, he was like a monster. I swear to God. He was. He was scary like a fucking monster. Fucking head, ugly fucking teeth, fat ass, fucking bald, rusty bastard. Came over here with a show off, banging it: "We will bury you. We'll take America without a shot. Communism is the wave of the future." Yeah, blow it out your dead rusty ass. Yeah, Communism is the wave of the future. Here's the wave. Yeah, so long! Nice try. Here's the wave of the future. Thirty years later, yeah, here's the wave. Plus he fucked with my favorite President.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] + [GUC] My favorite President, John F. Kennedy. My personal favorite President. Charming guy, great guy, good president. Fucked Marilyn Monroe. President of the United States and fucked Marylyn Monroe. What do you want? I know some people give him shit about that. Yeah, like you wouldn't have. No, you would've been too busy studying the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, yeah. Yeah, you wouldn't have wanted a piece of Marilyn, not you. No, you're too patriotic. Yeah, fuck you. If you looked at her, you'd have been just like JFK. You'd be there in the Oval Office, Marilyn across the desk, your dick up her ass, looking out watching the monument, going: 'It doesn't get much better than this, does it?' President of the United States, fucking Marilyn Monroe. 'My finger on the fucking button, telling fucking Russians to get their missiles out of Cuba in twelve hours. It doesn't get better than this'. Yeah, but you wouldn't have done it. You wouldn't have went for that. No. You wouldn't want to feel that. Fuck you. You would have done it.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] In 1969 we put a fucking man on the moon. We did it. We said fine let's do it. Did Russia ever go to the moon? No. Twenty years later, have they been to the moon? No. Why? Cause they're little space pussies. They're little space pussies. They're afraid. (...) Space pussies. Yeah, some space-race. Fucking jackasses. There was never a space race. They were full of shit. You really want to impress us, bring back our fucking flag, asshole. We were on the moon. That's right. Show us some moon rocks or kick this. Fucking phony space race. They're losers. I'm telling you folks, they're jealous. They're like Kurds with apartments, I'm not lying. They're not as fucked as the Kurds, but they're close.<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] + [PES] Fucking Kurds. God. There aren't enough idiots on this fucking planet. 'Will you take care of us?' I love that commercial. 'Won't you help the Kurds?' Won't you blow me? Fuck you. I'm not helping the Kurds. And is it me, or do these people look fucking familiar. Is it me or did we just have a war with these assholes? Goddamn. The gall. I hate the gall of these countries, that come back to us, a week after the war, and go, "hey, can you help us out. Our cities are all fucked up, our highways are destroyed. Our economy is shit, the people are wounded, they're out of work." Yeah. It's basically what the fuck we wanted to do to you. That was our goal. That was our military objective. That's why they called it a fucking war, asshole. We didn't have to do that, if you had pulled your troops out of Kuwait, instead of setting those seven hundred oil

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Kinison. "McDonald's Guinea Pigs." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 2:50-3:01.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Kinison. "Krushchev." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 3:08-3:59.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Kinison. "JFK." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 4:00-5:08.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Kinison. "The Space Race" Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 5:53-6:55.

wells on fire. And dumping oil in the ocean and poisoning the fish, so fuck you, eat your poisoned fish, breathe your black air, and kiss my American ass.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] Plus, they [the Kurds] are Iraq, alright. Let's not forget that. They're from Iraq. The dumbest planet on the fucking ... you know. They're stupid. They're idiots. They are. They're fucking idiots. This group of stupid people got together and said: 'Hey, why don't we have a war with the number one military power on the planet?' Yeah, that was a great idea. Yeah, why don't you just throw rocks at us next time, ok? Yeah, you just scared the shit out of us.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] Oh, what a dark hour for our country. Jesus Christ, it wasn't even a war. It was like an impression of a fucking war for us. You don't fuck with us. We have the smart bomb. You do not fuck with the smart bomb. It's the most highly technically advanced radar missile in history and we have it! And then again, the American sense of humour. 'Cause we'll riot in a war, folks, we're very funny. We'll fucking crack up. Those guys would be: 'You know what would be funny? If we put a video camera right on the head of it. Just so the last thing you see is the guy sticking his head out the window: Oh Fuck! That way you've got it on film. You've got it on film. You can only blow the shit out the guy one time. But if it's on tape you can relive that moment over and over again. Come on. You know those generals were getting drunk at night: 'Rewind it Rewind it! I love this part, my favorite part, look at his face. Stop. Freeze frame.' They're having fun with those fucking videos.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] Of course, we had to face their doomsday machine. We had to face their weapon of death: the SCUD missile. That's right. Yeah. If K-Mart was a weapons dealer, they would make the SCUD missile. Yeah, it's kinda like the fucking Smart bomb. It's kinda like the Smart Bomb, but what you do, you fire it out of the trunk of your car, then you go home and turn on CNN to see where it landed. So it's kinda, it's kinda like the fucking Smart Bomb, in a way. Like, if you can't afford a fucking Smart Bomb, you get a SCUD missile.

[PEP] I love that threat too. 'The fourth largest army in the world. The fourth largest army in the world.' Oh, Oh, No. Not number four. How scary are you if you're fucking number four? Not to mention if two of these guys would have had outfits that matched, maybe, maybe I would have been a little more afraid. This was the shittiest dressed fucking army I've ever seen in any war anywhere. Their outfits were shit. Terrible outfits.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] Come on. The war was over in 100 hours. The ground war. The air war of course went on a little longer because we're funny. I guess that we're cracking up in the war, and you know, before we actually have any confrontation, before we send in the troops, what do you say, just to get their attention, we bomb the fuck out of them for 40 days and 40 nights. Like it's Noah's arc, alright. Let's give them that Noah's Arc treatment with about two million tons of TNT.<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] It was funny man. The ground war lasted 100 hours. A hundred fucking hours. I've had fucking parties that went on longer than that folks. I've had parties that went

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Kinison. "Help the Kurds" Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 8:17-9:27.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Kinison. "Kurds and SCUD missiles." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 1:27-4:26.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Kinison. "Kurds and SCUD missiles." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 1:27-4:26.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Kinison. "Kurds and SCUD missiles." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 1:27-4:26.

<sup>5</sup> Sam Kinison. "100 hour war." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 6:04-6:48.

longer than world war three. That's kind of embarrassing. I swear to God, it's embarrassing.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] No, I have my own theory why the war lasted only 100 hours. I think our guys got over there and said: "Hey, what do you say we end this fucking war and go home before Bob Hope comes back with another shitty fucking show of Losers-Has-Been-Celebrities?"<sup>2</sup>

[PES] I really want to talk about this homeless situation. I'm really bummed out by this. Three hundred thousand homeless. It's not bad. It's American. I mean, if you gotta be homeless somewhere, this is the place to be fucking homeless. Fuck the Kurds would beat your ass to be homeless here. The Kurds dream about being homeless in America. "I'm dreaming about being homeless in America. Oh my God it's better than sex. Garbage bins full of food, oh my god." I swear to God, you can go behind restaurants at McDonald's and fast food places and eat better out of the trash bins in our country than in 90% of the rest of the fucking world.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] If you gonna be homeless, be homeless in America. Personally, I think it's kind of embarrassing, because they need a kick in their fucking homeless ass for being homeless in America. If you can't get it together here, where do you expect to go and make a live for yourself? This is it. It's not that hard. Get a job or fuck somebody that has a job. How hard is that?<sup>4</sup>

**1994**

### **Chris Rock – Big Ass Jokes**

[PES] Things are going all right. I cannot complain. Doing my special. Doing a new movie. Got a new TV show. Successful black man. So you know what's next right? White girl. Gotta get me a white girl. I cannot be a successful black man without a white girl. They won't even let you buy a mansion without a white girl. 'Hey, here's a million dollars.' 'Where's your white girl? We have zoning restrictions'.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] That's some amazing shit to me, like Black People in the Olympics representing America, that's like weird. You realize no matter how fucked up this country has been racially, there's always been black people in the Olympics, no matter how far back you go. They had black people in the Olympics in the twenties. In the twenties! Now, a brother was at the back of the bus in the sixties. In the twenties, the brother must have been inside the engine of the bus ... on the conveyer belt chasing a piece of chicken.<sup>6</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] That's the problem with Black people: we want to be down. Everybody else forms their own shit. They get dissed, they form their own shit. Asian people came over here, they got dissed, so they said, fuck you! China Town. Alright? Got their own shit. Italian people came over here they got dissed they went Fuck you! Little Italy. Alright? I don't give a fuck what city you go to you will not find Little Africa anywhere. There is no little Africa. What, the ghetto? The burnt little Africa? Black people we got it bad man. We don't even have food. There's no black food. Soul food is not black food alright? That's some nasty shit they fed to the slaves alright. You think a ham hock

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Kinison. "100 hour war Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 6:50-7:47.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Kinison. "100 hour war Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 6:50-7:47.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Kinison. "Homelessness." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 4:30-5:36.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Kinison. "Homelessness." Live from Hell. Houston, Texas. 1993. Interval: 4:30-5:36.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Rock. *Big Ass Jokes*. HBO stand-up special. Atlanta, Georgia. 1994. Interval: 1:58-2:35.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Rock. *Big Ass Jokes*. HBO stand-up special. Atlanta, Georgia. 1994. Interval: 6:30-7:00.

tasted good the first time the white man gave it to us? We put some seasoning on it and made it work ok. Black people we don't even have salad dressing.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] I do a lot of racial humour. Do a lot of racial humour. You know why? I was bussed to school when I was a kid. Very hard being bussed man. Had to get up every morning, at six o'clock in the morning, to go to school and compete with white kids who didn't have to wake up until eight. And that's not fair. You know, say I got a lower mark on the test, got a teacher going 'Oh Chris can't read.' No. Chris is fucking tired alright? You know what the great thing is? People talk about being bussed to school, I got bussed to school... like you're supposed to get bussed to school to go to a better neighborhood and get a better education and that shit. I got bussed to a school in a poor white neighborhood, a neighborhood worse than the one that I lived in. And everybody scared of black people, everybody scared of Puerto Ricans; yo, ain't nothing scarier than poor white people. Even white people are scared of poor white people. 'Hey, keep them white people away from us.' Yo these mofos lived under their trailer homes alright. They weren't white trash, they were like white toxic waste. A bunch of shaggy from Scooby Doo looking people, that's who I went to school with. And they hated my guts. They hated me, 'cause my family had more money than them. We didn't even have money, but we had more money than them. And right then I learned my lesson: nothing than a white guy with a penny hates more than a nigger with a nickel.<sup>2</sup>

### **Martin Lawrence – You So Crazy**

[PES] I hear the ladies hollerin' for me like I'm fine. Shit. Y'all gonna have me believe I'm fine in this motherfucker. I mean I couldn't get women back in the day. Now I got women fucking me going 'I don't know what it is about you...' It wouldn't happen to be this hundred grand in my motherfukin pocket would it?<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] I gotta talk about this thing called racism. It bothers me. It fucks with me. I cannot believe racism still exists. It fucks me up when some white people don't accept black people in America because you brought us to this mofuck. We was in Africa chillin. Unda-nana-na-Unda-nana-nana. Motherfuckin titty free right, just chillin. White people told us a party on a boat, we got the wrong boat, wound-up in America. They made us wear clothes cover that shit, uh-uh.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] And I know some people out there white people going 'Oh my god is he on this whole racial thing?' But ask yourself, does racism still exist? You motherfucking right it still exists. The Rodney King ass-whooping was a prime example of that shit. And they didn't just whoop Rodney's ass. They whiz-za-za-za-zooped Rodney's ass. And Rodney kept getting up. I ain't understanding that shit. I would have been just like a little bitch chillin 'aaahh what a ass-whoopin!' But see, Rodney kept getting up because that's how black people are. We don't stay down for nobody. You know what I'm saying? (...) But that was the nicest though white people had ever been. You could get over in traffic that night, couldn't ya? 'Excuse me white man, can I get over?' 'Sure, come on, just come on, fucking go ahead buddy.'<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] And then, then at night man I was watching television, they had the nerve to air Driving Miss Daisy, showing you how shitty it used to be. Morgan Freeman talking that shit 'Oh oh, come on now Miss Daisy. I's tryin' to drive you to the door.' Shit, I wish I had

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Big Ass Jokes*. HBO stand-up special. Atlanta, Georgia. 1994. Interval: 7:35-9:00.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Big Ass Jokes*. HBO stand-up special. Atlanta, Georgia. 1994. Interval: 12:18-13:46.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. 1994. Interval: 1:52-2:21.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. 1994. Interval: 2:53-8:51.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. 1994. Interval: 2:53-8:51.

starred in that mofuck yo. Dialog would have been a little different. 'Bitch shut the fuck up. I'm trying to drive your stinking ass to the store. Suck my dick Miss Daisy (...)'<sup>1</sup>  
[PEP] And the media was getting jokes in on us and shit. Wasn't it? Media think they slick. White media had some jokes for our ass. 'Oh my god. Oh. My. God. They just looted another supermarket. I can guarantee you if you come down here all the chicken is gone. All the watermelon and malt liquor is gone. That's all they showed that night was black people coming out of the stores with shit. Black people, black people, coming out of the store with shit. They even showed me one time coming out with some shit. You know because I had to be down with my people. But they ain't said shit about the Mexicans. Nothin. And to tell the truth, come one man, Mexicans got them some shit. I love the Mexican, a la la vista, and Chavez to you. But you got you some shit. And the Mexicans didn't even know what the call was about. They just saw an opportunity to get some free shit. I had some Mexicans roll up on me crying 'Yo my man, this is fucked up. This should never fucking happen. The way they beat Rodney Dangerfield was wrong. He don't get no respect.'<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] We gotta get over this racial hump, it's very important. Black man, black men, stay out of court. 'cause we ain't stand a chance in no goddam court. You know that. Just ask Mike Tyson. Shit, that's Mike. What's the white boy that got over in court? Who's the white boy that got over, the one, no, the white boy who was eating all the ass, that had the ass, motherfucking [Jeffrey] Dahmer, ain't that a bitch? Dahmer, they put this guy on trial. The fuck is the trial about? You found an ass in the refrigerator. Guilty. Man, if that was black people, white people would have brought the electric chair to his house. Just like that Waco Texas shit. Let some black people run up that much money they had to blew that shit up on Martin Luther King's birthday.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] Black man black men stay the fuck out of jail. Got enough of us in there, you know that. Enough. And better not be a black person in here and say they don't know nobody in jail, 'cause that's bullshit. Ray Ray, Earl, Craig, Shorty Tim, you know, lil' Ridge, all them mofuckers in jail, Shanda's lil' brotha, all of them in jail. Chillin. But black people guilty though in jail right, it wasn't all locked up sending pictures home like jail is a nice motherfucking place to be. Always posing too. Time up. Shieeet. If I was in jail my shit wouldn't look like that.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] One thing if I had to like anything about jail, 'cause jail is a fucked up place to be, is that when a brother goes in there and uses his time wisely. You know pick up a book, read, you know, don't give a fuck what it is, ain't read anything all their life, it could be Mary Had a Little Lamb. But they try hard. Me-ri hh-ad a lil leam. Man how many lambs did the bitch have? This shit is frustrated. And it's fucked up though when they read one book and get out and try to educate you on some shit. You ever seen that mofucker you ain't seen in a while and you come up to him you like 'man, where've you been?' He like 'Oh man. These people that had me incarcerated over some things I had done back in the past. But what I found is if I utilize my talent and my mind I can grow as one human being. See, that's where I'm at with mind. I think we, in order to grow, we gotta love the brother man and the other man. I think it's very important to do that. Basically, what I'm trying to say is, you got five dollars on you I can borrow?'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. 1994. Interval: 2:53-8:51.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. 1994. Interval: 2:53-8:51.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. New York City, 1994. Interval: 10:30-15:40.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. New York City, 1994. Interval: 10:30-15:40.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Lawrence. *You So Crazy*. New York City. 1994. Interval: 15:45-.17:01

## **Dennis Miller – They Shoot Don't They**

[SPF] The place looks beautiful, surrounded by all the American icons. Lincoln as we love to remember him, at the helm of the Starship Enterprise. 'Spok! Fazers on emancipate!'<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] Although I miss television. A rapidly changing medium. Most people have now crazy glued down the scan button on the remote control and the average American attention span is that of a ferret on a double espresso. We have an amazing proliferation of television channels now. In the latter part of last year we were introduced to the 24 all cartoon channel. [Audience goes Yooooo Yeah] thank you for taking a stand in life. The 24 hour science fiction channel. Of course, to make room for these on the dial they got rid of the literacy channel, and the what's left of fucking civilization channel. A lot of infomercials out there.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] I went shopping today over here at the Mall of the Living Dead. I got stuck behind an 854 year old woman at the bank machine if I counted the rings correctly.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] Hitler, the big guy, I get the feeling he's running around Hell with an all-access laminate. 'Excuse me pal you can't go Sorry Mr. Hitler I didn't know it was you. Didn't see the very important prick pass. I'm sorry go ahead. Go right into the Mike Todd cavern. Here's some drink and tickets alright?'<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] Speaking of the dark side. Izzy Stradlin kicked out of Guns n Roses. What the fuck do you have to do to get kicked out of Guns n' Roses huh? 'Hey Slash you want to quit shooting heroin into your cock? We're gonna vote on Izzy over here!' He forgot to return one of Axl's casserole dishes from that gang fuck at Savannah's house the other night. Sorry is he turning the paddle? You're just not GNR.<sup>5</sup>

[PG] I'm glad I'm married. It's the right time to be married. The AIDS virus is now thought to be as difficult to isolate as the Republican Party's concern for its victims.<sup>6</sup>

[GUC] I'm back on the road now, playing some rather bleak vistas. (...) ever notice every small town has that one weird bus stop you drive by you look over and there's just such an amazing conglomeration of aberrant humanity that you think to yourself 'wow, where in the fuck does that bus go?' What concentric circle of Dante's Inferno is that Joe Franklin panel heading for? All the people who sit in the first three rows at a Gallagher concert on the off-chance he'll use the Sledge-o-matic that night.<sup>7</sup>

[PG] My flight almost didn't take off. We were picketed by a right-to-life group after our captain had to abort a take-off..... Hey but who amongst us is wise enough to know when flight really begins?<sup>8</sup>

[PES] Well good for you. I heard some people moan though. It's funny to me how reflexively protective we are of the Kennedys. They really are our royalty. It always amazes me. And I'm not sure it's warranted because there's a faction of that family that has a track record like Jimmy Page okay. They might as well go ahead and name their next grandchild Alleged.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 2:35-2:50

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 6:43-7:35

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 10:13-10:20

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 11:41-13:01

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 11:41-13:01

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 16:00-16:14

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 21:00-22:10

<sup>8</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 25:00-25:11

[SPF] And you know something? Teddy ... Teddy Kennedy is the worst of the lot. This guy has that Melvin Dummar credibility. At this point in his life he can't look a fucking Cyclops in the eye and you know we still protect him.

[PES] + [SPF] We're like little serfs down in the field picking truffles for that evenings feast. You look up, Teddy's hanging naked off the drawbridge, sucking altered states solutional paste out of some young wenches Meade cup. 'Oh don't look that's the Kennedys fucking again. Don't look, don't look.' You know something? Maybe you've forgiven him his sexual peccadillos but the fact is I find his alibis as flimsy as a Victoria Secret camisole and I think his recent marriage was just a smokescreen he threw up because he knew he couldn't maintain an election anymore. And you know something? And if he's such a ladies man what does it take him 9 hours to open a woman's car door for her ok? Now, you can moan, but I think I'm on the right side of that one. Although I realize by saying that out loud on national TV I risk becoming the first guy to ever get assassinated by a Kennedy. But you know something? I think he stepped over the line this last time in Florida. As a parent I was offended by the fact that evidently he was trying to get laid in front of his own son. You know if I had ever seen my dad's dick I would have had to blow my fucking head off.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] According to recent census figures whites are now officially a minority in New York City. And you know what? I am getting sick of being hassled by the man. I just do that to piss Spike Lee off if he's watching. Getting a little sick of this guy looking at me like I'm Jimmy Mason in *Mandingo*. 'Yes Spike, I can't jump, you can't lighten up, my man. It's the problem in this country now. That's the problem in this country now. Everybody takes themselves so seriously you can't tease anybody.'<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] I read now gay people don't want to be called gay anymore, they now wish to be referred to as Asian. 'Hey what's Dennis saying there man? Is Dennis saying all Asians are gay?!' Is Dennis saying all gays are Asian? You know what I'm saying. All Asians are gay. Now somewhere out there there's an Asian person taking pen to paper in protest. I want you to hear me out, put the pen down, it was a fucking joke alright? It was a comment on how pathetically neurotic we've all become about our own little piece of turf. I obviously do not believe that all Asians are gay. For Christ's sake, there's a billion of you, I know somebody's fucking out there ok?<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] And yet, and yet, this is what it's come to in latter day America. Everybody's broken off into these petulant little Travis Bickel tribes constantly walking the perimeter of their own damaged self-esteem, ever vigilant against an incursion by they, them, the other guys. Everybody's encouraged to be touchy, everybody that is but me. I'm the white Anglo-Saxon male, I'm everybody's asshole. Black people think I'm physically deficient and oppressive, gay people think I'm latently homosexual and overly macho, women think I'm offish and horny, Asians think I'm lazy and stupid. Hey you think you got an axe to grind I'm fucking Paul Bunyan over here okay folks?<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] And you know something, and you know something, there's a principle of reciprocity here: if I'm expected to be genial I expect that from the rest of you. Why are we so hung-up on the name-calling? When did that happen? We are just overgrown babies. As it turns out adult life is just Tall Grade School. 'You suck!.' 'With your mouth.' 'Hi my mouth.' 'Hi me.' But you know something? Folks, the playground is way back there in the mist and we gotta let it go and get on with it. Why do we get hung-up on the

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 29:25-31:30

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 32:07-37:00

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 32:07-37:00

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 32:07-37:00

little things? Why do we chum up the water with the minutiae. I have a theory. I think we're far less evolved than we think we are. I know we fancy ourselves as nineties creatures who take it all in and deal with it, put it all back out, nothing fazes us. And I think we're full of shit.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] I think on a deep level we look at the world around us and we think it's a fucking mad house and we've lost complete control. We're scared out of our wits. We watch CNN daily and we watch things daily we have no idea how to get our head around. The children in Somalia, the atrocities in Bosnia Califragilisticexpialidocious. I think this stuff gets us right here. We think 'My God. We've lost it.' So what we do is we take all the things, and we trump them up into things that are bigger than they actually are. So we can control them and mold them and in some vague way to keep our feet tethered to the planet. This is how we get hung up on something like Madonna's book. Who gives a shit about Madonna's book. You know something? If Madonna wants to pose naked with two old bald lesbians who look like the singers from Midnight Oil and the lead ensemble player from Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*, who gives a shit! Why do we stick our nose into everything like this? I just don't understand it. When did this entire country turn into Gladys Kravitz from *Bewitched*?<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Now Barbara Streisand, singer, actress and newly anointed societal auteur, has designated a certain state in the Union that she wishes us not to visit. Well thank you Barbara. I don't remember you consulting me when you cast yourself in *Yentl*. Now, obviously her heart is in the right place on this, but she's going about it in the wrong way. We have a mechanism in this country for overturning bad laws. It's called the vote. Can't we let the democracy breathe for Chrissake? What would Streisand have us do now? Begin to treat Coloradans like she's afraid Coloradans are going to treat homosexuals? Now let's see: Colorado's out, Phoenix is out, we better watch ourselves. The only place left will be a big jammy party out of Barbara's place in Malibu Canyon, but you know something, that will never happen, because other than telling you exactly what to do with your life Barbara Streisand doesn't want to have a fucking thing to do with you folks. Okay? Yeah. Call Barbara's publicist. Tell him you'd like to get together with her for a couple of hours and discuss the plight of the common man. You got a better chance of hooking up with Amelia Earhart.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] + [SPF] Okay folks. We trivialize everything in this country. Women's issues? With all the serious inequities being heaped on women, the inequality and pay, the brutalization at the hands of incomplete male monsters, what do we focus on? the freak show, the bullshit, Clarence Thomas and the pubic hair and the coke, the paranoid feminist groups telling you to beware of everything male, and everything comes down to male sexual aggression. The dreaded Heimlich come on. The New England Patriot's locker room situation. This is Lindbergh baby headlines in this country for two months. Why? a couple second stringers dangled their johnsons in some female reporters face. She's so traumatized she has to move out of the fucking country. There's that Margaret Bourke-White spirit huh? Evidently she's in a I brushed up against it clinic in Lugano Switzerland or something. Or let me advance the theory that she shouldn't have been in the locker room. And the reason she shouldn't have been in the locker room is that she shouldn't have wanted to be in the locker room. Women in this country will make their greatest strides when they begin to realize there's certain bullshit male rituals that they

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 32:07-37:00

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 32:07-37:00

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 37:04-41:37



shouldn't want to have a fucking thing to do with. Come on. Peel back the mask, it's Camille Paglia.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] + [GUC] But come on. You're better than that for chrissake. We've botched it. We're horrible at it. You got to take back the power here, don't you read anything into the cosmic tip-off that you are the life givers? You are the ones that have to step in and save us. Shoot for the big piñata, fuck the MacGuffin you're 52% of the electorate fuck the locker, vote the Arlen Specter's out of office. And you know something, if you really want to break the back of male domination in this country, get together and collectively cut us off, because you see, you love the fuck but we need the fuck ok? And you should deny us *en masse*, the Great American Poke-Out, I guarantee you within two weeks you will rule the country.<sup>2</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] And the first step you have to take is to take back control of your own bodies. Now I hope you all saw the signal flare go off last week. The right-to-life movement or a member of it, killed a doctor. Let me use their own terminology against them. They aborted a child in the 200<sup>th</sup> trimester. Now, you know something? I don't even believe in abortion, but more importantly, I don't believe in the right to a life without any rights. And I think many people in the right-to-life movement should get a fucking life before they begin to tell other people what to do with theirs.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] + [PES] And you know something ... and you know something? The right-to-life people would have a lot more credibility with me if so many of them weren't cross and roll with the National Rifle Association okay. We have got a serious gun problem in this country folks. And until we confront it we will never be considered a great civilization.<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] Now, I know the gun lobby has done a brilliant job of attaching guns to apple pie, god, and motherhood. But you know that's bullshit as much as I know it's bullshit. If you let the mothers of this world vote on guns tomorrow, they will be nothing more than a sad memory. And don't give me that stuff about God and guns. I've read the Bible. I now God didn't carry a gun, and don't tell me it was ancient time and guns didn't exist. He was God I think he could have invented one had he wanted to, alright?<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] the NRA has their cute little bumper sticker 'you'll get my gun when you pry it from my cold dead hand.' Whatever.<sup>6</sup>

[GUC] + [SPF] We get hung up on the little things, the big things walk right by us and we don't even frisk them. Charles Keating. How did we let this man pillage the elderly of this country for over a decade? Why weren't we protecting the innocent? Because we were hung up on the bullshit, the name-calling, and now that it's time for him to go to prison we're all gonna get squeamish about that too. Well you know something, I'm not. Because this guy is so far in karma receivership I hope he fucking rots in prison. And you know something, it's gonna be a brutal transition for Mr. Keating from the SNL to the SNM because you get on the other side of that wall and inside trading takes on a whole new meaning alright? 'Hey everybody this is my bitch Charlie he's good at figurin. 'There's a guy and he's here to stay and they call him Charlie.' (...) and you know something, I don't even feel like a Yahoo saying that.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 37:04-41:37

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 37:04-41:37

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 37:04-41:37

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 41:40-42:43

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 41:40-42:43

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 42:53-45:19

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 42:53-45:19

[PES] + [GUC] As I get older I get less idealistic and it becomes obvious to me as I'm sure it becomes obvious to most of you folks that there are just some evil motherfuckers on this planet and we got to stop bending over backwards to appease them. We play by the rules, and they piss on our head and it's time for us to take back the power. The Savings and Loan crisis is going to cost you and I, we're going to pay for it, it's conservatively estimated at 200 billion dollars. Billion. Can you really grasp that figure? Let me put it in layman's terms for you folks. If there was only one guy in this country, he'd have to kick in 200 billion dollars. Just wanted to cut through the haze.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] Now I'm supposed to take Manuel Noriega to my bosom, after a lifetime of rumoured paedophilia, murdering anybody he didn't agree with, he finds God and I'm supposed to embrace him in the fellowship of man. Well fuck that I hate to get Werner Erhardian, but there is accountability in the universe and I'm not buying it. Says he found Jesus in a Dade County Florida Correctional facility. You know Manny, I don't want to piss on your parade baby, but every other guy in that place is named Jesus ok? So I don't think I'd read a lot into it that.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] Now some people would question this material, question whether it's heretical. Question my belief in Christ. I happen to fancy myself a Christian. My Christianity isn't predicated on not looking into things that I don't understand. It isn't predicated on whether or not I say the word fuck, but I do have a God that I believe in and I pray to him daily, I thank him for the good things he gives me and I ask him for forgiveness. It's just that I happen to believe that my God finds me incredibly fucking funny. And that of course is why I chose him as my God. Nothing wrong with being shallow, as long as you're insightful about it.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] + [GUC] Saddam Hussein. Do you believe we have to go through this bullshit again? Can you believe we have to uproot parents from their children and send them into the desert to duel with this madman. Why? Come on. You can't kill this guy. He's like the dismembered knight in Monty Python's Holy Grail. We had him dead to rights, he's the worst soldier in the history of the planet. Last time I saw a battle plan like that I was playing Stratego with Judy Landers. Come on. This guy is Wily Coyote in a red beret. We were stomping him like a naked fat guy at Altamont and we pulled back, why? I'll tell you why. It allows us to believe that we're more civilized than he is. And you know something? That's the basic problem. That's where we go wrong. We are not more civilized than him on an unconscious level, we're the ones that stray away from that. I think all men, deep down, are both the most noble and depraved creatures in the history of the planet, often in the same 10 second period, and I'm very comfortable with my Palaeolithic underpinnings. I like my caveman side.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] We've got so goddamn civilized the world is going to hell in a handbasket. Look at Los Angeles, where I live. There's a dysfunctional little metropolis. This place is the gunfight at the I'm Not Ok corral. LA makes Blade Runner look like a Norman Rockwell litho. Tensions are so high between the cops and the civilians in LA I'll be honest with you, I'm not mocking this up for joke, I'm scared shitless of these guys. I get pulled over by a cop in LA I don't even fuck around. I just wind the window down and blow the guy, okay? I don't want anybody misinterpreting my body language, or getting a bad read on my intentions. 'Give me that officer, go ahead write that right on top of my head. Alright.' 'I was going to beat the shit out of him but he was blowing me. What was I going to do?

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 42:53-45:19

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 45:25-45:48

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 45:50-46:49

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 46:50-48:10.

He had my dick in his skull. I risk damaging my own dick by hitting him in the head.' Hit him on the side of the head Bobby. Yeah, that's not bad. Joey gimme your stick. Whoa Yeah, Everybody I'm the Energizer Rabbit, look, he keeps blowing and blowing and blowing. You have the right to remain silent, anything you say might be garbled, whoa, look it's Abner the sexually eccentric.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] Killer bees have moved up from South America, are now in Texas taking jobs away from American bees. And, who's gonna save us from the madness? Who's gonna lead us out of the darkness and into the light? Billy Clinton? I pray to God, I hope so. If you're watching Mr. Clinton, I wish you the best. I'm not looking for you to fail, I hope you save us all. But I'm not getting that vibe yet. Yeah, you know. Says he knew he wanted to be President when he was 16. You know when I was 16 I wanted to get my fucking van detailed alright. Always got that forced grin on his face, looks like a guy who's getting his back-teeth x-rayed and they ask him to chomp down on that film plate you know. And I worry about his health. He's always got that raspy cough you know he's President now, you think he'd learned how to avoid drafts. Hey Bill, Billy, Bill I don't mind you bullshitting me just don't lie to me like I'm Montel Williams okay? My homage to Belzer.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] Al Gore? There's some stiff body language huh? Guy makes Ed Sullivan look like an auto fellatio freak. I thought the choice between Clinton and Bush was like the choice between airline food and hospital food. Both of them will keep you alive, but neither one of them has you floating up in the air like that cartoon dog after he ate the biscuit.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] But at least Clinton is one of us, at least he's had a joint in his hand. Wants me to believe he didn't inhale it. 'Garsh. Oh boy. Shower a baby bumblebee.' Least he's had it in his hand though. You know how silly this is going to look years from now that we make these people do this dance about whether or not they smoked pot? Are you not embarrassed that we do that do these people? Come on. Who didn't pass through that era and smoke a joint? Do you remember the fuck heads who wouldn't touch the reefer? Is that the person you want at the helm of this country? Come on. 20 years from now you're gonna have guys running around for President saying 'yeah sure I snorted heroin but I didn't shoot it for chrissake. It was stepped on, it was shitty.'<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] I like his wife. I think she's a good woman. I think we should get off her back. So what we didn't vote for her. We need smart people now. Maybe she can help. I think she's a pretty good dame. They're already calling her the good Yoko. But he needs all the help he can get.<sup>5</sup>

[SPF] He's got a lot of problems facing him and not least of which is the fact that Bush left the club attached to the steering wheel of the White House limousine. The club, now in designer colors. I love the image of somebody sitting at home saying 'Yeah, well sure, I'd love to have the club, but come on, not in red.' 'Now in lime green for the discerning paranoid'.<sup>6</sup>

[PES] Our country is looking at a recession akin to the one affecting the hairline of the lead singer from the group Fine Young Cannibals. We have a complete gridlock in

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 48:12-49:30.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 49:35-51:58

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 51:01-54:02

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 51:01-54:02

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 51:01-54:02

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 51:01-54:02

Congress, looking up at Capitol Hill is like looking up at that Escher print of the wild geese flying together, it makes no fucking sense and occasionally it shits on your head.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] And, so I hope he's surrounding himself with good people, although I'm getting a little bit of a freaky vibe off that cabinet he's assembled huh? It's starting to look like the Geek Follies that opened for the Lollapalooza tour last year. See the new Attorney General? Wow. Lithgow in GARP. Man. You get the feeling there are no nanny troubles in that past huh?<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] Warren Christopher looks like the guy from Munch's painting the Scream after he's had electroshock treatments. Lloyd Bentsen had to leave his job as the grandfather clock in a Captain Kangaroo show, and who's that little guy Right always running around. Is he secretary of the lollipop league, what's happening over there?<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] But I hope they're good people because they have a lot of patch up work to do. I'm not saying the former President Nero, I mean, Bush was a bad man. I think it's obvious though, towards the end, he had his elbow planted firmly on the pulse of the American people.<sup>4</sup>

[PG] + [SPF] I think the Republicans fucked themselves at their own convention. That was an ugly little scene huh? What was that? Caligula's barn raisin? And whose bright idea was it to let Pat Buchanan speak huh? Yeah let's give the pyromaniac the Zippo. If Pat Buchanan had been at the tribunal in Nuremberg he would have listened to testimony detailing the Nazi atrocities and said "..... and?" This guy makes Max Cady look like Atticus Finch. Pat Buchanan is so homophobic he blames global warming on the AIDS quilt.<sup>5</sup>

[SPF] You know something? I was a Perot man. And the crazier that little bastard got the more I wanted to vote for him alright. Yeah. Set the controls and steer for the center of the Sun you demented little Tolkien character with a golf cart. I was ready to follow this Simon Bar Sinister replicant right into the jaws of hell. Had that streamlined little tyrant skull that I just loved in a death spot, he looked like Sargent Carter with all the moisture sucked out of his body. And he shot from the hip replacement and you know something, that's what fucked him in the end. You can't talk like that in this country. They're not ready for that. You know they were going to paint him as a paranoid asshole. You just knew it was going to happen as soon as he started making sense like that. It's like the guy who invents the engine it runs on salt water you know they're gonna sill quit his break line within a week and a half.<sup>6</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] + [GUC] And how do we go after Ross Perot in a really ugly way? We went after James Stockdale. You know Stockdale has become a buzzword in this culture, for a doddering old man, but let's look at the record folks: this guy was the first guy in and the last guy out of Vietnam. A war that many Americans including your new President chose not to dirty his hands with. The reason he had to turn his hearing aid on in that debate is because those fucking animals knocked his eardrum out when he wouldn't spill his guts. He teaches philosophy at Stanford University. He's a brilliant, sensitive, courageous individual. And yet he committed, I don't want to turn it into a rally, but he committed the one unpardonable sin in our culture: he was bad on television. And Paddy Chayefsky he must be laughing his ass off out there. And we should be ashamed of ourselves. Could

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 54:06-56:29.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 54:06-56:29.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 54:06-56:29.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 54:06-56:29.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 54:06-56:29.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 56:45-59:36.

he have been our vice-president? Of course, he could have been our vice-president. You think Al Gore is a charismatic visionary? His favourite film is *Tron* for chrissake. And how hard could this job be? Look who did it for the last 4 years. Dan Quayle's head is emptier than a jack-in-the-box in downtown Seattle. He shouldn't have been second in command of the Hakawi tribe from F-Troop. Much less the third most powerful nation on the face of this planet.<sup>1</sup>

[SPF] and this is not to say I won't miss Dan Quayle, because to me he was the Rosetta Stone of contemporary American comedy. Let's face facts, he deserved the vice-presidency like Elvis deserved this black belt alright? I always thought a Quayle was Dan Tana's assistant bins on *The Old Vegas Show*. You let him answer the phone, but he does not drive the T-bird. And you know something, he's thinking of running for President four years hence. The day Dan Quayle is our President is the day Shelley Winters runs with the Bulls at Pamplona. Thank you. Good Night. Bye.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 56:45-59:36.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *They Shoot, Don't They*. 1994. Interval: 56:45-59:36.

## APPENDIX 2: SC<sup>2</sup> 1995-1999

1995

### Jeanine Garofalo – Comedy Half Hour

[PES] I'm incredibly lazy. I have a very "Can you start my orange" approach to life. I don't haggle with salesmen for cars, I don't get better deals on things. I don't know. I'm a straight C student. I don't know. I've never in my life uttered the phrase "Is there going to be extra credit on this?" because I would never, I don't do that. I don't know anything about that way of life. In fact I've only stuck to one thing in my life. I started doing stand-up in 1985, and I've only stuck to the entertainment industry because only that can provide me with the sheer depression and self-loathing. That's the only thing that, the misery, the only thing that can fill that void of hatred. So I've stuck with that.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] I should just wear a hair shirt, all day. That's what SNL was for me, it was a hair shirt, it was a giant hair shirt. SNL to me, and I had a lot of great experiences there, god bless them you know. But SNL to me was this whole experience was, this is how I encapsulate it. I feel like the Native American who accepted the pox infested blankets from the US cavalry. 'For me? Thank you! I don't feel so good.' That's what that experience was.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Okay. I hate high fashion. I hate it. I hate supermodels as celebrities; I hate the fact that we reward people for being genetic freaks. I really do. I think it's awful. I just think it's abominable that, you know, the crisis of confidence that hits 13-14 year old girls when they go through it, it's just a crime. Reviving Ophelia. Read it, Good book. 14 million eating disorders in this country, it makes me sick.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] It makes me sick the way women are the victims of lookism. And that high fashion just feeds into coveting and vanity and all that is evil and I hate them I will not back down on this I don't care how unlikable it makes me seem to you, I hate models in general and oh when even female journalists will say 'Cindy Crawford, one of the bigger models.' Fuck you! Fuck you! Shut up! I hate, you know you're lying. Shut up! You know and when there's statistics five ten, one twenty, fuck you. I hate you. And stop making me feel bad about the way I look, about myself. Stop it TV, and stop it movies. And until as women we all say 'no, we're not going to starve ourselves' nothings gonna change. So we're our own worst enemies a lot of the times. But I still ... blame men. Seriously. I'm such an eyesore when I land at LAX, that 'I'm here, I'm fine.' And they can kiss my fat ass. I swear to God. And I won't lose the weight. I promise you this. In my career I promise you because that would be a sellout. But I'm lazy too, yes. But I am very noble as well.<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] I hate e-fashion file so much. And they have these runway shows and then they have a commentator going 'Return to glamour this season. A pretty face is your best asset this season.' As opposed to last season, when ugly girls had a free ride, all the way through. When back fat was all the rage. And by the way, I did star in the movie Back Fat directed by Ron Howard.<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] I was walking out of the Beverly Centre and I was walking to my car. And there was a dad and his like three year old walking to their car. I was like walking here and then there was an empirically speaking attractive blonde walking near me. And I'm not,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 10:37-11:23

<sup>2</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 15:00-16:15

<sup>3</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 17:02- 20:00.

<sup>4</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 17:02- 20:00.

<sup>5</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 17:02- 20:00.

you know, I sound like a woman slammer. I don't mean that at all. I hope I haven't come across as that at all. I'm so down with my gender that it's unbelievable. So I hope I haven't at all painted that picture. But uhm, this blonde who was not down with the cause, because she goes to a gym, anyway, I feel that way, if you go to the gym and stuff, you're not on my side. You're not. You're not. I really believe that. I believe it because anybody 'just do it for me because it makes me feel good' you're a liar, you're lying. No one gets on a Stairmaster 'cause 'oh, it's just for me.' It's a lie. (...) So anyway, so I was walking out to my car and this blonde was walking out to her car and the dad ogled the blonde. And she was like so trite you know. She had like the Levi's hiked up, cinched at the waist, black belt, black cowboy boots, V-neck, Haynes t-shirt. And I know I'm wearing one too but whatever. But not in the same way. She had one tucked in and the crispy bangs, kind of crispy and long blond hair, walk walk walk bla bla bla, and so the dad was ogling her and I was walking near her and thought 'God that is such a bad role model, at least ogle me. Take the road less traveled give your son something to grow on. You know. I'm not a lesbian. I look like a lesbian. But no. It's different. And give your son something.' And that look, you know, it speaks volumes about the guy and about the girl, that's as original as a fucking snowball fight that's how unoriginal that look is to me.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] I am just, there's a little piece of me, there's a little piece in this cynic, that is somewhat envious of people that don't give a fuck about what goes in their earhole, eyehole, mouth-hole, whatever. We accept anything. Whoever is in office as President. 'I don't give a damn.' Rush Limbaugh? 'Yeah, he's funny I don't care.' Ask him to wash denim. Sure! Yeah. I just want to have kids I don't want to rock the boat. That's all I want to do. ... Lion king? Absolutely. Sound track? Yes.<sup>2</sup>

**1996**

### **Andrew Dice Clay – Assume the Position**

[GUC] You see, that's that time you gotta spend with children. Or they grow up fucked up: doing drugs and shit, instead of just jerking off all over themselves. That's what it's about. You don't stab fucking people. You don't want kids to end up like Jeffrey Dahmer. He didn't eat a sandwich, he ate Sal. Do you understand? All this shit that goes on and then I do a show like this, they'll come out 'Oh oh oh. He said pussy again.' I tell a fucking dick joke and the people want to give me the electric chair. What the fuck is going on in this country? It's just unreal. Because they get the wrong idea. See I'll tell you the truth. I love to fuck. I just said it. I love to fuck, get blown, eat pussy, it's beautiful. But you don't beat and you don't rape. That's the bottom line.<sup>3</sup>

### **Chris Rock – Bring the Pain**

[SPF] "How are you? Washington! D.C., chocolate city! That's right! Home of the Million-Man March! That's right, the Million Man March! That had all the positive black leaders there! Farrakhan, Jesse,<sup>4</sup> Marion Barry ... Marion Barry ... at the Million Man March! How did he get the ticket? It was a day of positivity! How did he get in? Marion Barry at the Million Man March, do you know what that means? It means that even in our finest hour, we had a crackhead on stage!

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 21:48-24:10

<sup>2</sup> Jeanine Garofalo. *HBO Comedy Half Hour*. 1995. Interval: 26:18-26:55

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Dice Clay. *Assume the Position*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 39:55-41:50

<sup>4</sup> Jackson.

[SPF] Yes, boo if you want, you know I'm right! How the hell did Marion Barry get his job back? He smoked crack and got his job back. How the hell did that happen? If you get caught smoking crack at McDonald's you can't get your job back. That's right, they are not gonna trust you around the Happy Meals! They'll send your ass to Hardee's. He smoked crack and got his job back! I want to know who was so ... Who ran against him that they lost? Who was so bad they lost to a crackhead? What was their campaign like? Was they on heroin? 'Vote for me!' 'Vote for me! Don't vote for crack, vote for smack!' Marion Barry ... come on man, how are you gonna tell little kids to not get high... when their mayor is on crack? "Don't get high. You won't be nothing." "I could be Mayor!"<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] Crack everywhere, crack everywhere ... you know what they say? 'Crack is destroying the black community.' 'Crack is destroying the ghetto.' Yeah, like the ghetto was so nice before crack! They say that shit like everybody had at least a mansion, a yacht and a swimming pool ... then crack came by and dried it all up!<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] I think we always focus on the negative side of crack ... Always on the negative side of crack. What about the good side of crack? What about the beauty of crack? What about the good things that crack has brought into our mind, that were not here before? Do you know what the good side of crack is? If you're up at the right hour you can get a VCR for \$1.50. You could furnish your whole house for \$10.95. Why? 'Cause of crack. Shit, at Christmastime, have you ever bought somebody a crack gift? They think you've got them something. 'Oh, you should not have!' 'I did!' Bought from a crackhead! I think they should just legalize crack. Legalize it. Do you know why I want them to legalize crack? Just so my friends' mothers can have something to brag about. 'You know, Ronald got his own crack house now! Johnny's got his own crack house. When I drive by, everyday I go: 'That is my baby's crack house right there' They got Jumbo!<sup>3</sup>

[PES] Legalize it, man. All drugs should be legalized, all drugs should be legal! Why? People want to get high. That's right. People think about getting high right now. People are like: 'Damn, how much longer is the show?' People love to get high! You could get rid of all illegal drugs in the world and it won't mean shit. People want to get high. If you get rid of all the crack, all the heroin, all the blow, you know what will happen? People will just think of new ways to get high! That's right, guys will go to their basement and become scientists and be like: 'Check this out, check this out. You know, if you get a baby's bottle, right? Fill it up with a little gasoline, dead lima beans, and then suck it. You will be fucked up!' That's right.<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] That's right man. Now we've got the war on drugs. Bullshit! The war on drugs is bullshit, it is the way to get more motherfuckers in jail, that's all it is ... yes! That's all it is! The drug dealers don't really sell drugs. The drug dealers ... offer drugs! I'm thirty years old, ain't nobody ever sold me drugs. Nobody has ever sold nobody in this room some drugs! You ever in your life not thinking about getting high and somebody sold you some fucking drugs? Hell, no! The drug dealers offer, the go 'Hey Man you want some smoke, you want some smoke?' You say 'No', that's it! Now, Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand ... Shit! No, man, drug dealers don't sell drugs: drugs sell themselves. It's crack, it's not an encyclopedia, it's not a fucking vacuum cleaner! You don't really gotta try to sell crack, OK? I never heard a crack dealer go, 'Man, how am I gonna get rid of all this crack? It's just piled up in my house!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:09-03:32

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 03:34-05:07

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 03:34-05:07

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 05:09-05:43

<sup>5</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 5:45-07:00



[GUC] I don't fuck around, I don't get high at all. Part of the main reason I don't fuck around is my big brother. Big brother. Junkie alcoholic! But doesn't eat pork, 'cause 'pork's no good for ya.' People are full of shit, man. People who shoot heroine, and go: 'You know, red meat will kill you!' What do you mean 'red meat will kill you'? Only in America we say some bullshit like 'red meat will kill you.' We've got too much food in America. Too much food! What do you mean 'Red meat will kill you'? People are starving all over the world! What do you mean, 'Red meat will kill you'? No, no no! Don't eat no red meat? No. Don't eat no green meat, ok? What are you talking about? You know, if you are one of the chosen few people on this earth lucky enough to get your hands on a steak: bite the shit out of it man.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] Too much food in America. We've got so much food in America, you realize America is the only country in the whole world that makes people feel bad for being fat. The only country in the whole world. People are starving all over the world. You're fat some place else people are like: 'Damn, how did you do that? That's amazing! I gotta hang with you! Oh, you think you are all that with your fat ass? I'll put on some weight, we're gonna hang.'<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] Too much food in America, man. We've got so much food in America we're allergic to food. Allergic to food! Hungry people ain't allergic to shit! So do you think anybody in Rwanda's got a fucking lactose intolerance? Now we've got some people who don't eat pork, what the fuck is that shit about? You don't eat pork! You don't eat pork! Some people don't eat pork for religious reasons which I think is dumb. I ain't shitting on nobody's religion, but I refuse to believe that on Judgment Day my diet is going to come into question, OK? What you eat has got shit to do with who you are as a person, ok? 'Hey God, I killed a bunch of kids ... but I ate right!' No! That ain't gonna happen, man. No.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] You see, people don't realize that religious books were written by man. Man wrote everything. Man wrote the Bible, man wrote the Koran, man wrote the Torah, all that shit written by man. And thousands of years ago, before there was, you know, like five thousand years ago, before there was Reynolds Wrap, before there was refrigerators, before there was freezers, before there was seasoning ... a pork chop might kill you! That's right. One drop, 'Aaaah! Dead.' But times have changed. That's right. See, times have changed, people, you know, five thousand years ago, they was like 'Damn, this pork is killing everybody. How can we get people to not eat pork? Ok! Tell them God said don't eat it.' And everybody said 'Okay, God said don't eat it.' And they stopped eating it. But times have changed. And now we've got refrigerators, we've got freezers, we've got some Saran wrap, we've got Reynolds wrap. Now a pork chop is your friend. That's right, if you are starving, a pork chop will save your life. Shit, I eat a pig's ass, if they cook it right.<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] + [GUC] A lot of stuff going on this year. Everything's racial issue. What was the big thing this year? Elections! Colin Powell! 'He should run. He could win. Colin can win, he should run!' He can't win! Colin Powell can't win! Colin Powell's got a better chance of winning the bronze in female gymnastics ... than being the president of the United States. Get the fuck out! White people ain't voting for Colin Powell. They say they are,

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 07:04-11:26

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 07:04-11:26

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 07:04-11:26

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 07:04-11:26

they are not. Ok? They're gonna soup his head up, make him run, he'll get killed trying to run.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] Shit. Colin Powell. White people say they're gonna vote for him because it seems like the right thing to say. It just seems like a cool thing to say: 'Yeah, I would vote for him. Psst.' It just seems like the right thing to say, just like if you ask somebody if they want to be an organ donor. They always say 'yeah.' Nobody wants to be an organ donor! Nobody, it just seems like the right thing to say. Shit, organ doning is for people with no faith at all. You know, what if they figured out a way to bring you back from the dead? Now I don't got no eyes. Ain't this a bitch! Back from the dead and I can't see shit! 'Mom, I'm back! Mom, where are my eyes? You gave them to a little boy in Idaho? Now I will have to kill him to get my eyes back!' <sup>2</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] Colin Powell can't be president! You know how I could tell Colin Powell can't be president? Whenever Colin Powell is on the news, white people always give him the same compliments. Always the same compliments! 'How do you feel about Colin Powell? He speaks so well! He's so well spoken! He speaks so well! I mean, he really speaks well! He speaks so well!' Like that's a compliment! 'Speaks so well' is not a compliment, OK? 'Speaks so well' is some shit you say about retarded people that can talk. What do you mean 'He speaks well?' What, did he have a stroke the other day? He's a fucking educated man, how the fuck do you expect him to sound you dirty motherfucker? What are you talking about? 'He speaks so well'. What are you talking about, 'he speaks so well'. What voice were you looking to come out of his mouth? What the fuck did you expect him to sound like? 'I'm a-drop me a bomb today!' 'I'll be pres-o-dent!' Get the fuck outta here! <sup>3</sup>

[SPF] + [PEP] Now they're telling that Colin Powell should run for vice president. 'Do it for his country.' Fuck the country, shit! He gonna run with the guy he can beat? He gonna run with fucking Dole? He can beat Dole. They only ask a black man to do something that fucking stupid, run with a guy he can beat. Get the fuck out of here. They won't ask no white guy won't do no shit like that. They're not gonna ask Al Gore to run with Al Sharpton, no. Get the fuck out of here, man. Vice-President. You know what? It ain't gonna happen! As long as you live you ain't ever gonna see no black vice president. Not while the president is white. Oh no, you will never see. Did they tell you 'never say never'? I'm saying never! You will never see no black vice president. Not while there's a white president. And you know why? 'Cause some black guy would just kill the president, that's why. Shit, I'd do it. If we had a black vice president right now, I couldn't wait to kill the president. Shit. And what's gonna happen to me? What're you gonna you do, put me in jail with a bunch of black guys that treat me like a hero for the rest of my life? Shit, even if they had a death penalty, what would happen? Get pardoned by the black president. I'd be the biggest star in the history of jail. I'd be signing autographs, '97/KY here you go.' Shit, if I'd be in jail guys would come at me: 'Yo, Chris, Chris, yo, man. I hope my kids turn out to be just like you, man. You know, I was getting ready to rape you until I realized who you were!' <sup>4</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] + [PES] Oh, they will rape you in jail, boy. See, the whole damn country is so damn conservative now. Everybody says: 'Jails ain't tough enough. Jails ain't tough enough. We gotta have the death penalty. Jails ain't tough enough.' No. Jails are fucked up, ok? Don't believe the hype. The problem is, the reason jails are so crowded 'cause

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 11:27-16:15

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 11:27-16:15

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 11:27-16:15

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 11:27-16:15

life is fucked up too! When people are broke, people are starving, life ... Shit, life is catching up to jail. Shit, if you live in an old project, a new jail ain't that bad.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] And everybody saying: 'Oh, schools are out of control, they are out of control, we need prayer in the schools.' We do not need prayer in schools, we need the toss-salad man in school. That'll straighten the kids out. 'Hey Jimmy, you've got a D. You know what you gotta do? Noooooo! Nooooo! I don't wanna toss the salad. I don't wanna toss the salad. I will read. I will learn to read.'<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] A lot of racial shit this year, lot of racial shit. What is the big thing? O.J. O.J. was big. That's right. Black people too happy, white people too mad. The white people like 'Bam, this is a bullshit.' I ain't seen white people that mad since they cancelled M.A.S.H. Black people way too happy. 'Hey, we won, we won! Yes! We won!' What the fuck did we win? Every day I look at the mailbox for my O.J. prize: nothing. Nothing. They go: 'Ooh, that was all about race.' That shit wasn't about race. That shit was about fame. 'Cause if O.J. wasn't famous, he'd be in jail right now. If O.J. drove a bus ... If O.J. drove a bus, he wouldn't even be O.J. He'd be Orenthal the Bus Driving Murderer. They all go: 'Oh, the jury was so stupid.' Get the fuck out of here, man. 'It's so stupid, how could they not ...?' White people would have done exact same shit, ok? The exact same shit! Because if that was Jerry Seinfeld charged with double murder and the only person that found the bloody glove happened to be in the Nation of Islam ... Jerry would be a free man, and eating cereal right now.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] But let's break down the case, what's the guy, Ron Goldman? That was her boyfriend. Don't be mistaken thinking there was some guy returning the glasses, ok? When was the last time you forgot some shit at the restaurant and they brought it back to your house ok? Shit, I want to eat there. Shit, you could leave a newborn baby in a restaurant and they'll put him in the coatroom. Second of all, he was known to drive around town in this Ferrari that O.J. bought for her. Think about this shit. I buy you a car, and you're gonna let another man drive around in my car? Are you out of your fucking mind? Shit. God, you better recognize. Shit, I don't even have a Ferrari, but if I saw somebody driving in my Pinto that shit would blow up like the Godfather. I'm not saying he should have killed her ... but I understand.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Know what else? O.J. was paying twenty-five thousand dollars a month in alimony. Twenty-five thousand dollars. And four thousand dollars a month for food. For food! What the fuck was she eating for 4 grand a month? I guess she's like: 'I gotta get some extra cheese on my whopper.' You know, women, y'all got it good boy. When it's time to get a divorce, women got it made. They go to court, start talking some shit: 'Your Honor, I'm used to this, I'm used to that, I'm accustomed to this.' Yo, what the fuck is 'accustomed'? What's that got to do with shit? Hey, you go to a restaurant, you're accustomed to eating. You leave, you ain't eating no more. They don't owe you a steak. Now, women go to court, talk that shit: 'Your Honor, I'm used to this, I'm used to that, I want some money, give me some money.' And they get the money. What about what the man's used to? What about what the man's accustomed to? That might not be money. But during the course of a relationship, a man grows accustomed to a few things. And I would love to see a man go to court and say 'Your Honor, check this out ... I'm accustomed to fucking her four times a week. Now I feel I should be able to fuck her at

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 16:16-18:52

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 16:16-18:52

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 19:00-25:05

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 19:00-25:05

least twice a week. I mean, she can have the alimony, but I want some pussy payments.' Am I fair? That's, right, man, shit.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] That alimony, that's what made OJ crack. That alimony. She's paid that big-ass alimony, he ain't scored a touch-down in twenty years. That's right, should have had a pre-nup. That's right, prenuptial agreement. Everybody needs a pre-nup. People think you gotta be rich to get a pre-nup. Oh no. You got twenty million, your wife wants ten, big deal. You ain't starving. But if you make thirty thousand, and your wife wants fifteen, you might have to kill her. Shit.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] So you gotta think about OJ's situation: twenty-five thousand a month, another man's driving around in his car and fucking his wife in a house he's still paying the mortgage on. Now I'm not saying he should have killed her ... but I understand.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] Now we've got a lot of things, a lot of racism going on in the world right now. Who's more racist, black people or white people? Black people. You know why? Because we hate black people too. Everything white people don't like about black people, black people really don't like about black people.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] There's some shit going on with black people right now. There's like a civil war going on with black people. And there's two sides: black people, and there's niggas. And niggas have got to go. Every time black people want to have a good time ignorant ass niggas fuck it up. Can't do shit. Can't do shit without some ignorant ass niggas fucking it up. Can't keep a disco open for more than three weeks. Grand opening, grand closing. Can't go to a movie the first week it comes out. Why? 'Cause niggas are shooting at the screen. What kind of ignorant shit is that? 'Hey this is a good movie, it's so good I gotta bust a cap in here.' Hey, I love black people but I hate niggas boy. Oh I hate niggas boy. Boy I wish they let me join the Klu Klux Klan.<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] So I was in community college, I'm in there, figure 'Let me take some shit I know.' So I took a Black history class. I've got to know this right? I'm black, right? I get a B just for showing up, right? Wrong! Failed it. Ain't this some sad shit? A black man failing black history, that's sad. 'Cause, you know fat people don't fail cooking. 'That's paprika.' Failed Black history. Why? 'Cause I didn't know shit about Africa. Cause you know, you go to white schools, you learn Europe up the ass. Never learn shit about it. I still don't know shit about Africa. The only thing I know about Africa it's far. Africa is far, far away. Africa's like a 35-hour flight. So you know that boat ride was real long. The boat ride is so long there are still slaves on their way here.<sup>6</sup>

[SPF] I didn't know nothing at school. All I knew was Martin Luther King. That's what they would teach you at school about black people: Martin Luther King. That was my answer to everything, 'Martin Luther King.' 'What's the capital of Zaire? Martin Luther King. Can you tell us the name of the woman that would not leave her seat on the bus? Oh, that's hard. Are you sure it was a woman? Oh, I've got it: Martina Luther King.' You know what is so sad, man. You know what's wild? Martin Luther King stood for non-violence. Now what's Martin Luther King? A street. And I don't give a fuck where you live in America, if you're on a Martin Luther King Boulevard, there is some violence

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 19:00-25:05

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 19:00-25:05

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 19:00-25:05

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 29:28-30:49

<sup>5</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 29:28-30:49

<sup>6</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 40:00-41:59

going down. It ain't the safest place to be. You can't call nobody telling them you're lost on MLK. 'I'm lost, I'm on the Martin Luther King ... Run! Run! Run! The media's there.'<sup>1</sup>

### **George Carlin – Back in Town**

[PG] Why? Why? Why? Why? Why is it that most of the people who are against abortion are people you wouldn't want to fuck in the first place?<sup>2</sup>

[PG] Boy these conservatives are really something aren't they? They're all in favor of the unborn, they will do anything for the unborn, but once you're born, you're on your own.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] Pro-life conservatives are obsessed with the fetus from conception to 9 months. After that they don't want to know about you. They don't want to hear from you, know nothing, no neo-natal care, no daycare, no heads start, no school lunch, no food-stamps, no welfare, no nothing. If you're preborn you're fine. If you're pre-school you're fucked. You're fucked.<sup>4</sup>

[PG] Conservatives don't give a shit about you until you reach military age. Then they think you are just fine. Just what they've been looking for. Conservatives want live babies so they can raise them to be dead soldiers. Pro-life? Pro-life? These people aren't Pro-Life, they're killing doctors. What kind of Pro-Life is that? What, they'll do anything they can to save a fetus, but if it grows up to be a doctor they just might have to kill it? They're not pro-life. You know what they are? They're anti-woman. Simple as it gets. Anti-woman. They don't like women. They believe a woman's primary role is to function as a broodmare for the State.<sup>5</sup>

[PG] Pro-Life? You don't see any of these white anti-abortion women volunteering to have any black fetuses transplanted into their uteruses, do ya? No. You don't see them adopting a whole lot of crack babies do ya? No, that might be something Christ would do. And, you won't see a lot of these Pro-life people dowsing themselves in kerosene and lighting themselves on fire. You know morally committed religious people in South Vietnam knew how to stage a goddamn demonstration didn't they? They knew how to put on a fucking protest. Light yourself on fire! Come on you moral crusaders let's see a little smoke. To max that fire in your belly.<sup>6</sup>

[GUC] Here's another question I have: how come when it's us, it's an abortion; and when it's a chicken it's an omelet? What, are we so much better than chickens all of a sudden? When did this happen that we passed chickens in goodness? Name six ways we're better than chickens....See, nobody can do it. You know why? Cause chickens are decent people.<sup>7</sup>

[GUC] But let's get back to this abortion shit. Now, is a fetus a human being? This seems to be the central question. Well, if a fetus is a human being, how come the Census doesn't count them? If the fetus was a human being, how come when there's a miscarriage they don't have a funeral? If a fetus is a human being, how come people say 'We have two children and one on the way' instead of saying 'We have three children'?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bring the Pain*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 40:00-41:59

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>6</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>7</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>8</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

[GUC] People say life begins at conception. I say life began about a billion years ago and it's a continuous process. Continuous, just keeps rolling along. Rolling, rolling, rolling along. I said, you know something, you can go back further than that. What about the carbon atoms? Human life could not exist without carbon. So is it just possible that we shouldn't be burning all this coal? Just looking for a little consistency here in these anti-abortion arguments.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PG] See, the really hard core people will tell you life begins at fertilization. Fertilization, when the sperm fertilizes the egg. Which is usually a few moments after the man says 'Gee honey I was gonna pull out but the phone rang and it startled me.' But even after the egg is fertilized, it's still 6 or 7 days before it reaches the uterus and pregnancy begins. And not every egg makes it that far. 80% of a woman's fertilized eggs are rinsed and flushed out of her body once a month during those delightful few days she has. They wind up on sanitary napkins and yet they are fertilized eggs. So, basically, what these anti-abortion people are telling us is that any woman who's had more than one period is a serial killer. Consistency. Consistency.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PG] Hey, hey, if they really want to get serious, what about all the sperm that are wasted when the state executes a condemned man and one of these pro-life guys who's watching comes in his pants huh? Here's a guy standing over there with his jockey shorts full of little Vinnies and Debbies and nobody's saying a word to the guy. Not every ejaculation deserves a name.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] Now, speaking of consistency, Catholics, which I was until I reached the age of reason, Catholics and other Christians are against abortions and they're against homosexuals. Well, who has less abortions than homosexuals? Leave these fucking people alone for chrissakes. Here's an entire class of people guaranteed never to have an abortion. And the Catholics and Christians are just tossing them aside. You'd think they'd make natural allies. Go look for consistency in religion.<sup>4</sup>

[PG] + [SPF] Speaking of my friends the Catholics, when John Cardinal O'Connor of New York and some of these other cardinals and bishops have experienced their first pregnancies and their first labor pains and they've raised a couple of children on minimum wage, then I'll be glad to hear what they have to say about abortion. I'm sure it'll be interesting and enlightening too. But, but in the meantime what they ought to be doing is telling these priests who took a vow of chastity to keep their hands off the altar boys. Keep your hands to yourself father, you know? When Jesus said 'suffer the little children, come unto me' that's not what he was talking about.<sup>5</sup>

[PG] You know what I tell these anti-abortion people? I say 'hey, hey, if you think a fetus is more important than a woman, try to get a fetus to wash the shit stains off your underwear.' For no pay and no pension. I tell them 'think of an abortion as term limits. That's all it is. Biological term limits.'<sup>6</sup>

[GUC] But you know, the longer you listen to this abortion debate, the more you hear this phrase 'sanctity of life.' You've heard that. 'sanctity of life'. You believe in it? Personally, I think it's a bunch of shit. Well, I mean, life is sacred? Who said so? God? Hey if you read history you realize that God is one of the leading causes of death. Has been for thousands of years. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, all taking turns killing each

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

<sup>6</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 01:10-9:14

other cause God told them it was a good idea. The sword of God, the blood of the lamb, vengeance is mine, millions of dead motherfuckers. Millions of dead motherfuckers all because they gave the wrong answer to the God question. 'You believe in God? No. Pew! Dead. You believe in God? Yes. You believe in my God? No. Pew! Dead. My God has a bigger dick than your God.' That's all it is That's all it is. Thousands of years. And all the best wars too. The bloodiest most brutal wars fought all based on religious hatred. Which is fine with me, hey, anytime a bunch of holy people want to kill each other I'm a happy guy.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [SPF] But don't be giving me all this shit about the sanctity of life. I mean, even if there were such a thing, I don't it's something you can blame on God. No, you know where the sanctity of life came from? We made it up. You know why? Cause we're alive. Self-interest. Living people have a strong interest in promoting the idea that somehow life is sacred. You don't see Elvin Costello running around talking about this shit do you? We're not hearing a lot from Mussolini on the subject. What's the latest from JFK? Not a goddamn thing. Cause JFK, Mussolini and Elvis Costello are fucking dead. They're fucking dead.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] Dead people give less than a shit about the sanctity of life. Only living people care about it, so the whole thing grows out of a completely biased point of view. It's a self-serving manmade bullshit story. It's one of these things we tell ourselves so we'll feel noble. Life is sacred, makes you feel noble. But let me ask you this: if everything that ever lived is dead, and everything alive is gonna die, where does the sacred part come in? I'm having trouble with that. Because I mean even with the stuff we preach about the sanctity of life we don't practice it. We don't practice it. Look at what we kill: mosquitos and flies, because they're pests; lions and tigers, cause it's fun; chickens and pigs, 'cause we're hungry; pheasants and quails, 'cause it's fun ... and we're hungry; and people. We kill people. 'Cause they're pests. And it's fun! And you might have noticed something else. The sanctity of life doesn't seem to apply to cancer cells does it. You rarely see a bumper sticker that says 'save the tumors' or 'I break for advanced melanoma.' No. Viruses, mold, mildew, maggots, fungus, weeds, e-coli, bacteria, the crabs, nothing sacred about those things.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] So at best, the sanctity of life is kind of a selective thing. We get to choose which forms of life we think are sacred and we get to kill the rest. Pretty neat deal huh? Know how we got it? We made the whole fucking thing up. Made it up. The same way we made up the death penalty. We made them both up: sanctity of life and the death penalty. Aren't we versatile?<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] And you know, in this country now there are a lot of people who want to expand the death penalty to include drug dealers. This is really stupid. Drug dealers aren't afraid to die. They're already killing each other every day on the streets by the hundreds. Drive-bys, gang shootings, they're not afraid to die. The Death penalty doesn't mean anything unless you use it on people who are afraid to die. Like the bankers who launder the drug money. The bankers who launder the drug money. Forget the dealers. You want to slow down the drug traffic, you gotta start executing a few of these fucking bankers. White middle class republican bankers. And I'm not talking about soft American executions like lethal injection. I'm talking about fucking crucifixion folks. Let's bring back crucifixions. A form of capital punishment that Christians and Jews of

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 09:15-12:42.

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 09:15-12:42.

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 09:15-12:42.

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 12:43-14:40

America can really appreciate. And I'd go a little further. I'd crucify people upside down. Like Saint Peter, feet up head down. And naked. I'd have naked, upside down crucifixions on tv once a week at half-time of the Monday Night Football game. Monday Night."<sup>1</sup>

[PES] And I'll guarantee you one thing: you start executing, you start nailing one white banker per week to a big wooden cross on national tv you're gonna see that drug traffic begin to slow down pretty fucking quick. Pretty fucking quick. You wouldn't even be able to buy drugs in schools and prisons anymore.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] + [PEP] I honestly believe if you make the death penalty a little more entertaining and learned to market it correctly you just might be able to raise enough money to balance the stupid fucking budget. Balance the stupid fucking budget. And don't forget, the polls show the American people want capital punishment and they want a balanced budget. And I think, even in a fake democracy, people ought to get what they want once in a while just to feed this illusion that they're really in charge. Let's use capital punishment the same way we use sports and television in this country: to distract people and take their minds off how bad they're being fucked by the upper 1%.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] Now, unfortunately, unfortunately Monday Night Football doesn't last long enough. What we really need is year-round capital punishment on TV every night with sponsors. Gotta have sponsors. I'm sure as long as we're killing people, Marlboro cigarettes and Dow Chemical would be proud to participate. Proud to Participate. Balance the stupid fucking budget. And let me say this to you my interesting Judeo-Christian friends: not only do I recommend crucifixions, I'd be in favor of bringing back beheadings. Beheadings on TV. Slow motion, instant replay. And maybe you can let the heads roll down a little hill, and fall into one of five numbered holes. Let the people at home gamble on which hole the head is gonna fall into. And you do it in a stadium so the Mob can gamble on it too. Raise a little more money. And if you want to expand the violence a little longer to sell a few more commercials instead of using an axe you do the beheadings with a handsaw. Hey, don't bailout on me now goddamnit. The blood is already on our hands, all we're talking about is a matter of degree. You want something a little more delicate? We'll do the beheadings with an olive fork. That would be nice. And it would take a good goddamn long time. There's a lot of good things we could be doing. When's the last time we burned someone at the stake? It's been too long.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] Here's another form of capital punishment. It comes out of a nice rich religious tradition: burning people at the stake. Sponsor: Bridgeford Charcoal. And you put it on TV on Sunday mornings. The Sunday morning evangelical send us an offering praise Jesus human bonfire. You think that wouldn't get good ratings? In this sick fucking country? Shit, you'd have people skipping church to watch this stuff. And you take the money they send in the offerings and you use it to balance the budget.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] What about boiling people in oil? Boy, those were the days weren't they? You get the oil going real good, a nice high rolling boil. And then, slowly, at the end of a rope, you lower the perpetrator head first into the boiling oil. Huh? You talk about fun shit! And just to encourage citizen participation you let the mob in the stadium control the speed of the rope. Good clean wholesome family entertainment, the kids will love it. The kids will love it. And the same time they're enjoying themselves we're teaching

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 12:43-14:40

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37



them a nice Christian moral lesson: boiling people in oil, sponsor: Crisco. And maybe, maybe instead of boiling all these guys, every now and then you can French fry a couple of them. French fried felons. Dip a guy in egg batter, just for a goof. Kind of a tempura thing. Jeffrey Dahmer never thought of this shit did he? Jeffrey Dahmer eat your heart out. Which is an interesting thought in and of itself.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] Alright, enough nostalgia. What about some modern forms of capital punishment? How about we throw a guy off the World Trade Center and whomever he lands on wins the Publishers Clearing House. Okay. Something a little more sophisticated: you dip a guy in brown gravy and lock him in a small room with a wolverine who's high on angel dust. Here's one guy who's not going to be fucking with too many kids at the bust stop for a while. Here's something really nice you could do: you shoot a guy out of a high-speed catapult, right into a brick-wall. Trouble is it would be over too quick. No good for TV. You'd have to do a whole bunch of guys right in a row. Rapid-fire capital punishment. Fifteen catapults. While you're shooting off one, you're loading up the others. Of course, every now and then you would have to stop to clean off the wall. Cleanliness, right next to godliness. Alright, high-tech. I sense some of yous are waiting for high-tech. I got it. You take a small tactical nuclear weapon, and stick it up a guy's ass. A thermonuclear suppository. Preparation H-bomb. You talk about fallout huh? Whoa! Or you take the bomb and you stick it just inside that little hole on the end of a guy's dick you know? Yeah. A bomb in a dick. When it goes off the guy wouldn't know whether he was coming or going. Get out of here. I got you.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] I got a lot of good ideas. Balance the stupid fucking budget. Here's another idea. I'm going to save you a whole lot of money on prisons but at the same time we are still going to remove from society many of our more annoying citizens. Four groups are going away permanently. First group: violent criminals. Here's what you do with these Emmy Award winners. You take the entire state of Kansas, you move everybody out. You give them a couple hundred dollars for their inconvenience you know? That'll be fair and then you move them out, you put a big ten-story electric fence around Kansas and Kansas becomes a permanent prison farm for violent criminals. No parole, no police, no supplies the only thing you give them is lethal weapons and live ammunition so they can communicate in a meaningful way. Then you put the whole thing on cable TV. The violence network, VNN. And for a corporate sponsor, you get one of those company's that loves to smear its logo feces all over the landscape. Budweiser will jump at this shit in half a minute.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] + [GUC] All right next group: sex criminals. Completely incurable. You got to lock them up. You could outlaw religion and most of these sex crimes would disappear in a couple of generations. But we don't have time for rational solutions. Much easier to fence off another rectangular state. Rectangular states are cheaper to fence, saves the taxpayers money you know? This time Wyoming, but only for true sex offenders. We're not going to bother consenting adults who like to dress up in leather Boy Scout uniforms and smash each other in the head with ballpeen hammers while they take turns blowing their cat. There's certainly nothing wrong with that. It's a victimless hobby and think of how good the cat must feel. No were only going to lock up rapist and molesters, those hopeless romantics who are so full of love they can't help getting a little of it on you. Usually on your leg. You take all these heavy breathing fun seekers and you stick them in Wyoming and you let them suck, fuck and fondle. You let

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 14:45-21:37

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 21:46-29:48

them blow, chew, sniff, lick, whip, gobble and corn hole each other until their testicles are whistling 'O'Come All Ye Faithful.' Then you turn on the camera and you got the Sperm Channel. And don't forget our corporate sponsor, were going to let Budweiser put little logo patches on the rapists pants right here: This Pud's for You.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] All right, next group: drug addicts and alcoholics. Not all of them, don't get nervous. Just the ones who are making life difficult for at least one other person. And were not going to bother first offenders. People deserve a chance to clean up. Everyone will get twelve chances to clean up. Okay. All right. Fifteen ... fifteen. That's fine and that's it. If you can't make it in fifteen tries off you go to Colorado. Colorado, a perfect place for staying loaded. Each week, all of the illegal drugs confiscated in the United States, that the police and DEA don't keep for their own personal use, will be air-dropped into Colorado. And were going to turn the Coors Brewery over to the beer drinking assholes and everyone can stay wasted, wired, stoned, bombed, hammered, smashed and shit-faced around the clock on another new cable channel: Shit Faced Central, this is the real Rocky Mountain High!<sup>2</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] Okay, I've saved my favorite group for last: The maniacs and crazy people. Yeah. The ones who live out where the buses don't run. And I distinguish between maniacs and crazy people. A maniac will beat nine people to death with a steel dildo. A crazy person will beat nine people to death with a steel dildo, but he'll be wearing a Bugs Bunny suit at the time. So you can't put them all away. You know you got to keep some of them around just for the entertainment. Like a guy who tells you that the King of Sweden is using his penis as a radio transmitter to send anti-Semitic lesbian meatloaf recipes to Soupy Sales and Marvin Hamlisch. A guy like that you want to give him his own radio show. No, the maniac farm will be reserved strictly for hopeless cases, like a guy who gets a big tattoo on his chest of Liza Minnelli taking a shit. You know? And he tells you if he wiggles a certain way it looks like she's wiping her ass, you know? A guy like that you want to get him into custody as quickly as possible. Now for the maniac farm, I think there's no question, we got to go with Utah. Utah, easy to fence ... easy to fence, right next to Wyoming and Colorado is right next Kansas and that means all four groups of our most amusing citizens are now in one place, except for the big fences.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] + [GUC] And I think I have another one of my really good ideas for cable TV: gates. Small sliding gates in the fences. Think of what you got here. Think of what you've got. Predators, degenerates, crack heads and fruitcakes. Nine hundred miles of fence separating them. Every fifty miles you put a small sliding gate, but the gates are only ten inches wide and they're only open once a month, for seven seconds. And you know something: fuck cable, this shit has got to be on pay-per-view. Because if those gates are only open seven seconds a month, you are going to have some mighty interesting people pushing and shoving to be first on line. Deeply disturbed, armed, cranky lunatics, on drugs. You know the ones. A lot of tattoos, lot of teeth broken off at the gum line ... the true face of America. And every time you open the gates a few of the more aggressive ones are going to get through. The crème da la crème. The alphas. They're going to get through. They're going to find each other and their going to cross breed and pretty soon you have a melting pot. Child killers, corpse fuckers, drug zombies and full-blown wackoloons wondering the landscape in search of truth and fun.

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 21:46-29:48

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 21:46-29:48

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 21:46-29:48

Just like now. Everyone will have guns. Everyone will have drugs. And no one will be in charge. Just like now. But at least we'll have a balanced budget.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] What else is troubling me? Mickey Mouse's birthday being announced on the television news as if it's an actual event. I don't give a shit. If I cared about Mickey Mouse's birthday I'd have memorized it years ago and I'd send him a card. Dear Mickey, Happy Birthday. Love, George. I don't do that why? I don't give a shit. Fuck Mickey Mouse. Fuck him in the asshole with a big rubber dick. Then break it off and beat him with the rest of it. I hope Mickey dies. I do, I hope he goddamn dies. I hope he gets a hold of some tainted cheese and dies lonely and forgotten behind the baseboard of a soiled bathroom in a poor neighborhood with his hand in Goofy's pants. Mickey Mouse, no wonder no one in the world takes our country serious. Do we waste valuable television time informing our citizens of the age of an imaginary rodent.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Now, there's one thing you might have noticed I don't complain about: politicians. Everybody complains about politicians. Everybody says they suck. Well where do people think these politicians come from? They don't fall out of the sky. They don't pass through a membrane from another reality. They come from American parents and American families, American homes, American schools, American churches, American businesses and American universities. And they're elected by American citizens. This is the best we can do folks. This is what we have to offer. It's what our system produces. Garbage in, garbage out.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] If you have selfish ignorant citizens, if you have selfish, ignorant citizens, you're going to get selfish, ignorant leaders and term limits ain't going to do you any good. You're just going to wind up with a brand new bunch of selfish, ignorant Americans. So maybe, maybe, maybe it's not the politicians who suck. Maybe something else sucks around here, like, the public. Yeah, the public sucks. There's a nice campaign slogan for somebody. The public sucks, fuck hope. Fuck hope. Because if it's really just the fault of these politicians then where are all the other bright people of conscience? Where are all the bright honest intelligent Americans ready to step in and save the nation and lead the way? We don't have people like that in this country. Everybody's at the mall, scratching his ass, picking his nose, taking his credit card out of his Fannie pack and buying a pair of sneakers with lights in them.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] So I have solved this little political dilemma for myself in a very simple way: on Election Day, I stay home. I don't vote. Fuck them. Fuck them. I don't vote. Two reasons, two reasons I don't vote. First of all, it's meaningless. This country was bought and sold and paid for a long time ago. The shit they shuffle around every four years, prrrt. Doesn't mean a fucking thing. And secondly I don't vote 'cause I believe if you vote you have no right to complain. People like to twist that around. I know they say... they say: 'Well if you don't vote you have no right to complain.' But where's the logic in that? If you vote and you elect dishonest, incompetent people and they get into office and screw everything up well you are responsible for what they have done. You caused the problem. You voted them in. You have no right to complain. I, on the other hand, who did not vote, who did not vote, who in fact, did not even leave the house on Election Day, am in no way responsible for what these people have done and have every right to complain as loud as I want about the mess you created that I had nothing to do with. So, I know that a little later on this year you're going to have another one of those really

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 21:46-29:48

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 13:15-14:14

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 26:52-30:06

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 26:52-30:06

swell presidential elections that you like so much. You'll enjoy yourselves. It will be a lot of fun. I'm sure as soon as the election is over you're country will improve immediately. As for me, I'll be home on that day doing essentially the same thing as you, the only difference is, when I get finished masturbating, I'm going to have a little something to show for it folks. Thank you very much.<sup>1</sup>

### **David Cross – Comedy Half Hour**

[PEP] + [PES] I'd like to officially tell the folks at McDonald's, 'You know what? You guys don't have to advertise as much as you do. Ok. We get it. Yeah. You're the folks who sell hamburgers. Thank you very much. We understand completely, there's no need for the incessant 24 hour commercials radio ads, buses. It's just insane. They don't have to advertise as much. I mean, I don't know why they do that. It's not like when I wake up in the morning and if don't see an ad from McDonald's I'm not confused. I'm not sitting there going 'hey did McDonalds go out of business? Where's the commercials.' They don't have to do it. I mean, all they have to do is stop one day like every four months, you know, that's it. Their sales aren't gonna go down. They'll save millions of dollars and then maybe they can put that money back into the system you know, maybe pay their minimum wage help an extra buck an hour, how about that you know? Yeah, spread the wealth. That way the next time I go into McDonalds I don't have to deal with some understandably pissed off 19 year old kid who's making after-taxes \$2.10 an hour to stand over a fucking 900 degree Fryalator all day, you know, sitting there going: 'can somebody explain to me again why I shouldn't be selling drugs?'<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] And the phrase minimum wage man can't we think of something else to call it. That's the most, what does that do for your self-esteem? What a horrible thing minimum wage, isn't there something else we can call it? 'Well-it's-better-than-nothing wage' yeah that's what I'm making now. I'm making the 'well-at-least-I-don't-live-in-Haiti wage.' You can't say minimum wage to people when they're asking you questions. 'Hey man, so how's it going. What are you making now?' Minimum wage. Yeah, lowest amount legally possible. That's where I am right now yeah. Oh they'd like to pay me less. They would. They can't. Legally they can't. I win. I'm the winner. Yeah. Great'.<sup>3</sup>

**1997**

### **Bill Hicks – Rant in E-Minor**

[PG] I'll tell you what's really pissing me off these days. I'll tell you who I'm sick of. These pro-lifers. Okay here's the deal: you lose, shut up, go home. They're basically acting as a terrorist group in America right now. Pro-life. You ever look at their faces? 'I'm Pro-Life.' Why don't they look it, you know? Don't you just want to hang with them and play Pictionary all night? 'Uhh, is that a cross? That's right. Uhh, is that another cross? That's right. Looks like a cross. You're right again. You're very good. I'm Pro-Life.'<sup>4</sup>

[PG] I'd hate to be a poor kid at an orphanage if these couples come fucking adopting. 'We're pro-life we're here to adopt.' Kid goes 'Oh not me not me no. I'm fine in here really. Don't send me home with the Flanders. Please. Please.' What bugs me about them is if you're so Pro-life, if you really are this feeling, Pro-life, do me a favor, don't lock

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *Back in Town*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 26:52-30:06

<sup>2</sup> David Cross. *Comedy Half Hour*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 5:19-7:48

<sup>3</sup> David Cross. *Comedy Half Hour*. HBO. 1996. Interval: 5:19-7:48

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 10:00-13:48

arms and block medical clinics. If you're so Pro-life do me a favor, lock arms and block cemeteries. Ok? See how committed you are to this fucking premise. 'She can't come in! She was ninety-eight she was hit by a bus. There's options. She's starting to stink let's go.' I want to see pro-lifers at funerals with crowbars opening fucking caskets: 'get out.' I mean, if you're gonna do the premise, go all the fucking way.<sup>1</sup>

[PG] But I find watching them on the news and watching their behavior, I finally had the abortion question answered in my own mind. 'Cause there is that age-old question: at what point does the fetus become a human being. And after watching pro-lifers in action, I realized, there's a lot of adults who haven't become human beings yet.<sup>2</sup>

[PG] Damn, I hate playing with the Pro-life people. And oddly enough, that face, is the exact same face non-smokers have too. 'I'm a non-smoker. I'm Pro-life. I'm a Pro-life non-smoker.' Let the party begin! I've been getting that look a lot lately because I started smoking again. See, I don't know how with a support group like you I've fucking failed you know. How did I fail?<sup>3</sup>

[PG] But I've always found religion to be fascinating. Ideas such as how people act on their beliefs. Pro-lifers murdering doctors. Pro-lifers murdering people. It's irony on the base level but I like it. It's real basic irony, right, but still, you can get a hoot, it's a hoot, it's a fucking hoot. A pro-lifer will kill your ass.<sup>4</sup>

[PG] + [PES] That's what fundamentalism breeds though: no irony. You see, they take the word literally. Fundamentalists, yeah. Well, once again, I recommend a healthy dose of psilocybin mushrooms. Three weeks ago two of my friends and I went to a ranch in Fredericksburg in Texas and took what Terence McKenna calls a heroic dose: five dried grams. Let me tell you: our third eye was squeegeed quite cleanly. Wow. And I'm glad they're against the law. Do you know what happened when I took them? I laid in a field of green grass for four hours going 'My god I love everything.' The heavens parted, God looked down, and rained gifts of forgiveness onto my being peeling me on every level, psychically, physically, emotionally and I realized our true nature is spirit not body we are eternal beings and God's love is unconditional and there's nothing we can ever do to change that. It is only our illusion that we are separate from god or that we are alone, in fact the reality is, we are one with God and he loves us. Now, if that isn't a hazard to this country, you see my point. How are we gonna keep building nuclear weapons, you know what I mean? What's gonna happen to the arms industry when we realize we're all one? It's gonna fuck up the economy. The economy that's fake anyway. Which would be a real bummer. You see why the Government's cracking down on the idea of experiencing unconditional love.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] Isn't it interesting that the two drugs that are legal, alcohol and cigarettes, two drugs that do absolutely nothing for you whatsoever, and drugs that grow naturally upon this planet, drugs that open your eyes up to make you realize how you're being fucked everyday of your life, those drugs are against the law? Wow. Coincidence? I don't know. I'm sure their motives are pure but...<sup>6</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] I just think it's interesting to see how people act on their beliefs. You know what I mean. 'Cause your all beliefs, they're just that, they're how you were taught and raised. That doesn't make them real. That's why I always recommend a psychedelic

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 10:00-13:48

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 10:00-13:48

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 10:00-13:48

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 27:50-32:12

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 27:50-32:12

<sup>6</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 27:50-32:12



still can't get hard so they call in Barbara Bush. She takes off her pearls and sticks them up his ass. Squats over him, undoes her girdle, her wrinkled labia unfolds half way to her knees like some boneless scrotum. She grunts and squeezes out a Lincoln to his mouth. Finally his dick gets half hard, and this little bubble forms on the end of his dick with a maggot inside. The bubble pops and the maggot squirms off, I guess to join some pro-life movement or something. Am I the only one who sees that? Thank God. He's a scat muncher. He munches scat. I'm so proud of that routine I'm sorry. I reached some new creative level with that one. It all started I came up with the phrase 'scat muncher' and I worked backwards and Rush Limbaugh scat muncher I think I got something here, wait a minute. A muncher of scat.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] + [SPF] But anyway, if any of you all have been watching Public Access lately and seen the Footage that they are running of the Bradley tanks shooting fire into the [Branch Davidians Waco Texas] compound. You've seen that? Well, I'll tell you it's an interesting story to me because, first of all, it goes against the party line that we were all told: that they were shooting tear gas into the compound to convince the women and children to leave. While also busting down the walls, which, I don't know if a kid was hit with a wall, if that would help him. Kids are resilient, they're pretty adaptive. 'Oh mommy, I'm alright, let's get out of here though.' But, the implications are fucking harrowing. If you've seen the footage, the Bradley tank shoots fire, and the implications basically are that the FBI, the ATF up to Janet Reno including President Clinton are uhm, liars and murderers. Yeah, and the fact that no major news source has picked up on this story would lead me, well, let's conclude together, that they're the propaganda arm of the elite few who actually run this fucking country. And we are lied to on a regular fucking basis so that we will remain in the dark, a docile apathetic herd of fucking cattle that doesn't know the true agenda of this country. So I thought it was fascinating.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] + [PES] I knew Clinton ... I knew he'd become one of the boys when he launched 22 cruise missiles against Baghdad. He launched 22 cruise missiles, what are they, \$3 million apiece, against Baghdad, in retaliation for the alleged assassination attempt against George Bush, which failed. We killed 6 innocent people doing this. I personally think it was a little overkill over there. What we should have done is: we should have embarrassed the Iraqis. Here's how we could have done it: we should have assassinated Bush and said 'That's how you do it towel-head. Don't fuck with us.' And see that way, if Bush had been the one who had died there would have been no loss of innocent life. Yeah. I'm a problem solver.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] But I have this theory: that whoever's elected, whoever runs the media gauntlet, and whoever, you know, you run the media gauntlet and you realize who's gonna play the game or not. And that's who we eventually vote on: people who've already sold out every idea of democracy and who are going to be the puppet lapdogs of the elite few who actually run this country, the major corporations, and the families, the few families who own them all. I believe when they're elected President, they're taken to a room, a smoky room, twelve guys with cigars, all industrialists, and a screen comes down. And they go: 'Roll the tape'. And what the new President sees is footage of Kennedy's assassination only from an angle we've never seen it. Ha, it looks like the cameraman was right over grassy knoll actually. The screen goes back up, the lights come on, the industrialists go: 'Any Questions?' And the new president goes 'what do you all want me to say?' and they go 'Here's your agenda my buddy friend. You can play

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 44:07-46:27

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 49:30-51:01

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 51:13-52:20

your little puppet fucking role and your first mission is to bomb Iraq to make people think we are a tough nation.’<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] And it’s so funny to me when they were on the news too about the Iraqi alleged assassination attempt. Basically, it was a car bomb, that, you know, the guy driving was gonna kill himself too. And everyone’s going ‘What a cowardly act. What a cowardly act.’ Well, wait a minute. This guy is in a car bomb, gonna blow himself up against this huge fucking capitalist New World Order leader America. And meanwhile we’re launching cruise missiles from 200 miles away on floating iron islands. Who are the cowards again? Point out cowardice again to me in the dictionary. I apparently didn’t get the whole meaning correctly when I read it. Then again when I read ‘cowardice’ I always, you know, uh, who fucking cares?<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] + [SPF] Folks, it’s time to evolve ideas. You know evolution did not end with us growing thumbs. You do know that right? It didn’t end there. We’re at the point now where we’re going to have to evolve ideas. The reason the world is so fucked up is we’re undergoing evolution. And the reason our institutions our traditional religions are all crumbling is because they’re no longer relevant. They’re no longer relevant. So it’s time for us to create a new philosophy and perhaps even a new religion you see. And that’s ok ‘cause that’s our right, ‘cause we are free children of God, with minds who can imagine anything, and that’s kind of our role. How do you evolve ideas? I’ll give you an example right here. By the way, there are more dick jokes coming, please relax. I know I’m starting to lose them a little bit here with this shit. I’m digging a fucking hole right now. ‘Where the hell did Bill go? He dig himself right through the planet.’ I can hear people heckling in Chinese right now. ‘Why don’t do dick joke? Do dick joke with crowbar. No one want to hear your philosophy. They want to hear dick joke.’ Wow, what a completely rational heckler. ‘They pay to hear dick joke, not to hear you talk about the president Bush.’<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Here’s how you evolve an idea I’ll give you an example. Why is the drug czar in this country? Well, let’s go back. Why do we have a drug czar in this country, a)? B) Why is he a cop? Why isn’t he a guy in recovery who’s had an alcohol and or drug addiction and overcome it? And why doesn’t he help people with the same problem with compassion rather than condemnation? Why do we put people who are on drugs in jail? They’re sick. They’re not criminals. Sick people don’t get healed in jail. See it makes no sense. And if we evolve the idea you see the planet might be more compassionate and something like heaven might dawn. Heaven might dawn or something weird like that. You see? That’s how you evolve an idea.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] I’ll give you another example of how to evolve an idea. (...) Mushrooms grow naturally on the planet. They’re against the law. Marijuana grows naturally on the planet. It’s against the law. Do you think making nature against the law seems a bit, I don’t know, unnatural? Why are the two drugs that are legal, alcohol and cigarettes, two drugs that do absolutely nothing for you at all, legal? But the drugs that might open your mind up to realize how you’re being fucked every day of your life, those drugs are against the law. Huh, coincidence? One never knows. And yet, I posed these theories for you to dwell on because quite frankly they’re wearing me down.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 52:27-53:44

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 53:45-54:30

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 54:39-56:09

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 56:12-57:06

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 57:07-59:00



[PES] + [PEP] You want a better world, ladies and gentlemen? Legalize pot right now. You want to end the deficit, legalize pot right now. I am so sick of hearing about the goddamn deficit I could fucking puke blood. There ain't no fucking deficit. It's a fucking lie. And it's a fucking illusion in the first place. But you want to end it, you want to end it? Legalize pot: the biggest cash crop in America. Deficit's gone.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [SPF] But I am so sick of hearing about 'Well, your leaders misspent your hard earned tax dollars so you the people now have to tighten your belts, and we gotta start paying this back. Because we, your leaders, misspent your money'. You know what would make tightening my belt a little easier? If I could tighten it around Jesse Helms scrawny little chicken neck. Aw, I feel better about the sacrifice right now. You fucking tobacco-pushing motherfucker. You are the worst fucking drug dealer in the fucking world. You scrawny, right wing, fear-mongering, piece of sucker of Satan's cock. You suck Satan's cock. You fucking chicken neck, fucking little cracker. I'd tighten my belt if that were the case. I'd eat Bologna for a week, you know what I mean? I'd sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] Boy, Jesse Helms is another great one isn't he? Just another fevered ego tanking our collective unconscious. 'Cause you know, anyone like Swagger, anyone that far to the right is hiding a very deep and dark secret. You do know that, right? I'm an armchair fucking psychologist. But, you know when Jesse Helms finally dies he's gonna commit suicide, first of all, in a wash tub outback underneath a pecan tree. He's gonna slash his wrists and he's gonna write in blood 'I've been a bad boy.' But you know they're gonna find the skins of young children drying in his attic. Swarms of horseflies going in and out of the eaves. And on CNN over and over his wife going: 'I always wondered about Jesse's collection of little shoes.' Anyone that far to the right is hiding a deep dark secret.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] But alcohol is legal. They push alcohol twenty-four hours a day on TV. They push it down your throat. Drink beer, drink beer, drink beer. Why? Well, 'cause it makes you slow and stupid and docile. And that's the way we like you to be folks. You know, it's only the number two killer drug in the world. But I've actually seen beer commercials during War Against Drugs specials. No sense of irony, no irony. No one fucking gives a shit. Marijuana, you know.... Cigarettes legal, alcohol legal, kill more people than all other illegal drugs combined, times one thousand. They are legal. Marijuana, a drug that kills no one, and, let's put it in a time frame: ever. Marijuana is against the law. You tell me why. I've given up.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] You want a better world? Legalize pot. Okay. It's a better drug. I'll prove it to you. You're at a ball game, you're at a concert. Someone's really violent, aggressive and obnoxious. Are they drunk or are they smoking pot? [Audience yells drunk] Wow, we all know the truth. I've never seen people on pot get in a fight because it's fucking impossible. 'Hey buddy.' 'Hey what?' End of argument. Say you get in a car accident. And you've been smoking pot. You're only going four miles an hour. 'EeerTuush. Holy shit we hit something ... You've got to open the garage door dude. It's okay. I forgot we were going in reverse.' At least no one was hurt. Garage door has to be replaced. Boom. A job has been created.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] There's gonna be some sacrifices when this happens. There are. I hope we can live with them. The end of our military involvement, as we spread democracy via gunpoint all over the world. The end of racial hatred. It's gonna be gone. Oh, can we live

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 59:12-59:44

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 59:47-1:00:56

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:00:59-1:01:59

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:02:03-1:03:14

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:03:17-1:04:52

with that? You all cool with that? Huh, you all right? The end of being the enemy of the planet, instead living in harmony with it. Can we do that? You all cool with that? <sup>1</sup>

[PEP] Everything they tell you about pot is a lie. Tell you 'pot smoking makes you unmotivated.' That is definitely a lie. 'Cause when you're high, you can do everything you normally do just as well, you just realize it's not worth the fucking effort. Big difference. Sure, I could get up at dawn, get in traffic, go to a job I hate, that does not inspire me creatively whatsoever, for the rest of my life. I could do that. Puff Puff Puff. Or, I could sleep till noon, get up and learn how to play the sitar. What is it one string? How fucking hard could that be?"<sup>2</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] Folks there's gonna be sacrifices: the end of nationalism. Can you live with that? The idea that the world is round and we're all brothers. That's gonna happen. You ok with that? Is everyone cool? They're pretty big sacrifices. I know I like living in the world of fear as much as you do. And I love the fact that we live in a world of unresolvable problems that in the future hopefully our children's children will one day live in a nice world. But until then the capitalist's boot is going to stomp on your fucking head like it always has. Can you live with that though? 'No. We want fear and hate'.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] It's time to evolve ideas folks. These are the ideas by the way that have kept me virtually anonymous in this country. For about 16 years of continuous travelling, hard work, broken relationships, no relationships. You know, I'm totally anonymous in this country. Meanwhile, they're draining the Pacific and putting up bench seats for Carrot Top's next Showtime Special you know? Carrot Top: for people who didn't get Gallagher. You know we had Gallagher. 'He was too heavy. I like Carrot Top. He's got red hair and that just cracks me up just looking at him.' 'I don't even need material.' 'Just I look at him and I start laughing.' 'He does look like the Wendy's girl. He does look like the Wendy's girl.' 'Honey you're screaming in the next trailer.' 'Shut up I'm watching Carrot Top.' When did we become fucking Dogpatch? That's what I want to know.

[GUC] + [PES] Only America could have a comic named Gallagher who ends his show by destroying good food with a sledgehammer. All these fat Americans on the front row 'This is comedy. That Bill Hicks is filled with hate. This is just pure funny.' The guy destroys good food with a hammer. Gee, I wonder why we're hated the world over. Anybody got a clue? I guarantee you there's gonna be no Gallagher World Tour any time soon. And if there is, there's gonna be no dates in Somalia. I don't know if those little bags of skin and bones will be able to appreciate Gallagher's particular brand of wit. 'He destroys food with hammer. We could feed our whole family for another week with his last routine. We must go see Gallagher. Maybe sit on the front row so I can catch a watermelon rind and feed my little boy Habiscus.' That's American man: just destroying food with a hammer while the world watches. I just think that's hilarious. Starving people all over, good food.<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] And it all started folks when he [Jay Leno] did a Doritos commercial. And here's the deal. I'm drawing the line in the sand like Colonel Fannin did at the Alamo. You're with me or you're not. If you do a commercial, you're off the artistic roll call forever. Case fucking closed. Man, doing Doritos? I was so sad Jay doing Doritos, just Satan fucking him in the ass on national TV. 'Hi, I'm Jay Leno. Remember when I used to be funny? I'm here for Doritos.' Satan is just there '[growling sound]'. 'Here Satan try the

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:05:10-1:05:42

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:05:50-1:06:51

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:06:56-1:07:37

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:07:43-1:10:30

nacho flavored brand.’ [Satan chewing] ‘Cool and refreshing [more growlin].’ ‘Tonight on the show we got Joey Louis and Patrick Duffy.’ Man, if that were the guest list he’d use a fucking Uzi on himself. Just be chewing fucking lead. You do a commercial you’re off the artistic roll call forever. You’ve now got a price on your head, you’re a corporate fucking whore, and you’re just another whore at the capitalist’s gangbang. Case fucking closed.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] It’s time to evolve ideas. That’s where we’re at. And we can do it. I know we can do it. ‘Cause I’ve done it. It’s happened in my life. My life’s changed a lot. We can do it man. That’s why you know this whole thing about the Branch Davidian, the whole lie about ‘well we broke down the compound because we heard child abuse was going on.’ You know, why aren’t there Bradley tanks knocking down Catholic Churches if that’s the case? If child abuse is in fact your concern, is what my point is.<sup>2</sup>

[PG] I’m sorry if anyone here is Catholic. I’m not sorry if you’re offended. I’m actually sorry just the fact that you’re Catholic. It’s gotta be one of the most ludicrous beliefs ever. Like these vampire priests sink their twin fangs of guilt and sin into you as a child and suck your joy of life out of you for the rest of your fucking existence.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] And I love watching the Pope bounce around in his little Pope-mobile. That’s gotta be hoot number one on my fucking CNN list. Just, I want to hold a show with the Pope just bouncing around in that all terrain Pope-mobile with the three feet of bullet-proof Plexiglas around him. Boy, there’s faith in action. You see, you know he’s really the spokesman for God, because only God’s spokesman would need Plexiglass bulletproof. Don’t you think? Don’t you all read that the same way? Are we on the same wavelength? Are you all laughing with me, or at me?”<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] It’s time to evolve ideas folks. Here’s one. The idea that childbirth is a miracle. Now, I don’t know who started this little rumor. But it is not true. ‘Oh childbirth is such a miracle, it’s such a miracle.’ Wrong! No more a miracle than eating food and having a turd fall out of your butt. It is a chemical biological reaction. The end. Case closed. The end. You wanna hear a miracle? Ok. A miracle is raising a kid who doesn’t talk at a fucking movie theatre. That is a fucking miracle.<sup>5</sup>

[GUC] Childbirth is not a miracle. It would be a miracle if people who had children and had a world to bring up to, were prepared to bring them to it, that was conducive to childrearing. That would be a fucking miracle. It’s not a miracle folks if every nine months any yin-yang in the world can drop a litter of these mewling cabbages on the planet. And in case you haven’t checked the single-mom statistics lately, the miracle is spreading like wildfire. Hallelujah. Trailer parks all over America filling up with little miracles. Thonk, thonk, thonk, like frogs laying eggs. Thonk. ‘Look at all my little miracles filling up my trailer like a sardine can. You know what would be a real miracle? If I could remember your daddy’s name. Thonk. I guess I’m gonna have to call you Trucker Junior. That’s all I remember about your daddy was his fuzzy little pot belly riding on top of me shooting his caffeine ridden semen into my belly to produce my little water head miracle cracker baby child. Thonk. There’s your brother, Pizza Boy Delivery Junior.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:13:03-1:14:36

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:00-1:16:29.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:34-1:16:56.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:16:57-1:17:41.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:17:45-1:19:00

<sup>6</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:19:32-1:20:57

[GUC] Isn't that a fucking miracle man? All those unwanted illiterate children pumped into planet earth. Keep them coming folks. Keep the miracle happening. COPS needs to stay on the air. This is COPS: The next generation you all are pumping out.<sup>1</sup>

[PG] + [PES] You know it would be a miracle if these pro-life fucks adopt some of the millions of unwanted children that are already on the fucking planet. I've actually had pro-lifers say 'why don't you adopt a child? And why don't you adopt a child? 'Cause I hate them and couldn't care fuck one. Okay? Sorry. My political hat's now in the political ring. Third party, just been formed. 'I'm pro-choice, I'm pro-life'. I don't give a fuck about them at all. Boom. New party just been formed motherfucker. Couldn't care fuck one. People who hate people Party. 'People who hate people, come together'. 'No'. It's so hard to get this party off the ground. There's a lot of us out there we just don't want to gather together. We're so unorganized. 'Come to the party.' 'Will there be other people there?' 'Yeah.' 'Can't make it, sorry.'<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] 'Lightning is gonna strike you mister, mister 'I've got opinions about legalization of drugs and we should live in heaven' you evil man. No more war, it's in the Bible, there should be war.' Oh boy, here we go. Another philosophical discussion with a Christian. Oh boy. Let's settle in for the long haul. Okay. So you believe the Bible is the exact word of God, correct? 'That's right.' Then I guess we're done arguing. 'Cause you're a fuckin ... let me ask you a question: you believe the Bible is the exact word of god right? 'That's right.' Okay, well then let me ask you a question: what, why did God change from a vengeful, jealous God in the Old Testament, to a forgiving loving God in the new testament? 'Well, he realized that what he was doing needed to...' God didn't realize anything. He already knows it, moron fuck.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] You ever notice how people who believe in creationism look really unevolved? They always got their eyes real close together, big eyebrow ridges, hairy hands and feet. 'I believe God created me in one day.' Yeah, looks like he rushed it. It took billions of years to get me. Eternity. Child birth is not a miracle. I'll go you one further. Child birth isn't natural. Wow. Back that one up motherfucker. It's not man, we're not supposed to give birth, we're not supposed to age or die. Did you know that? We're supposed to be in a garden right now, leaning against a tree, naming animals and the fact that you don't know the name of every animal in the world tells me something. We left the garden too fucking soon. 'What's that?' 'I don't know.' 'It's a wombat. Get back to the fucking garden.' And you're not allowed to rut and reproduce until you know the motherfucking earth planet that you're going raise your kids on.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] Here is the idea that has made me anonymous in America. If you have children here tonight, and I assume some of you do, I am sorry to tell you this: they are not special. Oh, wait, wait, wait, hold on. Let's don't have, any. Wait, wait, wait. Don't, don't misunderstand me. I know a lot of you all 'Whaaat? Whaaat?' Let's be clear on this. I know you think they're special. I am aware of that. I'm just trying to tell you: they're not. Do you know that every time a guy comes, he comes 200 million sperm? Do you know that? 200 million sperm. And you mean to tell me you think your child is special? Because 1 out of 200 million sperm, that load, we're talking one load, connected. Gee, what are the fucking odds? 200, you know what that means? I have wiped entire civilizations off of my chest ... with a grey gym sock. That is special. Entire nations have flaked and crusted in the hair around my navel. Maybe even Gideon. That is special. And

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:21:00-1:21:33

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:21:35-1:22:37

<sup>3</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:22:48-1:24:04

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:24:10-1:25:27

I want you to think about that, you two egg carrying beings out there. With that 'holier than thou we have the gift of life' attitude. I've tossed universes in my underpants while napping. Boom, a milky way shoots into my Jockey shorts. Ohhh, what's for fucking breakfast?<sup>1</sup>

### **Eddie Griffin – Voodoo Child**

[GUC] I'd like to take this time to thank you Caucasian people for inviting us here to America. That was real nice of y'all. Y'all laughing I'm serious as a mofucka. 'Cause I watched the discovery channel and Africa ain't a place a nigga really want to be right now. Them mofuckers over there starving hungry I'm staying right here in America where I can get a bucket of chicken for \$3.95 you know what I'm saying?<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] Fuck the dumb shit man. 'Cause you always see them starving kids commercials of Africans. Looks like he's eating powdered doughnuts all around their mouths and shit. Flies all around their damn heads. I'm watching last night, one of them had a fly on his eyeball, on his goddamn eyeball. I'm sitting there yelling at the TV set 'blink motherfucker blink!' I know they weak and that thing, but goddamn get the fly off. Fly just roller-skating around his shit. You know what I'm saying?<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] And white people when y'all get mad at us like over the OJ thing, you remember that, one nigga fucked up they want to kill all of us. Fuck OJ, that's not our nigga. That's y'all nigga. You know what I'm saying? After he fucked up you want to send him back to us. We don't want him. That's y'all nigga. He never killed nobody when he hung out with niggas. Gotta watch out, chop chop, staff staff. We knew he wasn't a nigga from them fucking commercials. Only a nigga that can run through the airport, through security, nobody touch him. Let one of us in here run through a fucking airport, 'Click click. Get down! Get down!' <sup>4</sup>

[GUC] White people, when y'all get mad at us, please stop saying this shit: 'why don't you go back to Africa?' What? How the fuck we going to go back to some shit we ain't never been to? Y'all act like we were born with maps of that mofucka in our head. Like we'll just land over there 'take me to Shambuku's house.' 'Now go down three elephants make a left at the lion, the nigga over there he over there.' We don't ask y'all to go back to England. Y'all ain't from this mofucka either. Yeah so 'why don't you go to bloody England done in gale cocksucker'.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] I ain't going back to Africa. No, no, no. 'Cause some of them Africans do not like us. Black Americans, they can't stand us. From the east coast you know what I'm talking about. I was in D.C. on tour right first time I went there. You know what I'm saying? I wanted to go out and see the city. So I jump in the cab 'cause you know nigga was broke at the time, when no TV show or limo nigga, was taxiiii. So I wanted to go see the White House, the Capitol, Internal Revenue Service building, just in case they overtaxing the nigga I know what building to blow the fuck up. So I'm in the cab, the motherfucking cab driver had the audacity to turn around and say 'You're not original black man.' You want to run that by me again bru? 'I said you're not original black man.' I said 'How black I gotta be motherfucka? Just 'cause you wanted the niggas that got away.' 'Cause white people, when y'all ancestors came to pick us up, y'all wasn't looking for little bony brothers. Y'all was looking for big cotton pickin motherfuckas. And them little bony ones

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hicks. *Rant in E-Minor*. Rykodisc. 1997. Interval: 1:26:49-1:29:40

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 9:04-12:05

<sup>3</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 9:04-12:05

<sup>4</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 9:04-12:05

<sup>5</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 9:04-12:05

over in Africa set us up. 'You don't want me. Look at me, cough all the time, got one nut, Shambuku over there big and strong, me seen him pick up a whole oak tree by himself. I help you catch him.' I'm sitting in the back getting mad as a mofucka. I said 'who winning in this situation motherfucka? You drivin me to the white house.' When he pull in front of the white house he looked in the backseat all he seen was an open door. I was gone. Didn't pay for shit. Yelled back at the cab 'Now go back to Africa and tell em how a nigga done your ass wrong. You uppity motherfucka'.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] I don't know why they mad at us. If anybody should be mad, we should be mad at their ass. You know what I'm saying? I give white people props on this. When y'all have hostages, y'all go get 'em. I don't give a fuck if it's two. You'll have meetings. 'Look here Jim. Bob and Suzy are trapped. It's over in the Middle-East. And we're gonna have to go over there. Are you sure you want to cause an international incident over two people? I don't give a good goddamn if it's one. They're white. We're white. By God, go get 'em. They're Americans. Bring 'em home.' Technically, we've been hostages in this country for 450 years. Not one canoe with a nigger with a spear has shown up to pick us the fuck up.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] And that boat ride was a motherfucka. You know what I'm saying? That was some fucked up ass shit man, that boat ride, 'cause it ain't like it is today. Couple of weeks from here to Africa in these cruises playing shuffleboard and shit. These motherfuckas was at the gully of the ship down the bowels. You know what I'm saying, chained to each other, hundreds of motherfuckas just chained to each other with little diaper sit on. That was a year long ride. 'Cause they was sailing ships and the wind don't blow all the time. You know they sittin down there mad as a mofucka. 'Will you stop swinging your leg. I'm chained to you. Every time you swing your leg my leg go too. And you, why you shitting all the time? I'm not the only one shitting. Where else am I going to shit. I'm chained to you chained to him chained to LeRoy chained to Tyron chained to Shakazulu, we are chained together. Now I'm going to shit right here. Me telling you now you stink. I'm not the only one shitting, look at you. You're taller than you were yesterday. Staking shit on top of shit on top of shit'. You know what I'm saying? I ain't going back to no Africa. I mean America we got our little problems with racism and shit. This still the only country you can start out with nothing and end up with a whole lot of shit. Where the fuck am I going to do a comedy show in Africa? Live from Hut number 3. With monkeys throwing shit at the nigga doing the shows. 'Hey why don't you grab your monkey man let me finish this show'.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] Then there's some other bullshit they're pimping on our kids man. This gangster rap shit. We losing too many good brothers over some bullshit, you know? I worked with Tupac and Biggie. Both of them good young brothers, lost in some craziness. Gangster rap? Ain't no such thing as a fucking gangster rapper. The two don't go together. It's an oxymoron. The first code of being a gangster is what? Silence. If you're a rapper you talk too goddamn much. Homeboy you never shut up. You telling all the damn business in the song. Had to drop a nigga with my line, they put him in a chalk line, me, Mookey Earl' you name dropping motherfucker. Now we got to kill your ass. Real gangsters don't go platinum. You'll never see John Gotti come and pick up a damn Grammy. (...) They're always hollerin 'West side. East Side. West Side.' Niggas dying over a block they don't even own. Nigga you're renting. You paying rent nigga.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 12:12-14:11

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 14:15-18:29

<sup>3</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 14:15-18:29

<sup>4</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 29:45-31:20

[GUC] + [PES] How many y'all believe in aliens? I think there's some aliens for real. How many y'all believe? Smart motherfuckers. Rest of y'all arrogant as a motherfucker. You know what I'm saying? 'Cause you got to be out your fucking mind to think we the only shit in the universe. You look at all the diverse life on this one planet: birds, snakes, alligators, lions, tigers and bears oh my. I mean look at the diversity just amongst human beings. Like God gonna create all this life here and then just say 'alright, everything else will be lights. Light it up for them at night.' Hell yes there's some motherfucking aliens out there. Reason they don't come here: bad news travel fast. We known throughout the universe as the fucked up planet. That's why motherfuckers say they seen a UFO, but they don't say it landed, came in the house, cooked at dinner. Them motherfuckers ain't landing; shit, they be on the spaceship man this is probably just the fucked up planet tour. They get a little pamphlet and shit. Cost 500 kugels to come to this motherfucker. Motherfucker sitting on the spaceship looking out the window: 'hey come on let's go down there let's mess with them.' 'Shut the fuck up. They fight over black and white. We purple. What the fuck you think they gonna do to us? Now look your ass out the window and let's go'.<sup>1</sup>

**1998**

**Dave Chappelle – Comedy Half Hour Special**

[GUC] What's up San Francisco. I like your city. It's beautiful, tolerant place. I didn't see much. I haven't seen my friend he calls me: 'Dave, having fun in Frisco?' 'Hell yeah.' 'Seen the sites?' 'No.' 'You want to go see Alcatraz?' What kind of nigga in his right mind wants to visit a prison for recreation? I have friends in jail I don't visit. I don't deal with jails. Don't deal with jails.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] And I don't deal with police. My house got robbed in New York I didn't even call the police. I wanted to but I couldn't. My crib is too nice. It's not that it's too nice but it's too nice for me. You know how the police are in New York. Soon as I opened the door they're like 'Hah, He's still here. Open and shut case Johnson. Apparently this black guy broke in and hung up pictures of his family everywhere. Never seen anything like it.' Don't deal with them man. I had to bail a friend of mine out of jail one time, you know that was horrible. I was scared. I had to walk right into the belly of the beast. I tried to look as non threatening as possible. 'Hi, I'm here to bail out my buddy.' 'Oh, ok, well, while you're here you do fit a description. If you walk this way we can process you.' It's how they always get us. Fitting those damn descriptions.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] I don't understand nothing anymore. I don't. I watched TV the other day. Now tell me, maybe it's just me. Maybe I'm crazy, is it me? Is it me or do commercials have nothing to do with the products anymore? I don't even know what a fucking commercial is about until the end. Everyone's a surprise nowadays. You seen that commercial where the lady got the black eye? This lady come on TV with a black eye and she's crying. She's like 'I smoke crack. And my husband beats me.' And then a voice came on and said 'Got milk?' It's got nothing to do with milk. I'm not saying I'm a commercial expert but I'll make a better commercial than that. I'll make it nice and simple. I'll do a close up of a titty. Put Milk right underneath. If that doesn't sell milk, nothing will boy, I'll tell you

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Griffin. *Voodoo Child*. 1997. Interval: 46:30-47:56

<sup>2</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 1:41-2:17

<sup>3</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 2:18-08:12

that shit right now. It's 1997, titties are industry in 1997. They are. I know they are. I'm a customer.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] There's too much shit out there to stress you out. This whole world is just drug infested, hate infested, drug infested world. Hate drugs. I heard the worst drug story. You know what my friend told me? You know what he's dealing with? His landlord is hooked on crack. That's terrible. That's pressure. If your landlord is hooked on crack that means you've gotta have the rent. He'll come around. Knock Knock Knock.'You got the rent?!' 'It's not even due yet it's the 10<sup>th</sup>.' 'Come on I need it. Well, let me just get \$20 dollars of it now and then just give me the rest at the end of the month.' Every couple of hours 'hey look I'm gonna need some more of the rent. This building's falling apart. Things came up.' Comes home early from a party, landlord's in the crib going through his shit. 'What are you doing in my house?' 'Ahhh. Where's the sink? I came to fix it.' 'It's in the kitchen.' 'I thought it was in the drawer. I'll fix it tomorrow when I come for the rent.'<sup>2</sup>

[PES] I study that kind of shit. I do. Anything that has to do with race. I read a little here see a little there. And I travel. That's always good. Traveling has made me a racism connoisseur if you will. You know it's different from region to region. Anyone ever been down south. So you guys know what I'm talking about. The racism down there is just fucking perfect. Stewed to perfection. It's comfortable it's out in the open. There are no secrets in Mississippi. Everybody knows the deal. 'Morning Nigger.' 'Morning Sir.'<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] Not up here. You hit the big cities man it's different. It's always a secret. We should do like them, we should keep our shit out in the open and vent a little, I mean, with limits. You don't want to say whatever comes to your mind, that might be a little much. White dude be walking down the street minding his business and a brother walk up to him 'Hello. You white oppressor, you slave master rapist of Africa.' 'Oh, Why hello my big lips spear chucking friend.' 'Touche' hunky. So whitey what did you do today? Oppress a new land and make the people there Christians against their will?' 'Muhahahah. What did you do fella? Burn those big black lips on a crack pipe 'cause you missed your job interview.' 'Easy whitey you're cutting deep. This chit chat has gotten me thirsty. If you excuse me for a moment I'm gonna go to the Korean store and get something to drink.' 'Chingaling. Hello you slanted eye ruined the economy in my neighborhood by opening stores and taking out money out the community chink.' 'Wow, good afternoon you browse around but never buy anything suspicious looking nigga.' After a while that might be too much. But you can't help it.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] If you're in America you're a racist. We're brought up from the beginning to think in generalizations. We never look at the individual. We rarely look at the individual. I'm a racist. I know I'm a racist. You know how I know? 'Cause the other day I caught myself being racist against myself. There's so much shit getting on I got mixed up. Forgot whose team I was on and shit. One time I was reading the paper man, this story came on about this guy was suing a department store 'cause they wouldn't let him play Santa Claus, you know 'cause he's black. And I was actually like relieved when the department store beat him. That's bad. But I wasn't ready for that. I wasn't ready for the idea of a black santa claus man. That shit would suck. We wouldn't get our presents till the 28<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 08:15-11:07

<sup>2</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. 1998. Interval: 15:48-17:35

<sup>3</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. 1998. Interval: 21:50-25:50

<sup>4</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. 1998. Interval: 21:50-25:50



29<sup>th</sup> 'Ahh, sorry I'm late kids. Santa got caught up with some pussy in Vegas. Whoa. I had to sell some toys to get back shit. Where them cookies at?'<sup>1</sup>

### **Jerry Seinfeld – I'm telling you for the last time**

[PEP] + [PES] To me the only thing tougher than the supermarket is the drugstore. The drugstore's really challenging because you have no idea what they're talking about. You're just looking at the ingredients. I had a cold a couple of weeks ago. So I go in there and I'm looking. It's just like, the entire wall is cold medication. And you can't understand anything so you're just reading ingredients. Did you ever catch yourself reading ingredients in the drugstore? 'Oh, this has .03 tetrahydroziline. It's a good amount of that.' But it's so hard to figure out. Sometimes they have like this one's quick acting, this one's long lasting. 'Hmm, when do I need to feel good?' Now or later? I don't know. They always tell you how the medicine works on TV in the commercials. That's my favorite part, with the guy that says: 'Here's the human body' and there's always this guy... no face, mouth open. This is how drug companies see the public.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] 'Dry clean only' is definitely the only warning label that human beings actually respect. They look at cigarettes: 'This will give you cancer, kill you, the kids, everything'.... 'Ahh screw it, it's good, I'll do whatever the hell I want'. 'Don't drink this medicine and operate heavy machinery' ... 'Oh glug glug glug, who cares. That's for people who don't know what the hell they're doing. I'm a pro'. But if you have something that's dry clean only and somebody goes to put it in the washing machine 'Don't put it in the washing machine! It's dry clean only! Are you crazy? Are you out of your mind?'<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] It's amazing what people will believe. I mean, I watch these infomercials late at night. If it gets late enough, the products start to look good to me. I have actually found myself sitting there thinking 'You know, I don't think I have a knife that can cut through the shoe. I don't think any of my knives are good enough to cut through shoes. I'm gonna get this knife and cut my shoes up. That seems pretty good.' I think the dumbest thing you can think late at night is 'You know, I'm gonna get this thing and get in shape.' It's 3 in the morning, you got potato chip crumbs on your shirt there, you got one eye open, one sock hanging off of the foot. You go 'Yeah, I'm gonna start working out with this thing. I'm gonna order this thing. This is all I need to get in shape. This is a fantastic device.' Rip-off. We can't stop getting ripped-off. We're gonna get ripped off.<sup>4</sup>

### **Jeff Foxworthy – Totally Comitted**

[PES] To me, the definition of redneck is 'a glorious absence of sophistication'. And it can be temporary or it can be permanent, but most of us are guilty of it, at least from time to time.

[PEP] + [GUC] Then, not long ago, I was reading this magazine article where somebody claimed that there was a shortage of sophisticated people in this country. Which I took to mean there was an abundance of people like me. And I started thinking about the differences, and they are vast, y'all. Like, sophisticated people invest their money in stock portfolios. Rednecks invest our money in commemorative plates. 'Yeah, that's the legends of NASCAR series right there'. This is probably our personal favorite: Richard Petty huggin' his momma. I can't hardly look at it without cryin'. Of course, that's Dale

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Chappelle. *Comedy Half Hour Special*. 1998. Interval: 21:50-25:50

<sup>2</sup> Jerry Seinfeld. *I'm Telling You for the last Time*. 1998. Interval: 28:31-30:07

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Seinfeld. *I'm Telling You for the last Time*. 1998. Interval: 54:22-56:20

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Seinfeld. *I'm Telling You for the last Time*. 1998. Interval: 54:22-56:20

Earnhardt. He wasn't in a wreck or nothin', that's just some ketchup on his forehead.' See, rednecks think "mutual funds" means everybody's having a good time. Sophisticated people have retirement plans. Rednecks play the lottery. That's our plan. And when we hit the Pick Six, we're going to add a room onto the trailer so we don't have to sleep with Jim's daddy no more. Sophisticated people go to art auctions. Rednecks? We have yard sales. And the difference is at art auctions, the sale price is slowly working its way up. Not at a yard sale. In fact, you got enough patience, you can get a house full of furniture for a buck twenty-five.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] Sophisticated people go to restaurants that require reservations. Rednecks go to restaurants that require we 'drive around to the second window please'. 'Hey and listen could you supersize them fries for the little woman? It's our anniversary'.<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] Remember a couple of months ago when they had all the floods in Louisiana? My wife and I were watching this on CNN, and I told her, I said: 'You watch. They're going to find the biggest, stupidest idiot they can find in the whole state, and they're going to show him walking chest deep in water down main street'. And they did. And it was my wife's cousin Danny. Walking chest deep in water, holding an umbrella. I was just looking at her going 'That's got to make you proud right there, doesn't it? That's your bloodline walking down the street'. But then I started thinking about my kids, and it made me kind of worried. 'Cause it's their bloodline too.'<sup>3</sup>

**1999**

**Chris Rock – Bigger and Blacker**

[GUC] + [PES] And everybody's talking about gun control, got to get rid of the guns. Fuck that. I like guns. You got a gun, you don't have to work out. I ain't working out. I ain't jogging. You got pecs, I got Tecs. Fuck that shit. You don't need no gun control. You know what you need? We need some bullet control. We need to control the bullets. That's right. I think all bullets should cost \$5 thousand dollars. \$5 thousand dollars for a bullet. You know why? Cause if a bullet cost \$5 thousand dollars, there'd be no more innocent bystanders. It'd be it. Every time someone gets shot, people will be like: 'Damn, he must have did something. Shit they put \$50 thousand dollars' worth of bullets in his ass.' And people will think before they kills somebody if a bullet cost \$5 thousand dollars: 'Man, I would blow your fucking head off, if I could afford it. I'm gonna get me another job, I'm gonna start saving some money and you're a dead man. You better hope I can't get no bullets on layaway.' So even if you get shot by a stray bullet, you won't have to go to no doctor to get it taken out. Whoever shot you would take their bullet back: 'I believe you got my property.' That's right, man.<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] I don't know, man. The world's nuts. It's all good for Clinton. Any time something bad happens, it's good for Bill Clinton. Just gets people off his ass. 'Stop thinking about me. Good. Kids got shot. Good. Good. Good. Good. People are not thinking about me. Ohh, Tornadoes. Good. Good. People ain't thinking about me.' Clinton damn near got impeached. For what? For what? Lied about a blowjob so his wife wouldn't find out. Is that against the law? Do you need the Supreme Court for that one? You could have took that one to The People's Court! Could have took that one to Judge Judy. She'd have knocked it out in a half hour, plus commercials.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Foxworthy. *Totally Committed*. 1998. Interval: 03:13-05:44

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Foxworthy. *Totally Committed*. 1998. Interval: 06:44-07:09

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Foxworthy. *Totally Committed*. 1998. Interval: 08:00-9:07

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 05:27-07:08

<sup>5</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 14:38-19:30

[SPF] + [PEP] What the fuck did Clinton do? They was charging him with shit I didn't even know was crimes. 'You got her some gifts.' So what he got her gifts? That's his friend. You can't buy your friend a gift? 'He tried to get her a job, tried to get her a job.' You can't get your friend a job? Shit, 80% of the people in this room got their job 'cause a friend recommended them. It's against the law to get your friend a job? Shit, she blew him for a couple of months. The least he could do is give her a recommendation! It's the least he could do.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] See, people... everybody expects this holy behavior 'cause he's the President. Expect him to behave this holy way. He's just the President. He ain't Reverend Clinton. It ain't Pastor Clinton. It ain't Maharajah Clinton. It is just Bill Clinton. He's just a man. A man's gonna be a man. A man is basically as faithful as his options. That's how faithful a man is, no more, no less.<sup>2</sup>

[PG] + [PEP] + [SPF] You see all these fat Republican guys going: 'I would never do such a thing. This is a travesty.' I'm like: 'Nobody's trying to blow you.' Ain't no 20-year-old girls trying to blow Orrin Hatch. Ain't nobody trying to give Newt Gingrich some. I don't give a fuck, you ain't never gonna hear Newt Gingrich go: 'Man, I wish these hoes would back up off me. I wish they would just back the fuck up off me.'<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] Let a player play, shit! That's right. It's damn near impossible for a man to turn down sex. It's hard for a man to turn down sex. We can stop chasing it, and even that requires some rehab. But it's hard for a man to stop. If it chase us, we can't run that fast. It's gonna catch us, we're like: 'Shit, pulled a hamstring. You got me.' You can't run that fast. See, it's easy for women to turn down sex. It ain't shit for y'all to turn down sex. It ain't no thing for y'all to turn down sex. Y'all like: 'Why can't you turn it down? I do it all the time. I do it all the time. Why can't you say no? I say no.' See, it's easy for y'all. You know why? 'Cause every woman in here, ever since you was 13, every guy you met's been trying to fuck you. That's right. Women are offered dick every day. Every woman in here gets offered dick at least three times a week. Three times a day, shit! That's right. Every time a man's being nice to you, all he's doing is offering dick. That's all it is. That's all it is. 'Uhm, uhm, can I get that for you? How about some dick? Could I help you with that? Could I help you to some dick. Do you need some dick?' Nobody offers us shit. We got to fend for ourselves. We can't believe it when we get an offer. We're like, 'Damn, this is my lucky day.' That's right, man.<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] + [GUC] See, this whole Monica Lewinsky scandal, a lot of this shit is Hillary's fault. That's right, I said it. I said it. It had to be said. Somebody got to say it. Everybody's like: 'Hillary's a hero, Hillary's a hero.' No, she ain't. Aquaman's a hero. He can talk to the fishes. What the fuck can Hillary do? A lot of this shit is Hillary's fault. 'Cause ladies, you know your man. You know your man better than he know himself. You know what kind of man you got. You know if you got the crazy, need-a-blowjob-all-the-time man. That's right, sometimes you gotta save your man from himself. You know what happens if he don't get his 'medicine'. That's right, Hillary Clinton put us all in danger. She put the security of the free world in jeopardy and she needs to suffer the consequences for her actions. That's right, she's the First Lady. She's supposed to be the first one on her knees to suck his dick. Shit. That's right. Monica Lewinsky shouldn't have even stood a chance.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 14:38-19:30

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 14:38-19:30

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 14:38-19:30

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 14:38-19:30

Hillary's supposed to already be down there like, 'Hey, hey, I got it. I got it. I've got the dick. Tickle his ass or something. Tickle his ass. Yeah, grab a ball, make yourself useful'.<sup>1</sup> [SPF] + [GUC] And they always beat on Clinton. Before any of this shit happened, they was on Clinton. What was they on him for? Gays in the military. Everybody says, 'Don't let them in. Don't let them in.' Hey, if they wanna fight, let them fight, 'cause I ain't fighting. I wouldn't give a fuck if I saw a Russian tank rolling down Flatbush Avenue. I ain't shooting nobody. So call me a faggot. When the war is over, I'll be the faggot with two legs, thank you.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] You know what's fucked up? Everybody gets so homophobic. People, we need to cut that shit out. 'Cause everybody in this room got at least a gay cousin. Every last one of you got a gay cousin. You knew he was gay when y'all was kids. You was playing ball, he was jumping rope. He didn't turn gay, he was gay then. He just didn't have nobody to be gay with. Shit, I got a gay uncle. Call him Aunt Tom. Every Christmas he'd come over with his 'friend'.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] See, it don't make no sense to hate nobody. It don't make no sense to be a racist, sexist, or nothing. It don't. It doesn't. It don't make no sense... 'cause whoever you hate will end up in your family. That's right. You don't like gays? You're gonna have a gay son. You don't like Puetro Ricans your daughter's gonna come home with Living La Vida Loca.<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] + [PES] I don't know man. Let's talk about Clinton. One thing Clinton did I didn't like: raise taxes. Taxes all high and shit. You know what's fucked-up about taxes? You don't even pay taxes. They take tax. You get your check, money gone. That ain't a payment, that's a jack.

[PES] + [GUC] Got all these taxes: city tax, state tax, Social Security tax. You don't get the money until you're 65. Meanwhile, the average black man dies at 54. Shit, we should get Social Security at 29! What the fuck, man? We don't live that long. Hypertension, high blood pressure, NYPD, something will get you.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] What the fuck is up with the police? My God. I am scared. I ain't getting rid of no guns. Fuck that shit. And I had a cop pull me over the other day, scared me so bad, made me think I stole my own car. 'Get out the car, get out the fucking car! You stole this car!' I'm like: 'Damn, maybe I did. Oh, Lord, I gone stole a car'.<sup>6</sup>

[PES] You know what's worse than taxes? What's worse than taxes? Insurance. You got to have some insurance. You got to. They shouldn't even call it insurance. They just should call it 'in case shit.' I give a company some money in case shit happens. Now, if shit don't happen, shouldn't I get my money back?<sup>7</sup>

[GUC] That's right, man, you better have some medical insurance, or you gonna die. That's right. Everybody like: 'You got to eat right and exercise'. No you don't. You need some coverage. Coverage will save your life. That's right. We all gonna die, but at least if you got some coverage, you will die on a mattress. That's right.<sup>8</sup>

[PES] When I was a kid, we didn't have no insurance. We didn't have a damn thing. You had to be damn near dead to see the doctor. That's right, you had to be way past

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 19:32-21:32

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 21:35-23:17

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 21:35-23:17

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 21:35-23:17

<sup>5</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 25:04-25:52

<sup>6</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 26:06-26:27

<sup>7</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 26:29-27:18

<sup>8</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 26:29-27:18

Robitussin. (...) You know I don't like doctors 'cause they don't cure shit. They don't cure nothing. Same diseases been hanging out since I was a kid, man. What's the last shit a doctor cured? Polio. You know how long ago polio was? That's like the first season of Lucy. Shit, Fred had an Afro with finger waves. Have you ever met anybody with polio? Anybody feel a little 'poly around you? No. That's right, they don't cure shit. The same diseases been hanging out since I was a kid: AIDS, sickle cell, tuberculosis, cancer, Jerry's kid still limping around. (...) That's right, man. That's right, we got AIDS out there. You think they're gonna cure AIDS? No, they can't even cure athlete's foot. They ain't curing AIDS. Shit, they ain't never curing AIDS. Don't even think about that shit. They ain't curing it, 'cause there ain't no money in the cure. The money's in the medicine. That's how you get paid, on the comeback. That's how a drug dealer makes his money, on the comeback. That's all the government is: a bunch of motherfucking drug dealers, on the comeback. They ain't curing no AIDS. That's all it is. You think they're gonna cure AIDS? They're still mad at all the money they lost on polio.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] Curing AIDS? Shit, that's like Cadillac making a car that lasts for 50 years. And you know they can do it. But they ain't gonna do nothing that fucking dumb. Shit, they got metal on the space shuttle that can go around the moon and withstand temperatures of up to 20 thousand degrees, you mean to tell me you don't think they can make an Eldorado where the fucking bumper don't fall off? They can, but they won't. So what they will do with AIDS is the same thing they do with everything else. They will figure out a way for you to live with it. They don't cure shit, they just patch it up. Get you to the next stop, so they can get more of your money. They ain't gonna cure it. Hopefully, in our lifetime, that's right, you're gonna see somebody go: 'Yo, man, you weren't at work yesterday. What's up?' 'My AIDS is acting up. You know, when the weather get like this, my AIDS just pop up. But I took some Robitussin. I'm fine now'.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Racism everywhere, everybody pissed off. Black people yelling 'Racism.' White people yelling 'Reverse racism'. Chinese people yelling 'Sideways racism.' And the Indians ain't yelling shit 'cause they dead. So everybody bitch about how bad their people got it. Nobody got it worse than the American Indian. Everybody need to calm the fuck down. Indians got it bad. Indians got it the worst. You know how bad the Indians got it? When's the last time you met two Indians? You ain't never met two Indians. Shit, I have seen a polar bear ride a fucking tricycle in my lifetime, I have never seen an Indian family that's chilling out at Red Lobster. Never seen it. Everybody wanna save the environment. Shit, I see trees every fucking day! I don't never see no Indians. I went to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade this year. They didn't have enough Indians for that shit. They had a bunch of pilgrims. When it came time for the Indians, they had three real Indians and the rest was a bunch of Puerto Ricans with feathers in their hair. What the fuck. Shit, I know Puerto Ricans when I see them. You can't slip a Puerto Rican by me. That's not Pocahontas, that's Jennifer Lopez!<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] Racism everywhere. Who's the maddest people? White people. Not y'all. Y'all alright. You paid money to see me, we cool. The feud is over. No, you watch the TV, watch 60 Minutes, you'll see white people pissed off, man. Man, the white man thinks he's losing the country. You watch the news: 'We're losing everything. We're fucking losing. Affirmative action and illegal aliens and we're fucking losing the country.' Losing? Shut the fuck up. White people ain't losing shit. If y'all losing, who's winning? It ain't us. It ain't us. Have you driven around this motherfucker? It ain't us. Shit, there

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 27:20-32:17

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 27:20-32:17

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 37:43-39:09

ain't a white man in this room that would change places with me. None of you would change places with me. And I'm rich! That's how good it is to be white. There's a white, one-legged busboy in here right now that won't change places with my black ass. He's going: 'No, man, I don't wanna switch. I wanna ride this white thing out. See where it takes me.' That's right, 'cause when you white, the sky's the limit. When you black, the limit's the sky.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] That's right, man. Now, when it comes to racism, do you know who the most racist people are for real, the real most racist people? Old black men. You find a brother over 60. I know you white people know an old black man. You go 'Willie at the job, he's so nice.' Willie hates your guts. There's nothing more racist than an old black man. You know why? 'Cause an old black man went through some real racism. He didn't go through that I-can't-get-a-cab shit. He was the cab. A white man just jump on his back: 'Main Street. Left, nigger. Left, nigger. Left, you fucking nigger!'<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] That's right, man. I don't know, black. What do we need, y'all? I think we need a new leader. We ain't had a black leader in a while. In a long time. Somebody that moves you. You know, we had Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and ever since then a bunch of substitute teachers. We ain't had the real thing. I want a motherfucker to move me.<sup>3</sup>

[SPF] Who we got? Let me break everybody down. Let me break 'em down. We got Al Sharpton, all right. Al Sharpton's all right. He ain't Malcolm or Martin, but if you get your ass whooped by the cops, he's the guy to call. Of course, Al kind of looks like Bookman from Good Times, but don't let that fuck you up.<sup>4</sup>

[SPF] Who else we got? Jesse Jackson. Jesse's all right. Jesse went over there. Jesse got them hostages. I don't know how the hell he did that shit. He went over there with no money, no sweet potato pie. What the fuck did Jesse say? Jesse must've been, like: 'Hey, do you want the United States to really be mad at you? Give the hostages to me.' That's what he said, you know.<sup>5</sup>

[SPF] + [GUC] What else we got? Farrakhan? Farrakhan got everybody together for the Million Man March and everything. But Farrakhan don't like the Jews, which is bugged. I get my hair cut on DeKalb Avenue. I never been in a barbershop and heard a bunch of brothers talking about Jews. Black people don't hate Jews. Black people hate white people. We don't got time to dice white people up into little groups. I hate everybody. I don't care if you just got here. 'Hey, I'm Romanian'. 'You Romanian cracker!'<sup>6</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] We need a fucking leader, man. When we got no leaders, when something happens, we make the shit bigger than it is. Shit's big, but don't make it bigger than it is. I'm watching the news, and like, 'Tupac Shakur was assassinated. Biggie Smalls, assassinated. Struck down by assassin's bullets. They were assassinated.' I'm like: 'No, they wasn't!' Martin Luther King was assassinated. Malcolm X was assassinated. John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Them two niggers got shot. Shit, I love Tupac, I love Biggie, but school will be open on their birthday. I don't think you'll see their pictures hanging up in your grandmamma's living room. 'That's Abraham, Martin, and Pac. And right here, I got one of Jesus and Biggie on the seesaw. Jesus always in the air.' We need a leader man, need a leader. You know who I think the black leader should be? Who I think the black leader should be? Pat Riley. Coach Pat Riley. No man has led more black

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 39:17-42:34

<sup>2</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 39:17-42:34

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 43:44-47:16

<sup>4</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 43:44-47:16

<sup>5</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 43:44-47:16

<sup>6</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 43:44-47:16

men to the promised land than Coach Pat Riley. He may not get us to the mountaintop, but he'll get us to the playoffs. And that's all we want. That's all we want.<sup>1</sup>

### **George Carlin – You are all diseased**

[PES] And that's another thing they don't like at the airport: jokes. You know? Yeah you can't joke about a bomb. Well why is it just jokes? What about a riddle? How about a limerick? How about a bomb anecdote? You know no punch line just a really cute story. Or, suppose you intended the remark not as a joke, but as an ironic musing. Are they prepared to make that distinction? Why I think not. And besides, who's to say what's funny. Airport security is a stupid idea, it's a waste of money and it's only there for one reason: to make white people feel safe. That's all. The illusion, the feeling and illusion of safety cause the authorities know they can't make an airplane completely safe. Too many people have access. You'll notice the drug smugglers don't seem to have a lot of trouble getting there little packages on board do they? No and God bless them too.<sup>2</sup>

[GUC] Besides, even if they made all of the airplanes completely safe the terrorist would simply start bombing other places that are crowded: Porn shops, crack houses, titty bars and gangbangs, you know, entertainment venues. The odds of you being killed by a terrorist are practically zero. So I say relax and enjoy the show.<sup>3</sup>

[PG] + [PES] You have to be a realist. You have to be realistic about terrorism. Certain groups of people, certain groups, Muslim Fundamentalist, Christian Fundamentalist, Jewish Fundamentalist and just plain guys from Montana, are going to continue to make life in this country very interesting for a long, long time. That's the reality. Angry men in combat fatigues talking to God on a two-way radio and mothering incoherent slogans about freedom are eventually going to provide us with a great deal of entertainment. Especially after your stupid, fucking economy collapses all around you and the terrorist come out of the woodwork and you'll have anthrax in your water supply and serine gas in your air conditioners. They'll be chemical and biological suitcase bombs in every city. And I say enjoy it, relax. Enjoy the show. Take a fucking chance. Put a little fun in your life.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] To me, terrorism is exciting. It's exciting. I think the very idea that you can set off a bomb in a marketplace and kill several hundred people is exciting and stimulating and I see it as a form of entertainment. Entertainment, that's all it is. Yeah. But, but I also know that most Americans are soft and frightened and unimaginative and they don't realize there's such a thing as dangerous fun and they certainly don't recognize a good show when they see one. I have always been willing to put myself at great personal risk for the sake of entertainment. And I've always been willing to put you at great personal risk for the same reason.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] As far as I'm concerned, all of this airport security, all the searches, the screenings, the cameras, the questions it's just one more way of reducing your liberty and reminding you that they can fuck with you anytime they want, as long as you put up with it. As long as you put up with it. Which means of course, anytime they want. 'Cause that's what Americans do now. They're always willing to trade away a little of their freedom in exchange for the feeling, the illusion of security. What we have now is a

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Rock. *Bigger and Blacker*. 1999. Interval: 43:44-47:16

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 05:25-06:26

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 06:54-09:27

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 06:54-09:27

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 06:54-09:27

completely neurotic population obsessed with security and safety and crime and drugs and cleanliness and hygiene and germs.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] Where did this sudden fear of germs come from in this country? Have you noticed this? The media constantly running stories about all the latest infections, salmonella, ecoli, hanka virus, bird flu and Americans panic easily. So now everybody's running around scrubbing this and spraying that and overcooking their food and repeatedly washing their hands, trying to avoid all contact with germs. It's ridiculous and it goes to ridiculous lengths. In prisons, before they give you a lethal injection, they swab your arm with alcohol. It's true. It's true. It's true. Well they don't want you to get an infection, and you can see their point. Wouldn't want some guy to go to hell and be sick. Would take a lot of the sportsmanship out of the whole execution.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] Listen I got a few more items of things that are pissing me off and this one comes in the form of a question. Haven't we had about enough of this cigar smoking shit in this country? Huh? Huh? When is this going to end? When is this shit going to go away? When are these fat, arrogant, overpaid, overfed, over-privileged, over-indulged, white collar, business criminal, asshole, cocksuckers going to put out their cigars and move along to their next abomination? White pussy businessmen sucking on a big brown dick. That's all it is. That's all it is. Yeah, a big brown dick. Sigmund Freud said, 'Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.' Oh yeah, well sometimes it's a big brown dick. With a fat, arrogant, white-collar business criminal, asshole sucking on the wet end of it.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] Hey, here's another question I've been pondering. What is all this shit about angels? Have you heard this? Yeah, three out of four people now believe in angels. What are you fucking stupid? Has everybody lost their fucking mind in this country? Angels, shit. You know what I think it is? I think it's a massive collective psychotic chemical flashback of all the drugs, all the drugs, smoked, swallowed, snorted, shot and absorbed rectally by all Americans from 1960 to 1990. Thirty years of adulterated street drugs will get you some fucking angels my friend. Angels shit. What about goblins huh? Doesn't anybody believe in goblins? Never hear about them except on Halloween and it's always negative shit too you know? And zombies. Where the fuck are all the zombies? That's the trouble with zombies: they're unreliable. I say if you're going to buy the angels shit you might as well go for the zombie package as well.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] Here's another horrifying example, aspect of American culture, the pussification, the continued, the continued pussification of the American male in the form... yeah all right, in the form of Harley Davidson theme restaurants. What the fuck is going on here? Harley Davidson used to mean something. It stood for biker attitude. Grimy outlaws and there sweaty mamas, full of beer and crank rolling around on Harley's looking for a good time: destroying property, raping teenagers and killing policemen. All very necessary activities by the way. But now theme restaurants and this soft shit obviously didn't come from hardcore bikers. It came from these weekend motorcyclists. These fraudulent, two day a week motherfuckers who have their bikes trucked into Sturgis, South Dakota for the big rally and then ride around like they just come in off the road. Dentists and bureaucrats and pussy boy software designers getting up on a Harley cause they think it makes them cool. Well hey Schizicks, you ain't cool, you're fucking chilly.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 06:54-09:27

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 09:30-10:23

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 15:22-16:25

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 17:01-18:06

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 18:10-19:35



[GUC] + [PES] I got a proposition for you, I think if white people are going to burn down black churches then black people ought to burn down the House Of Blues huh? What a fucking disgrace that place is, the House Of Blues. They ought to call it the house of lame white motherfuckers. Inauthentic, low frequency, single digit, lame white motherfuckers. Especially these male movie stars who think they're blues artists. You ever see these guys? Don't you just want to puke in your soup when one of these fat, balding, overweight, over aged, out of shape, middle-aged male movie stars with sunglasses jumps on stage and starts blowing into a harmonica. It's a fucking sacrilege. In the first place, in the first place, white people got no business playing the blues ever at all, under any circumstances. Ever, ever, ever. What the fuck do white people have to be blue about? Banana Republic ran out of khakis? Huh? The Espresso machine is jammed. Hootie & the Blowfish are breaking up? Shit, white people ought to understand their job is to give people the blues not to get them. And certainly not to sing or play them. Tell you a little secret about the blues; it's not enough to know which notes to play you got to know why they need to be played. And another thing, I don't think, I don't think white people should be trying to dance like blacks. Stop that. Stick to your faggoty polkas and waltzes. And that repulsive country line dancing shit that you do and be yourself. Be proud, be white, be lame and get the fuck off the dance floor.<sup>1</sup>

[PG] + [GUC] + [SPF] Now listen, long as were discussing minorities, I'd like to mention something about language. There are a couple of terms being used a lot these days by guilty white liberals. First one is: 'happens to be'. He 'happens to be' black. I have a friend who 'happens to be' black. Like it's a fucking accident you know? 'Happens to be black? Yes, he happens to be black. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. He had two black parents? Oh yes, yes he did. Yes. And they fucked? Oh indeed they did. Indeed. So where does the surprise part come in?' I should think it would be more unusual if he just happened to be Scandinavian. And, the other term is 'openly'. Openly gay. They'll say: 'he's openly gay'. But that's the only minority they use that for. You know you wouldn't say someone was openly black. Well maybe James Brown or Lewis Farrakhan. Lewis Farrakhan is openly black. Colin Powell is not openly black. Colin Powell is openly white, he just happens to be black. Okay. Thank you. Thank you.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] Now something a little more positive for you. Don't want you to think the whole show is just negativity. This is about a festival. This is my idea for one of those big outdoor summer festivals. This is called Slugfest. This is for men only. Here's what you do: you get about a hundred thousand of these fucking men, you know the ones I mean, these macho motherfuckers. Yeah, these strutting, preening, posturing, hairy, sweaty, alpha male jack offs. The muscle assholes. You take about a hundred thousand of these disgusting pricks and you throw them in a big dirt arena, big twenty-five acre dirt arena, and you just let them beat the shit out of each other for twenty-four hours nonstop. No food, no water. Just whiskey and PCP. And you just let them punch and pound and kick the shit out of each other until only one guy is left standing. Then you take that guy and you put him on a pedestal and you shoot him the fucking head. Yeah. Yeah. Then you put the whole thing on TV. Budweiser would jump at that shit in half a minute.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PEP] Here's another guy thing that sucks. These T-shirts that say: 'Lead follow or get out of the way'. You ever see that? This is more of that stupid Marine Corp bullshit. Obsolete male impulses from a hundred thousand years ago: 'Lead follow or get out of the way.' You know what I do when I see that shirt? I obstruct. I stand right in the

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 19:38-21:30

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 21:40-22:58

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 23:49-25:00

guys path, force him to walk around me, he gets a little past me, I spin him around, kick him in the nuts, rip off his shirt, wipe it on my ass and shove it down his fucking throat. That's what I do when I see that shirt. Yeah. Hey, listen, that's all these Marine's are looking for a good time.<sup>1</sup>

[PES] + [PEP] And speaking of tough guys, I'm getting a little tired of hearing that after six policemen get arrested for shoving a floor lamp up some black guys ass and ripping his intestine's out, the police department announces they're going to have 'Sensitivity training'. I say hey, if you need special training to be told not to jam a large cumbersome object up someone else's asshole, maybe you're too fucked up to be on the police force in the first place huh? Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe not, I don't know. Listen, yeah. That's right. You know what they ought to do? They ought to have two new requirements for being on the police: intelligence and decency. You never can tell, it might just work. It certainly hasn't been tried yet. No one should ever have any object placed inside their asshole that is larger than a fist and less loving than a dildo okay?<sup>2</sup>

[SPF] Now this next thing is about our president. This is about our president. Bill Jeff. Bill Jeff. Bill Jeff. Clinton. I don't call him Clinton I call him Clittin. Clittin, C-L-I-T-T-I-N, apostrophe. His big deal was J.F.K. Isn't that right? Love J.F.K. Wanted to emulate J.F.K. In every way. Well J.F.K.'s administration was called 'Camelot.' Well what it really should have been called 'Come A Lot.' Because that's what he did he came a lot. So, Clinton's looking for a legacy, that's what he should call it. Well maybe 'Come a little' would be better for him, 'cause he came a little. You know, a little on the dress, little on the desk, not a whole lot really. Hey, he was no match, no match for Kennedy in the pussy department. Kennedy aimed high, Marilyn Monroe. Clinton showed his dick to a government clerk. There's a drop off here. It's a drop off. Thank you.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] Something else I'm getting tired of is all this stupid bullshit we have to listen to all the time about children. It's all you hear in this country. 'Children. Help the children. What about the children? Save the children.' You know what I say? Fuck the children. Fuck 'em. They're getting entirely too much attention. And I know what you're thinking you say: 'Jesus, he's not going to attack children is he?' Yes he is. He's going to attack children. And remember, this is Mister Conductor talking. I know what I'm talking about. I know what I'm talking about.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] And I also know, I also know all you single dad's and soccer mom's who think you're such fucking heroes aren't going to like this. But somebody's got to tell you for your own good: you're children are overrated and overvalued. You've turned them into little cult objects. You have a child fetish and it's not healthy. And don't give me, don't give me that weak shit, 'Well I love my children.' Fuck you. Everybody loves their children. Doesn't make you special. John Wayne Gacy loved his children. Kept them all right out in the yard near the garage.<sup>5</sup>

[PEP] That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is this constant, mindless, yammering in the media, this neurotic fixation, that somehow everything, everything has to be revolved around children. It's completely out of balance. Listen, there are a couple of things about kids you have to remember. First of all: they're not all cute okay? In fact, if you look at them close, some of them are rather unpleasant looking. And a lot of them don't smell too good either. The little ones in particular seem to have a

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 26:27-27:07

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 27:09-28:03

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 28:08-29:07

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 29:09-31:17

<sup>5</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 29:09-31:17

kind of urine and sour milk combination or something. Stay with me on this: the longer, the sooner you face it, the better off you're going to be. Second premise: not all children are smart and clever. Got that? Kids are like any other group of people, a few winners a whole lot of losers.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] Did you ever notice on the TV news, every time some guy with an AK 47 strolls onto a school yard and kills three or four kids and a couple of teachers, the next day, the next day, the school is overrun with counselors and psychiatrist and grief counselors and trauma therapists trying to help the children cope. Shit, when I was in school, someone came to our school and killed three or four of us we went right on with our arithmetic. Thirty-five classmates minus four equals thirty-one. We were tough. We were tough. I say if kids can handle the violence at home they ought to be able to handle the violence in school. I'm not worried about guns in school. You know what I'm waiting for? Guns in church. That's going to be a lot of fun. And it will happen you watch. Some nut will go fucking ape shit in a church and they'll refer to him as a disgruntled worshiper.<sup>2</sup>

[PES] Here's another bunch of ignorant shit. School uniforms. Bad theory. The idea that if kids wear uniforms to school, it helps keep order. Don't these schools do enough damage making all these kids think alike? Now there going to get them to look alike too? And it's not a new idea. I first saw it in old news reels from the 1930s, but it was hard to understand cause the narration was in German.<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] Now, a lot of these company names and product names are influenced by marketing and advertising people. And this next thing is about advertising. And by the way, if you should have any cognitive dissonance about the fact that I do commercials for TenTenTwoTwenty and still attack advertising up here, well, you're just going to have to figure that shit out on your own, okay? Now, this is called advertising lullaby. Keeping in mind of course that the whole purpose of advertising is to lull you to sleep.<sup>4</sup>

[PEP] Quality, values, styles, service, selection, convenience, economy, savings, performance, experience, hospitality, low-rates, friendly service, name brands, easy terms, affordable prices, money back guarantee, free installation. Free admission, free appraisal, free alterations, free delivery, free estimates, free home trial and free parking. No cash, no problem, no kidding, no fuss, no muss, no risk, no obligation, no red tape, no down payment, no entry fee, no hidden charges, no purchase necessary, no one will call on you, no payments or interest till September. But limited time only, so act now, order today, send no money, offer good while supplies last, two to a customer, each item sold separately, batteries not included, mileage may vary, all sales are final, allow six weeks for delivery, some items not available, some assembly required, some restrictions may apply. But come on in. Come on in. Come on in for a free demonstration and a free consultation with our friendly professional staff. Our experience and knowledgeable sales representatives will help you make a selection that's just right for you and just right for your budget. And say, don't forget to pick up your free gift: a classic deluxe, custom designer, luxury, prestige, high-quality premium, select gourmet, pocket pencil sharpener. Yours for the asking, no purchase necessary, it's our way of saying thank you.

And, if you act now we'll include an extra added free complimentary bonus gift: a classic deluxe, custom designer, luxury, prestige, high-quality, premium, select, gourmet,

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 29:09-31:17

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 32:55-33:54

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 33:58-34:20

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 44:39-47:27

combination key ring, magnifying glass and garden hose in a genuine imitation leather style carrying case, with authentic vinyl trim. Yours for the asking, no purchase necessary. It's our way of saying thank you. Actually, it's our way of saying 'bend over just a little bit farther' so we can stick this big advertising dick up your ass a little bit deeper. A little bit deeper. A little bit deeper. You miserable, no good, fucking consumer asshole.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [GUC] 'Cause you do know folks, living in this country, you're bound to know, that every time you're exposed to advertising you realize once again that America's leading industry, America's most profitable business is still the manufacture packaging, distribution and marketing of bullshit. High quality, grade 'A', prime cut, pure American bullshit. And the sad part is, is that most people seem to have been indoctrinated to believe that bullshit only comes from certain places, certain sources: advertising, politics, salesmen. Not true. Bullshit is everywhere. Bullshit is rampant. Parents are full of shit, teachers are full of shit, clergymen are full of shit and law enforcement people are full of shit.<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] This entire country, this entire country is completely full of shit and always has been, from the Declaration of Independence of the Constitution to the Star Spangled Banner. It's still nothing more than one big steaming pile of red, white and blue all-American bullshit. Because, think of how we started. Think of that. This country was founded by a group of slave-owners who told us: 'All men are created equal.' Oh yeah, all men, except for Indians and niggers and women right? Always like to use that authentic American language. This was a small group of unelected, white male, land holding, slave owners who also suggested their class be the only one allowed to vote. Now that is what's known as being, stunningly and embarrassingly full of shit.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC] + [PES] + [SPF] I think Americans really show their ignorance when they say they want their politicians to be honest. What are these fucking cretins talking about? If honesty were suddenly introduced into American life the whole system would collapse. No one would know what to do. Honesty would fuck this country up. And I think deep down Americans know that. That's why they elected and re-elected Bill Clinton. That's right. Because, because the American people liked their bullshit right out front where they can get a good strong whiff of it. Clinton might be full of shit, but at least he lets you know it. Dole tried to hide it didn't he? Dole kept saying 'I'm a plain and honest man.' Bullshit. People don't believe that. What did Clinton say? He said: 'Hi folks. I'm completely full shit and how do you like that?' And the people said: 'You know something? At least he's honest. At least he's honest about being completely full of shit'.<sup>4</sup>

[PES] + [GUC] It's just like the business world. Same as business. Everybody knows by now all businessmen are completely full of shit. Just the worse kind of low life criminal, cocksuckers you could ever want to run into. The fucking piece of shit businessman. And the proof of it, the proof of it is they don't even trust each other. They don't trust one another. When a businessman sits down and negotiates a deal, the first thing he does is automatically assume that the other guy is a complete lying prick who's trying to fuck him out of his money. So he's got to do everything he can to fuck the other guy a little bit faster and a little bit harder. And he's got to do it with a big smile on his face. You know that big bullshit businessman smile and if you're a customer, whoa, that's when you get the really big smile. Customer always gets the really big smile, as the businessman

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 44:39-47:27

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 47:29-49:04

<sup>3</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 47:29-49:04

<sup>4</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 49:05-50:12

carefully positions himself directly behind the customer and unzips his pants and proceeds to service the account. I'm servicing this account. This customer needs service. Now you know what they mean. Now you know what they mean when they say: 'We specialize in customer service.' Whoever coined the phrase 'let the buyer beware' was probably bleeding from the asshole. But that's business. That's business.<sup>1</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] But in the bullshit department, in the bullshit department, a businessman can't hold a candle to a clergyman. 'Cause I got to tell you the truth folks, I got to tell you the truth. When it comes to bullshit, big time, major league bullshit, you have to stand in awe, in awe of the all-time champion of false promises and exaggerated claims: Religion. No contest. No contest. Religion easily has the greatest bullshit story ever told. Think about it. Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man, living in the sky, who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry, forever and ever, till the end of time. But he loves you. He loves you. He loves you and he needs money. He always needs money. He's all-powerful, all perfect, all knowing and all wise. Somehow, just can't handle money. Religion takes in billions of dollars, they pay no taxes, and they always need a little more. Now you talk about a good bullshit story: Holy Shit! Thank you.<sup>2</sup>

### **David Cross – The Pride is Back**

[PEP] Another thing I love is when anybody like gears their advertising to like a younger demographic and they try to skew stuff you know and hip it up you know and sell it to the younger folks you know. 'Cause they always fuck up you know. And then they attribute these qualities to products that don't merit them you know. Like eggs or something. They have this new campaign you know 'Henderson Valley Eggs – You're Gonna Love Our Eggs.' Yeah. This ain't your daddy's egg. Guy on a skateboard: 'Finally an egg for my generation.' You know they have these bending guitar notes and then they intercut it with like a quiet granny in a rocking chair, you know, sitting going: 'I like eggs the old-fashioned way.' 'Fuck you granny. Henderson Valley Egg – You're Gonna Love Our Eggs.'<sup>3</sup>

[PEP] In the inflight magazine, which is just the best journalism, they really dig deep. Man if you want to find out 101 things to do with plums, just read your inflight magazine. Alright. So this is another airlines magazine, and this is called 'Miles for Kids.' This is a letter from the President. And what he's doing is urging everybody to give up their frequent flyer miles for sick kids. I won't read the whole thing obviously but basically he says 'this program uses frequent flyer miles accumulated in a special fund to provide free travel for sick and terminally ill kids who need to get to a particular destination to obtain medical care or to realize a special travel dream that would otherwise go unfulfilled. And that was the thing that made me go: 'Huh?' 'Would otherwise go unfulfilled? Because, when I was reading this there were two empty seats next to me. So, why can't sick kids sit there? I mean, if they're so concerned with sick kids.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 50:13-51:40

<sup>2</sup> George Carlin. *You Are All Diseased*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 51:43-53:37

<sup>3</sup> David Cross. *The Pride is Back*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 9:33-10:29

<sup>4</sup> David Cross. *The Pride is Back*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 11:39-12:40

[PG] + [PEP] + [PES] I am so excited to be here, and just to be alive, and to witness firsthand, and to be here for the Millennium. We're so privileged we all get to be here, you know? Alive, to see firsthand January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 and listen to all those fundamentalist preachers having to do their back-peddling when Armageddon doesn't occur. Isn't that gonna be great? That's gonna kick ass. It's gonna be great. You get to see it. You know, because for hundreds of years they've been talking about: 'It's in Revelations. It's in the Book of Daniel. And on that day, the Book of Daniel said: God is telling us all signs pointing to that day Jesus Christ will descend from Heaven on a diamond studded chariot, with chocolates and teddy bears for all the good Christians. And then the Jew and the Muslim and the mud people will be hell on earth and lake of fire and bile and piss. 'Cause I'm gonna piss on them: Hey, take that Jew! And I'll take Christ's hand and...' But you know, that's not gonna happen. Jesus isn't coming back. It's gonna be great. You know, it was safe to do like you know in the 50s and 60s. That was really far away. But haha it's creeping up. And I can't wait for the excuses, you know: 'Well, I'll tell you. Ah, boy, I am just red faced about this. I'm tickled I'll tell you what. It's just funny. It's a funny story. Well, the funny thing is I keep my Bible in the den, ok, where my family congregates. And we pray and apparently about thirty years ago my youngest got in there, 'cause you know how kids love the Bible. My youngest got in there, and had peanut-butter on her fingers, and just had smudged over the bottom of the 3, so it looked like a 2. So, it's my bad. So it's January 1<sup>st</sup>, 3000. I was off by 1 millennium, and it will be another thousand years of ... of fundraising. God bless you. God bless you.'<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] One of the most selfish things I think you can do, I mean, just really selfish, is not being an organ donor. I think that's crazy and awful. I don't anybody in the history of heaven has ever been up there going: 'God, I wish I never gave up my kidneys. I gotta pee like a fucking race horse.'<sup>2</sup>

[PES] The other thing that really breaks my heart is when crazy people die and then they leave all their money to their pets. Oh, that's so sad when you read about that. You know, some crazy old lady leaves half a million dollars to her cat. 'And all my money goes to Miss Cinderella. So she can live in luxury like the princess she is. Also, fuck the homeless.' I mean, what are people supposed to think? There's a fucking cat paraded in front of them, like they're a homeless guy and this cat is being walked in this like gem studded collar and eating lobster out of a crystal goblet and the cat doesn't know the difference between a crystal goblet and the shit lined shoe, they don't know they don't care. That's happening and you know the homeless guy is like: 'Hey, can the cat spare some change.' Oh that makes me so angry I want to reanimate those people and kill them.<sup>3</sup>

[GUC]+ [PEP] But there's been this, you know, there's been this huge cry about violence in the media. 'Violence in the media! Violence in the media. Violence in the media is the cause of it.' And you know what, everywhere I fucking turn that thing was repeated constantly, ad nauseum. They fucking had it live on every station. They kept repeating the bloody guy coming out of the window, that's fucking violence in media? What are you talking about? Kids in Kentucky took out two guys. The guys in Arkansas took out three people. The guy in Clayton Georgia shot six people. Didn't kill any of them. They're fucking blips in the news. Nobody's talking about that. So clearly the lesson here is: you know, fucking have your shit together and do it right. Get your maps, get your bomb things. If you really want violence in the media to be the big story, that's what you gotta

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<sup>1</sup> David Cross. *The Pride is Back*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 16:45-19:26

<sup>2</sup> David Cross. *The Pride is Back*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 41:20-42:44

<sup>3</sup> David Cross. *The Pride is Back*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 41:20-42:44

do. It's so hypocritical and it's disturbing. It's garbage to me, and I don't like the leap in logic that it's violence in the media. 'Cause they act as if violence didn't exist before you know TV shows and Natural Born Killers. You know the guy who climbed the Bell Tower in the 60s in Austin Texas, what was the violent movie he watched before, I can't remember what it was. And I'm sorry, what were the violent videogames that Hitler used to play before he went out? And what were the videogames he gave to the entire German republic? Yeah. It's ridiculous.<sup>1</sup>

### **Dennis Miller – The Millennium Special**

[SPF] + [GUC] You know, when you look at it one way, very little seems to have changed in a hundred years. In 1901, President William McKinley was gunned down by an assassin's bullet. Nearly a hundred years later, we find in America, where McKinley is still dead, people have we not learned anything? I would say that life has definitely gotten easier, but that just might be the single biggest problem facing us as we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century. No doubt about it, we've become soft. We're just not as tough as we used to be even fifty years ago. For example, I was watching an episode of The Three Stooges last week and I just don't think your average man today could take a hacksaw to his nose the way they could back then. Then again, it's just probably as the modern hacksaw blade is so much sharper and stronger. But then, how do you explain the fact that you used to be able to hit somebody in the head with a ball-peen hammer, not only would it not crush their skull, but it would actually resonate with a pleasant tone of a doorbell huh? How do you explain that? Clearly truly a man for all seasons.<sup>2</sup>

[PEP] + [PES] But while individual Americans have become softer, America itself has only become stronger. I don't want to get too George M. Cohan here, but you gotta marvel at how in one short century the US went from being a backwater hick joke to a beacon of hope. You know, when we're not propping up fascist dictators, like Pinochet, Somoza, Noriega, Duvalier, Trujillo, and Marcos, we are a true symbol of freedom.<sup>3</sup>

[PES] + [SPF] Let's see, how else has the quality of life changed in the last century? Well, I'm pleased to say that we've gone from being a country where a black man could piss people off by refusing to sit in the back of the bus, to a country where a black man can piss people off by refusing to run for the Presidency after winning the Gulf War. It is a start. And I think we've gotten better about preserving the environment. But I hope we didn't wait too long. I want my kids to grow up in a world where the Bengal tiger is not just a sex position I invented back in the mid 70s.<sup>4</sup>

[GUC] On the plus side, we are exponentially increasing our knowledge every day. Your ten year old knows more about computers than the guy who invented the first one. And with the development of the internet the world is getting smaller and smaller which is great when you think about it. Because what the Third World really needs is not better housing, democracy and access to medical care; it's being able to buy Gilligan's hat on eBay.<sup>5</sup>

[PES] + [SPF] And politically, yeah, I guess the dignity of the White House has been a bit debased over recent years, but I bet if you scour the presidential archives, you'll find a written detailed account of every blow job Glover Cleveland and Warren G. Harding ever had. By the way, if you do get at those records, blow jobs were called 'sloppy

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<sup>1</sup> David Cross. *The Pride is Back*. HBO. 1998. Interval: 43:06-44:41

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 0:38-2:09

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 0:38-2:09

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 2:15-4:16

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 2:15-4:16

yawns' back then. So there you have it folks: the Millennium. Warren and Whorin, but never borin'.<sup>1</sup>

[GUC] A lot of good stuff, lot of bad stuff. We may have changed the way man lives, but we have accomplished very little in changing the way he behaves. Hopefully, we'll do a little better on the next one. You know, it's been slow going, but remember, it took us 40 million years just to develop a thumb, and no doubt it will take us another 40 million to get it out of our ass. Of course, that's just my opinion. I could be wrong. Good night ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 2:15-4:16

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Miller. *The Millennium Special*. HBO. 1999. Interval: 2:15-4:16



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