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EXCELLENCE IN INCOMPETENCE: THE DAILY SHOW  
CREATES A MOMENT OF ZEN

by

MEGAN TURLEY HODGKISS

Under the Direction of Michael L. Bruner

ABSTRACT

Jon Stewart, the anchor and purveyor of “fake news,” has catapulted television's The Daily Show into prominence. The show functions as both a source of political humor and a vehicle for political commentary. This thesis explores how the program visually and rhetorically problematizes the hegemonic model of traditional television news, and how it tips the balance between what is considered serious news and what has become cliché about the broadcast industry.

INDEX WORDS: The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, Visual Communication, Parody, Television, Hegemony, CNN, Traditional News Media, Political Communication, Humor Theory

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CREATES A MOMENT OF ZEN

by

MEGAN TURLEY HODGKISS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts Degree

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2006

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2006

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Georgia State University  
December 2006

## DEDICATION:

This thesis is dedicated to the good people of Folgers Coffee  
(my physical caffeine), as well as to Anne and Jim Hodgkiss  
(my mental caffeine).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to thank Dr. Friedman and Dr. Smith for telling me to “have fun” with this project.

Also, I would like to thank Dr. Bruner for his patience and ever-willingness to play Devil’s Advocate.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On April 7, 2005, it was announced that The Daily Show with Jon Stewart had just won its second Peabody Award, for excellence in its "Indecision 2004" coverage of the presidential campaign. Not too shabby for a Comedy Central cable show that proclaims itself as the conveyor of "fake news." Since taking over the show in 1999, Jon Stewart and his sarcastic, ironic approach to network news has earned the show numerous Emmy and Television Critics Association awards for comedic writing and performance (Comedy Central Online). Viewership has increased to more than 1.8 million per primetime broadcast (Willow 2). Obviously, someone out there is getting the joke.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how The Daily Show applies humor to the visual cues and verbal representations of traditional media, and by doing so problematizes the spectacle of television news and subsequently creates a political effect. It will also pose the questions: is The Daily Show a program to revolutionize the television news industry, is it merely another program designed to pull in capital, or is it a balance of both? Also, the thesis will focus on how The Daily Show is tipping the balance between what is considered a "serious" news program and what constitutes "fake" news. Through the show's specific brand of visual and verbal comedy, namely a sarcastic and busting-at-the-seems approach to isolated political moments, The Daily Show has arguably created a vehicle by which Stewart and his colleagues can expose the news media spectacle, although this effect may not always be deliberate or intentional. The episodes of The Daily Show evaluated in this thesis date between October

31, 2005 to November 17, 2005. These particular shows were selected not for their content, but because they are from the mid-point of the traditional television season (between August and May) and did not have any repeat episodes. The more conventional news content will largely come from CNN, the Cable News Network, as this network serves as a sort of archetype for traditional visual formats as well as a template for news hegemony. The examples of "serious" news do not have to be from a specific time period, as I will be analyzing the general format and stylization of the broadcast, not the specific content of the news stories. Ultimately, the purpose of this project is to identify the production elements of traditional news programs, examine how The Daily Show visually and verbally shifts from them, and then examine the political effect this creates.

To begin this investigation, it is important to first understand the history of The Daily Show, how it came to be a "fake news" program, and exactly what that means in the realm of primetime, broadcast news. The Daily Show, a 30-minute program airing Monday through Thursday nights on Comedy Central, begins with a self-important, overly dramatic, but rock-infused musical theme. Breaking from the red, white and blue title graphics, the camera then sweeps across the equally red, white and blue studio over to the desk of the slightly-graying but nicely-suited Jon Stewart. Looking up from his pile of blue note pages, scribbling madly and then often losing track of his pen, Stewart acknowledges the audience and then begins his headline segment. The program addresses the top stories out of Washington D.C., followed by correspondent segments delivered by stone-faced field reporters, and a third segment includes interviews with an eclectic collection

of guests. Thirty minutes later, the acute “Moment of Zen” punctuates the end of the newscast. Specifically, I will be looking at the material from the politically driven first and second segments, as well as addressing the Moment of Zen. The Daily Show does reflect on the same political news stories as the more traditional news programs; however, where the program makes a decisive split from this format is with its guest and entertainment segments.

The entertainment interview may have been one of the staples of The Daily Show since it first began airing in the summer of 1996. Lizz Winstead, a noted comedian and writer, teamed together with executive producer and talent wrangler Madeline Smithberg to create the show. It was designed as a replacement for Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher, which had recently moved from Comedy Central to ABC. The Daily Show stayed in the same political vein but aimed more at distorting the news than reporting on it (James 1). Former ESPN personality Craig Kilborn was hired to sit behind the anchor desk. During each show, Kilborn would follow-up his celebrity interviews with a segment called “Five Questions,” in which public figures were asked a series of irrelevant and often incongruous questions. During these initial episodes of The Daily Show, the production itself seemed at times incongruous. The Daily Show was designed to be a humorous, politically-charged show, but the comedy was derived more from superficial cracks about the news, and putting Hollywood figures in awkward positions (Schillaci 1). Like many television shows, whether news-related or not, The Daily Show during its first season seemed as though it had adopted a “see what sticks” programming strategy. In addition to the in-

studio segments and guest commentary, the inaugural season also incorporated inane bits of trivia going to and from commercials – an element that did not continue through subsequent seasons of the show.

While the first season of The Daily Show was taped without a studio audience, the second season incorporated a live studio audience. Much of Kilborn's material was written for him, with the exception of his personal asides to the audience and impromptu dance performances. The show was peppered with touches of Winstead's creativity, including comedic monologues, Q&A sessions with Winstead's mother and ad-libbed debates between Kilborn and Winstead. Behind the scenes, tensions began to rise following a 1997 Esquire interview in which Kilborn made sexually explicit comments about his co-workers. Kilborn was suspended from the program for a two-week period without pay. One month later, Lizz Winstead resigned from The Daily Show. In December 1998, Craig Kilborn left The Daily Show to take over as host of CBS's The Late, Late Show. Kilborn took the "Five Questions" segment with him, as well as the less formal, off-the-cuff feel of the program.

Four weeks later, Jon Stewart took his place behind the news desk, and the name of the Comedy Central program changed to The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. In addition to the revised title, the cable network made Stewart an executive producer as well as part of the writing team. In exchange, the execs at Comedy Central specified that Stewart had to wear a suit. The comedian was notorious for wearing casual clothing during high-brow, televised events, and the "suits" at the network wanted Stewart's wardrobe to mimic the sleek, professional

appearance of The Daily Show. The newly revised program appeared to be more streamlined and “newsworthy,” and, accordingly, Stewart’s comedy brought a sharper focus onto the political realm.

Humor and sarcasm is a tool Jon Stewart often uses, especially when it comes to his own background. Growing up a Jewish child in the Christian suburbs of New Jersey, Jonathan Stewart Leibowitz lived with his physicist father and educational consultant mother. After graduating from college with a psychology degree, Stewart experienced what he called an “early midlife crisis” (quoted in Friend 8). In 1986, he moved to New York, shortened his name, and began performing in Manhattan comedy clubs. A succession of semi-successful television and film stints followed and then The Daily Show offer landed upon his soon-to-be anchor desk.

If Stewart is the face of The Daily Show, writer-turned-producer Ben Karlin is definitely a driving force behind the scenes. When Stewart took over the program in 1999, he called Karlin “the most crucial new hire” (Stewart quoted in Colapinto 62). The then 27-year-old writer had never led a writing team or even written for a television show, but what he did have to his credit was that he was the former editor of the Onion, the much-celebrated satirical weekly newspaper (Hibberd 16). Karlin said when he was hired for The Daily Show he was worried about being able to write about the political headlines in a way that would make them seem interesting. To engage the audience, he chose to focus on what he himself found amusing about the news industry, or what he calls the “excesses of the media” (Karlin quoted in Colapinto 62). He commented on his writing style:

"the main thing, for me, is seeing hypocrisy." Under his direction, The Daily Show began to parody the "serious" TV news show's habit of "conferring a jazzy entertainment-style title on every event" (Colapinto 62). The theory and function of parody will be explored further in this thesis -- as it is so prevalent and essential to the program, it could almost be one of the cast members.

But the show is not just about the accomplishment of the Stewart-Karlin team. On The Daily Show, the "reporters" are also a major facet of the program. On the Comedy Central website, these on-air personalities are described as "dedicated correspondents [who] not only serve you up the objective truth, they cut it into itty-bitty pieces and feed it to you" (Comedy Central Online). Reporters Samantha Bee, Rob Corddry, Ed Helms, Jason Jones and Dan Bakkedahl all hail from esteemed comedic sketch troops and theater groups in the United States and Canada. Many of them are concurrently film actors, writers and television producers. In addition to the news team, The Daily Show also has several regular contributors to the show. Lewis Black's caustic comedy targets corporate America and high-level public figures in his "Back in Black" segments. Stand-up comic and television writer Demetri Martin shares his aloof and lackadaisical observations of young, marketable America with his "Trendspotting" segments. A third contributor is John Hodgman, a writer whose makeshift expertise on everything from global warming to the Indian economy is overshadowed only by his trademark black, horned-rimmed glasses.

Stewart and The Daily Show machine gained notoriety and popularity during the 2000 presidential campaigns with tongue-in-cheek segments such as

"Indecision 2000," "Choose and Lose," "Operation Enduring Coverage" and "America Freaks Out." The show earned its first Peabody Award that year. It was during his first broadcast following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, however, that may have certified Stewart and his team's capabilities as journalists. On September 20, 2001, The Daily Show with Jon Stewart began without any dramatic camera angles or theatrical music. Instead, the first shot of the show was focused simply on Jon Stewart sitting at his desk, teary-eyed. He told the audience, "They said get back to work. And there were no jobs available for a man in the fetal position, under his desk crying, which I gladly would have taken. I wanted to tell you why I grieve, but why I don't despair...to see these firefighters, these guys from all over the country, literally with buckets rebuilding, that is extraordinary" (9/20/2001 The Daily Show). Following the attacks, American audiences were unsure how the country would recover, and, more specifically, how television programming would change. After all these sobering events, would it be all right to laugh again? These were the challenges The Daily Show faced. Instead of the show's "mock newscast" format, Stewart approached the audience by being honest and emotional -- a surprisingly candid turn from the show's typically humorous and somewhat dissident style. It was through this post-9/11 episode that the audience got the opportunity to see The Daily Show as a program with substance -- it gave the audience the idea that the show may be more than just a funny program that made people laugh by making fun of politics.

Jon Stewart and The Daily Show's crack team continue to walk many different lines. The show draws over a million per broadcast. Stewart's faux school textbook, America (The Book), co-written with Ben Karlin, spent six weeks on the New York Times Best Seller List as well as the Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times, USA Today and San Francisco Chronicle lists. For all their accomplishments, however, The Daily Show is first and foremost known among such news organizations as CNN and NPR as the "mock newscast" (Conan, NPR 1).

When asked about the place The Daily Show has made for itself in the public sphere, Jon Stewart says that the program is produced strictly for entertainment purposes. The show "is a selfish pursuit. [It] is not being run as a public good. It's not being done to get the word out...We get to utilize the one trick we know how to do, which is write jokes and utilize that trade on something we care about" (Nawrocki 35). Given the success of the show for both its critical approach and humorous format, Stewart's opinion might be disingenuous or just naïve. The news making industry possesses the power to mediate and circulate our collective knowledge, and The Daily Show creates a political effect by exposing and critiquing the spectacle of the news broadcast.

Television news as we know it today took several decades to develop. One of the first daily news programs was The Big News, which began airing weeknights in 1960. Walter Cronkite anchored the show from the desk at KNXT-TV in Los Angeles, California. CBS news director Sam Zelman and CBS general manager Robert Wood formatted the show so that forty-five minutes would be

devoted to local stories, and the remaining fifteen minutes would be devoted to national news. "The Big News" was considered to be revolutionary, as weather, sports and news for the first time were combined within one newscast and under one sponsor. This also could be considered one of the first times that corporate America tightened its grip on the television industry; this is a concept that will be further explored.

Prior to the 1960s, most news shows, or newsreels, were melodramatic prerecorded films narrated by very stern and sober men. As the appeal of "The Big News" and Walter Cronkite grew, the newscast began to borrow the terminology and semblance of a newspaper office environment, the medium considered most prestigious at the time. Cronkite was called the "managing editor," not the television anchor, and he sat at a "copy desk" engaged in the service of "headlines" (Diamond 70).

During these first years of network newscasts, the television executives developed the format and programming they thought would be the most profitable. New technologies, such as videotape and satellite, enabled the broadcasts to be more efficient and immediate. Executives incorporated music and entertainment news in order to attract the younger, better-educated, white-collar audiences (Diamond 72). Ratings and profit margins, not reputation and prestige, often became the motivation that drove television news.

The comfortable television news format was rattled in November 1963, following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Anchor Walter Cronkite had the ominous task of addressing the CBS News audience about

Kennedy's death, which was later followed by the live media spectacles surrounding Lee Harvey Oswald's jail transfer and fatal shooting. Through the televisualization of the death of the president, the audience felt as though they could emotionally connect and be influenced, in a way, by events presented on the news: and thus, television news began to cultivate this apparent ability to influence the public (Barkin 35, Barnouw 330, Making Sense of the Sixties, Stark 111). As the television audience enters its golden anniversary with television news, the relationship between programming and influence has become even stronger.

How media frames the current issues (after they are finished choosing the current issues), shapes how we process, think, and react to the main events and people in daily news (Gladwell 255). One of the most prevalent network news sources, and also a frequent contributor to The Daily Show's bank of humorous videos, is CNN – the Cable News Network. Touted as one of the most reliable news organizations, CNN is broadcast into households around the globe on a 24-hours-a-day basis. The guiding principle behind the network was to create among an overtly-commercial and competitive media industry an authentic, bare-bones news broadcast focused on live, global, 24-hours a day news. The news clips that The Daily Show uses from CNN are not inherently funny. It is how The Daily Show presents the bravado and spectacle of traditional news, such as the stories crafted on CNN, which makes them humorous.

Humor, both as an art form and as a means of entertainment, is deeply rooted in popular culture and human existence. Through laughter, individuals

can not only express what they see as the humorous incongruities in their outer world, but also, by communicating these contradictions with others, they can seemingly instigate a change within society itself. As Bakhtin writes, comedy is the “hero of time...kill(ing) the old world, the old authority and truth, and at the same time gives birth to the new” (Bakhtin 207). Such is the role of The Daily Show: although the political content of the program may be coated with rhetorical and visual humor, the audience nonetheless ingests the political implications along with the comedy. While humor and laughter are tied to the emotional elements of human life, comedy has always been connected to the structure of society, a sort of “zeitgeist of the times” (Davis 151).

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart cements its role as a barometer of the political zeitgeist through entertainment and education, through news parody and satirical critiques of bureaucracy. Still, as the popularity of The Daily Show continues to rise (Barker 1), as more people turn to the program as their main source of political news, The Daily Show still classifies itself as an entertainment show. Former Daily Show correspondent Stephen Colbert commented: “we constantly try to remind people that we’re fake...We accept absolutely no responsibility journalistically...we’re really entertainers and the genre we’ve chosen is the light news parody...We make a concerted effort at all times to say that there’s no reason you should trust us. We flagrantly manipulate footage. We manipulate messages for comedic purposes” (Conan, NPR 1). Stewart and The Daily Show team may consider themselves to be anti-corporate, the designers of a mock newscast, but perhaps they are naïve in this sense.

Through comedy and the “fake” news format, they are creating a program that in fact problemizes the news industry, causing networks like CNN to stand up and take notice. It’s a phenomenon Michael Cornfield calls the “Daily Show Revolution” (Cornfield 34).

The Daily Show creates a political effect, it influences political behavior, by allowing people to view politics in a different way, namely, by making them laugh about it. Cornfield identifies three ways in which Stewart drives “the revolution.” First, he has “mastered the nascent art of reacting visually and verbally to the latest video clip.” The video segment is the set-up, and Stewart’s reaction is the punch line. Second, he “sends up the storytelling and repartee conventions of ordinary television news along with the politics of whatever they are ‘reporting’,” while also imitating “serious” interviews (34). Stewart creates comedy by mocking what he points out as the imperfections of top-market television journalism. Third, he has “invented a form of interview that might be termed the ‘shambush’” (34), a sort of playful, somewhat ambush approach to questioning his celebrity and political guests. Both Stewart and his correspondents resort to dead-pan delivery and incognito word-play to lure out the comedy without alarming the typically stuffy and stern interview subjects.

Unapologetically, much of The Daily Show’s correspondents’ footage uses chroma-key and green-screen technology. The b-roll footage or stills are shot on location and then rolled behind a reporter that is in studio. The at-home audience cannot easily tell the difference between an offsite and in-studio report until the camera pans out to a wide shot, revealing that Jon Stewart and the

reporter are only a foot or two away from each other, staring into two different cameras as through they were separated by thousands of miles. Just another trick of the mock-newscast trade, and just another visual element Stewart uses to manipulate and parody newsroom conventions.

The style of The Daily Show capitalizes on mocking the self-important tone of the traditional newscast; however, the cast members of the program continually counter the idea that The Daily Show is a fake newscast. Colbert, who now hosts his own Daily Show spin-off commented: "It's not fake news...we are not newsmen, but it's jokes about real news" (cited in Kurtz 2004, A01). "We're so glad that people like the show," he continues, "but they're missing the joke if they don't actually watch the mass media, because half of our joke is what the news is and a lot of the time our joke is the way the news is reported elsewhere" (cited in Conan 2-3). Although The Daily Show may be making fun of the more traditional news programs, their jokes still rely on the assumption that the audience is watching, or at least is familiar, with the conventional news broadcasts.

The connection between The Daily Show and more conventional news program, some critics argue, is more than just content. Some television critics suggest that the two are connected by capitalism, because both are products of corporate America. Is The Daily Show the program that will revolutionize television news organizations, or is it merely alternative programming designed by capitalist-driven companies to cast a differently-designed net in the aims of catching a different type of audience? Is the show praised as the hip, new

program really just another program made to boost ratings? While The Daily Show does make fun of traditional news and also isolates itself from it, The Daily Show is shown on CNN International, is owned by the Comedy Central network, and presents guests who are trying to promote their book/film/television show/product. Is The Daily Show really resistant to the drive of capitalism and corporate America, and if so, in what ways?

A second question of interest is the balance between “fake” news and “serious” news. Much of the content of The Daily Show consists of clips and footage from serious, news programs. But when we see them on The Daily Show, why do we laugh? What makes them humorous to us? Part of this answer is the treatment of the clip: how The Daily Show anchors and reporters introduce the footage or the graphics made to go with the clip. However, there is another part to this answer: traditional news is not made to be inherently funny, but when the footage is isolated, when we see the clip by itself, sometimes the way the conventional anchors are behaving or the way the story is spun is in itself bloated with drama and spectacle. The question raised here is the changing tide of what is considered “serious” news. More and more, audiences are turning to The Daily Show because they believe they are getting a legitimate, however comedic, perspective, and, subsequently, the “serious” news is starting to seem more like a joke. Numerous studies have shown that modern audiences find that The Daily Show provides news content that is more relevant to their own needs and lifestyles (Barker 1, Chen 12, Conan 4, Douthat 56, Love 28).

Now that the history and current players involved with The Daily Show have been introduced, and some of the more important questions about the show have been clarified, the concluding pages of this introductory chapter will explore why people should take notice of the program, and what the show means in the realm of television news. Chapter Two will identify the visual cues and rhetorical elements used by traditional media, and talk about how those features have become so prevalent that they have developed into a sort of template, or rigid format, for the “serious” new programs. To understand the foundation of The Daily Show as a sort of parody of traditional and serious news, one must understand the basis of more conventional news programs. Once these elements have been identified, Chapter Three will further develop which visual cues and verbal elements The Daily Show uses, and which are modified for the purposes of creating a humorous, problematizing effect. The chapter will include a brief history of comedy to introduce the theories behind humor, and then the content analysis will pull examples from the show to further develop the concepts of puns, satire, irony and parody – the main comedic tools utilized by The Daily Show. Finally, Chapter Four will once again raise the question of where capitalism fits within the production and direction of The Daily Show. Once the driving forces behind traditional news and The Daily Show have been explored, I will again discuss how The Daily Show balances its reputation as the program to revolutionize news against the criticism that the show is just another corporate money-maker.

Amid all the acclaim and the criticism, one aspect of The Daily Show that television analysts cannot dispute is the show's powerhouse ratings. In 2003, when Jon Stewart had been at the helm of the show for four seasons, the ratings had skyrocketed 72 percent to more than 1.2 million viewers per primetime broadcast, and now their viewership has increased to 1.7 million people per primetime broadcast (Willow 2). Many of those current audience members are from the youth demographic.

According to the Pew Research Center, when people under 30 years old were polled about where they get their television news, 21 percent listed The Daily Show and 23 percent said they got their information from network news (Conan, NPR 4). As The Daily Show is a self-proclaimed entertainment news program, however, the 21 percent were also found to be "not terribly well-informed." The same survey also revealed that 38 percent of those polled still believed that network news is objective (Conan, NPR 4).

Carroll Doherty of the Pew Research Center attributes The Daily Show viewership to lifestyle factors. He explained that the 11:00pm broadcast is more conducive to the younger viewers, who are not often at home during the typical 5:00-6:30pm network newscasts. The young audience, Doherty contends, is not necessarily getting a wide range of basic news information from The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, but what they do get from the program is how to think *about* the political realm (Conan, NPR 2). By watching a program like The Daily Show, which provides audiences with an alternative perspective of what is going on in

the news, the viewers are able to develop their own critical eye, and to figure out how the stories presented in the nightly newscasts affects their own lives.

For the viewers getting their news from The Daily Show rather than more traditional sources, there are both pros and cons. The Daily Show is aired Monday through Thursday, with the news concentrated in the first 20 minutes of the broadcast. This means that the viewers are only privy to 80 collective minutes of The Daily Show news per week, compared to the half-hour, weekday national newscasts from ABC, CBS and NBC. The Daily Show viewers may gain a different perspective on the news that the conventional networks air; however, this may also be a disadvantage as Jon Stewart has been reprimanded by both media and political critics for his liberal political views. The largest benefit of watching The Daily Show is exposure to different framing systems and perspectives on who and what make up daily news: Jon Stewart's comedic approach to news attracts a younger, wider audience, who in turn is exposed to people and ideas they would not have normally sought out. In a sense, The Daily Show may, as Doherty points out, help its audience members learn to wade through the television spectacle, showing them how to reflect upon the chosen news stories, rather than simply ingest what someone else considers and presents as newsworthy.

To summarize, as The Daily Show celebrates its 10-year anniversary, it is also celebrating stellar ratings and a thumbs-up from television critics. While some say The Daily Show is a refreshing departure from the heavily-formatted traditional news programs, others say the program that prides itself as the

alternative, hip news show is really just another product of the capitalist television industry. Either way, The Daily Show puts a humorous spin on otherwise dowdy political issues by manipulating conventional visual cues, using edgy rhetorical elements, and, thus, it problematizes the television news industry.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE FOUNDATION OF SPECTACLE

The power and authority of the traditional news broadcast is based on a format that is repetitive, replicable, and thus dependable for news audiences. The news broadcast begins the same time every day, with the same type of news anchors and same studio environment. Audiences can easily relate to the stories because the textual elements are easy to understand and the accompanying pictures clarify the intent of the story. Newscasts, Todd Gitlin argues, adopt a certain pattern that audiences can easily identify. There will typically be the obvious “good guy” and “bad guy,” there will usually be some type of commercial sponsor, and conflicts will always end with obvious solutions (Gitlin 241).

When it comes to the composition of the news story, there are a multitude of visual elements to consider: angle, lighting, perspective, framing, cutting, pacing, sequencing, zooming, tracking and panning (Kraft 3). Although there are a plethora of factors and manipulations in each shot of each frame, and each alteration may affect the viewer’s perception of the visual information, the news packages still end up being strikingly similar. It is because consistency, Gaye Tuchman argues, creates trust and authority (332). These two characteristics are the lifeblood of traditional television news programs. Dependability in format and content, and a sense of authority, is what keeps the audience coming back.

But when the news programs become too repetitive, when they rely more on ratings and reputation than they do on their subject matter, this is when the traditional news programs arguably enter the realm of superficial or “fake” news.

When the serious or traditional news programs fall into this trap of style over substance, it leaves room for alternative programs such as The Daily Show to critique and expose the spectacle of conventional television news.

The visual elements of traditional news programs consist largely of camera shots and graphics. Typically, each studio is equipped with three separate cameras, and this is so the control room can easily switch between individual shots of the anchors (usually two of them are on set), an anchor and a guest, or a wide shot that would consist of two or more on-air personalities. There can also be a jib camera, or overhead camera, which can capture sweeping shots of the set or the audience. The Daily Show also has three studio cameras, which Stewart often addresses by name, and an overhead camera that is used in the opening sequence of the show to sweep across the studio, as well to capture silhouette shots of the audience as the show comes in and out of commercial.

Studio cameras, whether used in traditional new programs or on The Daily Show, have the capability to capture several different shots. Ranging from the closest to the widest, you can begin with the extreme-close-up shot (ECU). When the extreme close up shot is used, usually just the talent's face is shown, often for reaction shots or to exhibit something on the on-air personality's face. Also, the extreme close up can be used to show the detail of, or to zoom in on, an object on set. The next close-range shot would be the close-up (CU). The close-up isolates the upper third of the person on screen, namely the top of their head to their bust line. Often, the close-up shot is used in conjunction with an

insert graphic, a picture “inserted” over the shoulder of the person on screen.

The next camera shot, in closest to widest order, is the two-shot (2-SHOT). This camera shot captures two people within the same frame, often these two people are seated or standing within close proximity of each other. With a two-shot, the on-camera personalities are usually sharing reading duties, so it makes more sense for them to already be in the same shot. Also with the two-shot, because the people are sharing camera time, they can also engage in on-air conversation, either ad-libbed or prepared, without having to have the cameras repeatedly jump from one close-up to the next. Technically speaking, there are also three-shots, four-shots and so on, but when the number of on-camera people exceeds two or three, the control room usually just calls this a “wide shot” and asks the camera operator to back up and zoom out until everybody fits in one frame.

When more than one person appears on screen at the same time, and more than one camera is being used, that requires the help of the graphics department. In this case, there are two graphic shots that can be used. The first shot is called the “double-box” (DBBX). For this shot, you have two cameras taking close-up shots of two different people who are typically in two different places – anchors who appear on-screen with their field reporters frequently use this shot. The first person is in one “box,” which is placed on screen directly next to the “box” of the second person; then, without being able to see each other, these two people can virtually talk to each other without having to be in the same place at once. Typically, these boxes have a title over them which describes the story, something like “Shooting Investigation” or “Middle East Crisis.” When one

of these on-air personalities is “tossing to” the other, meaning they are just giving an introduction to the other person, the size of the boxes can be different. This is called the two-thirds-box (2/3BX). To give an example, the 2/3 box is often used on CNN when the anchor of one show “tosses” to the anchor of the upcoming show. Likewise, on The Daily Show, Jon Stewart is captured within the 1/3 size box as he “tosses” to the 2/3 box of Stephen Colbert, the host of the show airing after The Daily Show.

The remaining graphics used for conventional news programs provide more information about the story at-hand, being on-screen pictures or text. When a story is introduced, or when anchors are reading a copy-only (no video) story, there is a picture box over their right shoulder called an “insert.” This insert can be a generic photo, such as a presidential seal when talking about the president, or it can be a still photo from the story itself, such as the President standing at an event that the anchor is about to talk about. When the shot changes, the anchor is no longer seen, but when you can hear their voice over pre-recorded or live footage of an event, this is called a voice-over. At the beginning of a voice-over, the scene needs to be established for the audience, so the control room will insert what is called a graphic locator: several lines of text at the bottom third of the screen which can identify the date, time, and place. If the events are happening live, a box will appear in the upper left corner of the screen that says “live.” There are a few other small graphic inserts that can be seen in the corners of the television screens: if the footage of the voice-over is from the network’s bank of footage, the word “file” will appear on the top right corner of the

screen. Also, because the audience needs to constantly be reminded which channel they are watching to get their as-it-happens news, a small picture graphic of the station's call letters (FOX5) or network symbol (the NBC peacock) will appear in the bottom right corner of the screen.

There are also graphics that take up the full size of the screen, which are called "clips." Clips often feature a large, faded picture in the background with a prominent listing of text on top of it (clip-chy). The clip can be used to write-out the text of a phone conversation or speech, list the main bullet-points of the story, or provide information of upcoming events, sort of like a visual calendar. A clip can include a small picture of the person who is being transcribed, or the person the story is addressing (p-clip-chy), it can feature one large picture, like a map with specific highlighted areas (map), or the clip can be cut in half, and feature the anchor or footage with a vertical column of text (half-chy).

Another facet of the studio-produced, network news broadcast is the monitor. Monitors are large, stand-alone screens that can either be permanently attached to a portion of the studio, like onto a wall, or they can be portable, set on wheels to move around the set as needed. These screens can either play a portion of video or they can show pre-produced animation. The animation differs for each station, so that one network's international block of news or health segment can be visually distinctive from the others, like the station's own stamp. The big screen monitors (BSM) provide an interesting backdrop for the anchor's desk, showing the cityscape of their broadcast city or perhaps showcasing a large version of the person or product making a guest appearance on the show

that day. On-screen personalities can be seated in front of a monitor, so that it provides decoration, or they can be standing in front of a monitor that takes up the entire frame, providing a moving, animated tool for their story.

While it important to establish a sort of basic knowledge of these different visual elements for a better comprehension of the thesis, it should be pointed out that The Daily Show only uses a portion of these cues during a typical broadcast. The Daily Show largely utilizes the close-up shots when Stewart is talking to the camera during the “headlines” segment, and an extreme close-up is reserved for when the camera quickly zooms in on a humorous object or a seemingly embarrassing expression or feature of the reporters. When two studio cameras are in use, usually during the “field reporters” segments, Stewart and the correspondent are shown in a double box format. If the reporter is deliberately in-studio, the camera goes to a 2-shot. The only exception to this pattern is at the end of the program, when Stewart tosses to Stephen Colbert using a 2/3 box format.

In additional to the portion of visual cues The Daily Show borrows from traditional news programs, there is also a collection of verbal elements taken from the more conventional news shows. The rhetorical elements on The Daily Show operate on two different levels. First, there are the seemingly adlibbed outbursts or reactions that Stewart, and sometimes the correspondents, have to the videos. Second, there are the graphic elements that The Daily Show borrows from the more traditional news programs, but what is typed on these cues are anything but traditional. These cues -- the inserts, banners, double box titles,

package titles and locators -- are all ways that The Daily Show visually represents elements of verbal, or rhetorical, humor and parody.

The visual and rhetorical elements of the more conventional news broadcast all compose a rigid set of television standards, which Gitlin (1987) calls the "hegemony of media" (64). Hegemony establishes a set of normative structures that influence people and institutions: for example, hegemonic norms give authority to television news. For Gitlin, hegemony is embedded in the format and structure of the newscast.

The concept of hegemony is a concept of domination. Over the years, the term has been applied to academic, political and economic trends, but at its most basic form, hegemony can be defined as the domination of ideas. These ideas are often crafted around the social interests and socioeconomic needs of those with power, and reinforced by the leading group or prominent members of that society. Hegemony is not universal: as technology, communication and civilization change and evolve over time, so do the discursive forces behind it. While the arrangement of hegemony may be conditional, its supporting theory is not. Hegemony reinforces an ideology - the system of practices or set of beliefs that saturate all levels of everyday experience; it is a lived relation (Kellner 202). Hegemony supposes the existence of that ideology, the presence of something that seems truly total and has the ability to shape society (Kellner 156).

The process of hegemony can be illustrated in three separate phases. First, the dominant social group introduces a central system of practices and ideas (Williams in Kellner 157). These players are often the intellectual or moral

leaders in a culture, a group with a “broad based and coherent worldview that leads by gaining active assent from allies and passive assent from other classes or groups” (Condit 206). They can operate either in the public realm, as with members of the state, or on the private realm, as with members of civil society, to define hegemony. In their book Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe describe hegemony as a discursive formation derived from heated opposition (105). To begin, the cultural leaders capture a concept through language; the beliefs and ideas are objectified by words. As this language begins to strengthen, and as the concept is more concretely articulated, a discursive construction forms (96). More and more, there develops a comparison between what the ideology encompasses and what antagonisms lie outside that realm, and these systems of differences enter a war for position (122). When the discursive construction wins the theoretical fight for dominance, and this ideology is recognized and accepted by society, hegemony is formed (139).

In the second phase in the hegemonic model, those ideas are transmitted and incorporated into society by a dominant culture (Williams in Kellner 158). Celeste Condit breaks down the process of incorporation by identifying the different “models of consent” (208). The first model, the simplest of all of these figures, is called the Top-Down Model (209). The model maps the direct, one-on-one communication or transmission of ideology from the ruling class onto the working class. The second model is based on Antonio Gramsci’s work, the theorist who developed the concept of hegemony to describe the dependence of

the capitalist elite on the mass working class (Condit 206). Accordingly, the Gramscian Model of incorporation deals with the capitalist elite's transmission of an ideology onto the working class, with the elite ultimately compromising the final version of ideology so the masses will consent to it. The third model Condit identifies is the Concordance Model (210); this is the structure that most closely reflects how hegemonic norms function within our currently society, and the theory which is most appropriate for this research project. The Concordance model suggests that good public discourse must accommodate and incorporate a wide range of social interests, portraying a collection of consumers, financiers, producers and organizers who mediate the concept of hegemony through a constant exchange of ideas with other groups, consisting of lawmakers and civic organizations. For a hegemonic concept to persevere, it must take into account the evolution of culture, the consciousness of its players and the different groups that comprise it.

The third and final step of the theoretical hegemonic model deals with the maintenance of the prescribed norms (Kellner 158). Hegemony is reinforced by the so-called dominant regimes, but as society evolves and different values, opinions and attitudes enter the picture, the regimes must decide whether to deal with the change or fight against it (Kellner 158). They have the option of adapting to reflect the "alternative" views; they can simply recognize their presence; or, as a third option, the regime can chose to completely ignore the alternative opinions, labeling them as merely "oppositional" attitudes that lie outside of the realm of the appropriate ideology. This process of hegemonic

formation, incorporation and maintenance is political as much as it is academic and theoretical.

Hegemony will always be tied to culture, whether through economic strategies, political ideologies, social structures, or acting as a guiding principle in all three of these fields. Typically, the actors who express, implement and then enforce hegemony are the prominent members of society, noted for their personable nature or for their leadership role in the public sphere. Either way, hegemony is typically expressed through mass communication channels such as print, radio or television. In the case of television programming, and especially television news, information is expertly prepackaged so as to both attract the attention of the audience as well as replicate the format to which they have become accustomed. Condit writes, “the variety of political organizations that represent different social groups and changes are active addressees of messages ... consequently, the leaders who represent these groups choose among various possible alliances in order to maximize their own interest” (209). Furthermore, the political community is a communication matrix; it consists of policies, theories, messages and identities which all claim to function for the common good. Hegemony is a type of political relation in the sense that it constructs what Mouffe calls a “we” (39), that is, a culture operating under the sociopolitical and economic ideologies of the ruling regime, or the public figures of state. Political movements and public figures rely on large-scale communication systems in order to present their ideas to society and, later, to reinforce hegemony. But “politics as usual” can only utilize this channel of

communication by conforming to the established norms of newsmaking and operating within the parameters of the network's economic and political interests.

Mass media operates under its own system of beliefs and practices, distributing ideology and sculpting consciousness through their daily programs. The media industry conforms to hegemony, for it "produces its goods, tailoring them to particular markets and organizing their content so that they are packaged to be compatible with the dominant values and mode of discourse" (Gitlin 240). The hegemony of television is embedded in the production of the show: the replicable format, the genre which reflects and fits within the market demographics, the television personalities to which audience members can relate, and the conflict-solution framing which provides closure to the audience. Television news programs also incorporate the political and economic ideology handed-down from industry leaders such as the network heads and news directors. The hegemony of television news, that is, lies within the presentation of news as well as in the stories themselves. News stories are chosen by the assignment editors for their "newsworthiness," or their potential to attract an audience. Once a topic is selected, the show producer decides a worthy, visual location for the reporter to broadcast from, and then they decide where this news story will be placed in that day's news rundown. The format of the story, the on-air personalities who present it, and the treatment of the news story are all elements of television hegemony which the audience expects to see and has become accustomed to seeing.

Little are viewers aware, the spectacle of television news is an extraordinarily regimented, economically and socially dominated means of production. Guy Debord describes spectacle as a “model of socially dominant life ... presenting itself as something positive...and [having] a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations (Debord in Kellner 140-142). The spectacle of news, all the bells and whistles and animations that frame our programs, acts as an instrument of unification, presenting the world in terms of how it fits in the realm of acceptable practices and dominant ideology. Spectacle, as it immerses itself into the different domains of society, becomes culture’s hegemonic compass: a standard to which society strives to achieve and adhere.

One of the media organizations that drives the news spectacle and therefore perpetuate the hegemonic norms of television news is CNN. Subsequently, because the Cable News Network is known for setting the industry’s bar when it comes to spectacle and standards, namely through its 24/7 coverage of breaking news and global affairs, it is also one of The Daily Show’s more frequent objects of parody. News monolith CNN was conceived in 1979 by a two-person team of an experienced television producer and an ambitious, but inexperienced, entrepreneur. In a period of about 15 years, however, CNN became an omni-present system of stations, both a source of news and a catalyst of it.

One of the founders of CNN, and the name most closely associated with the company, is media mogul Ted Turner, who first got into the media business

when he inherited his father's successful billboard company, which was operated out of Atlanta. Seeking additional ventures, Ted Turner purchased Atlanta television station Channel 17 WTCG in the mid-1970s, which he later changed to "Superstation" WTBS. In 1977, television news producer Reese Schonfeld approached Turner about beginning a cable network dedicated entirely to news. The two designed an all-electric newsroom, flanked by videotape editing machines and tied together by a computer system. The first CNN headquarters was in a downtrodden brick building in Atlanta, its ballrooms converted into giant newsrooms.

In April 1980, Turner leased satellite space from the FCC, and on Sunday, June 1, 1980, the first news broadcast began. The first CNN story, reaching an audience of 1.7 million cable subscribers (Kung 106), detailed the shooting of civil rights leader Vernon Jordan, which was followed by a sports segment. This first broadcast was considered an amateur attempt at news, as a cleaning lady could be viewed in the back of the studio and an unsuspecting reporter was caught on-camera picking his nose. It was not a good first impression, but Turner still insisted that "We will stay on air till the end of the world and then we will cover the story and sign off singing 'Nearer My God to Thee'" (Hickey 88).

Turner's \$34.5 million dollar investment (Hickey 88) continued to be on shaky ground, but since he was passionate about making the news station successful, Turner continued to pour time and money into it (Gibson 1/26/2005). CNN's lukewarm coverage of the 1980 presidential campaign earned it the nickname "Chicken News Network" (Barkin 109). Additionally, networks ABC,

NBC and CBS banded together to keep CNN out of the White House until Turner sued them for entry in 1982. That same year, after numerous disagreements, co-founder Reese Schonfeld was forced to step down as President of CNN, replaced by Burt Reinhart. Reinhart's hermitic character and conflicts with reporters caused a severe chasm between CNN executives and CNN journalists. Schonfeld argued, "Ted had a habit of taking people who were basically flawed [and putting them] to work for him because they were easier for him to manage" (Schonfeld quoted in Collins 117).

Eventually, the Cable News Network did have some successes. Politicians, who were granted free access to the news station, began to realize they could get face time easier on a 24-hour network than with the competition. CNN satellites also sent signals overseas to get scoops from international broadcasters.

The guiding principles behind CNN were to create among a hostile media industry a news broadcast focused on live, global, 24-hour news. CNN founders wanted the network to be a keystone in the global cultural interaction, the mediascape that disseminated news around the world. Turner believed that his risky venture, his steadfast commitment to news, was a public service, and that his news could change the course of world history (Kung 100). In the process of trying to change the news message, CNN itself transformed within the news market.

In the 1990s, the Cable News Network's extensive, 24/7 coverage of the Gulf War and the O.J. Simpson trial put the television network in the public eye.

The O.J. Simpson trial was an example of an event that Douglas Kellner describes as a “megaspactacle” (93). “Megaspactacles fixate attention on events that distract people from the pressing issues of their everyday lives with endless hype on shocking crimes, sports contests and personalities, political scandals, natural disasters, and the self-promoting hype of media culture itself” (93). Many of the elements of the murder were a megaspactacle: the brutal killing of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, and then the subsequent trial of the celebrity, former football star. CNN and the major networks televised the trial on a daily basis, but where CNN separated themselves from the other networks was in their thorough treatment of the story: CNN offered live coverage, expert commentary, as well as daily 30-minute trial summaries which were repeated several times a day (Kellner 101). It was during this period of time that CNN solidified its reputation as a valid and valuable news source.

Another of CNN’s commercial successes was its coverage of the Persian Gulf War in 1991 (Hickey 89). During this time, CNN based its news format on the more traditional newscasts, but through its use of new technology and eye-catching graphics, updated and changed the hegemonic norms for television news. While covering the Gulf War, CNN scooped its network news competitors by bringing exclusive, live coverage directly from Baghdad, the heart of the war. The channel delivered a uniform, global newscast that showed the war mostly through an American perspective. Since CNN had such strong satellite capabilities, the network became a primary communication conduit between major players in the Gulf War, such as between George H.W. Bush and Saddam

Hussein. Following the end of the war, CNN created several new international networks, which were designed so that their programming appealed to local audiences and regional advertisers.

In the early 1990s, CNN was a relatively independent institution with two major sources of income: subscription fees from cable operating companies and advertising (Kung 2000: 105). In the late 1990s, CNN gained new influence through corporate mergers. In 1996, Turner Broadcasting merged with Time Warner to form the world's largest media company (Gunther 59). As a result of the merger, CNN encountered synergetic perks, such as access to better guests and resources. Under the Time Warner/Turner wing were the following companies: New Line Cinema, Castle Rock Entertainment, TBS, TNT, Turner Classic Movies, Sport South Network, CNN, Cartoon Network, Hanna-Barbara, MGM, Atlanta Braves Baseball, Atlanta Hawks Basketball, Atlanta Thrashers Hockey, Time Magazine, Looney Tunes, HBO, People Magazine, Sports Illustrated Magazine, and the WB Network.

As the popularity of the Internet grew, Turner also led the company into the new media industry. In January 2000, Time Warner/Turner merged with AOL to become AOL Time Warner: the two executives shook hands, exchanged jackets, and organized a party for the employees. The celebration would be short-lived, however, as the AOL merger resulted in an almost instant 10 percent job layoff, 400 of CNN's staff in particular. The layoffs led to troubling times for the employees at CNN, while the business entity continued to grow exponentially. As a result of the two mergers, the CNN Channel now included:

CNN Headlines, CNN International, CNN en Español, CNN Radio Network, CNN News Source, CNN Inflight, CNN Airport Channel, CNN Newsroom, Checkout Channel, Airport Channel, CNN Reel News and CNN Teletext (Volkmer 1999). As Turner Broadcasting and the CNN monolith venture into these realms of media, becoming a vertically integrated enterprise, they solidify their role as the pace car of television news hegemony.

In the broadcasting industry, in large part as a result of these mergers, CNN became known as the Global News Leader (Volkmer 1999). Live coverage of mass media news events encouraged international participation. The privately owned, commercial company created a new political platform due to its capabilities as a global political communication leader. The immediacy and impact of a story made CNN synonymous with telediplomacy. World rulers such as President George Bush, Saddam Hussein, and Mikhail Gorbachev relied on CNN as a primary news source. During the administration of President Clinton, CNN launched a new, government-focused program, called CNN's Inside Politics. Hosted by long-time White House field reporter Wolf Blitzer, the show became a favorite of politicians and journalists alike. President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore said that Inside Politics was the only show they regularly watched: first, it was always on in the White House, and second, how journalists "spun" the news on the show usually dictated in which direction opinions would turn (Kurtz 158). On the official website for Inside Politics, CNN described the show as "The program [that] provides the most comprehensive political news coverage on national television, including reports from the campaign trail, in-

depth political analysis and newsmaker interviews. From Capitol Hill to the White House, Inside Politics looked at the political events that shaped political life” (CNN.com). Lawrence Eagleburger, former Secretary of State, commented on CNN’s political coverage: “We have yet to understand how profoundly it has changed things. The public hears of an event now in real time, before the State Department has had time to think about it. Consequently, we find ourselves reacting before we’ve had time to think. This is now the way we determine be” (Ammon 70).

The prevalence of the Cable News Network in the media-state relation became so strong, that the phrase “CNN Effect” (Robinson 30) was coined to describe how the network has seemingly taken over as the hegemonic global news leader. Spawned amidst broadcasts of the Gulf War, the “CNN Effect” was caused by the real-time communication technology the network utilized to provoke responses from political elite. During humanitarian crises involving Western government, it was CNN, the Western media, which influenced policymaking and civil intervention. For example, through CNN’s satellite capabilities audiences saw the violent and deadly affects of the Gulf War in a real-time format, stirring in political leaders a more immediate need to end the fighting. Also, through CNN International, the satellite feeds became the primary channel of communication for antagonists Saddam Hussein and President George Bush, thus expediting the policy making process (Ammon 70). CNN was everywhere, in a multitude of stations, formats and languages. Many viewers learned to rely on the network for all their breaking news, and, as such, how CNN

reported on an issue began to influence how the audience and even branches of the government interpreted it. From the foundation of the CNN Effect, Piers Robinson created the “Policy-Media Interaction Model.” The political elite, in a sense the executive producers of our legislation, use CNN, a top news media network, to streamline media and politics into one capitalist-driven package (Robinson 31). CNN had the precarious position of not only being the entity that helped shaped the news, but also the channel through which that news was communicated: an example of hegemony at its strongest.

The “CNN Effect,” also referred to as the “CNN Curve” or “CNN Factor” (Livingston 291), can be utilized as a media-state accelerant, impediment, or as an agenda setting agency. As an accelerant, it may shorten the decision making process or response time; however, as an impediment, the “CNN Effect” appeals to emotional distress to lower morale or may threaten military confidence on a global level. For example, when CNN shows video from overseas of American casualties it may lower the morale of the public or create skepticism of the military forces. The time devoted to these media-state issues on any of the CNN channels may alter its level of importance, thus instigating a reordering of foreign policy priorities.

The Cable News Network has tapped into so many different areas of the media industry that their presence can be felt on the television, on the movie screen, at the sports arenas and in the pages of magazines. As people are exposed to the products of Turner Broadcasting and CNN, they are in a sense indoctrinated into the hegemonic principles that comprise traditional news media.

It is unclear whether CNN rose to the top of the industry by adopting to this hegemony or creating a new version of it, but, while this network remains at the top of the media heap, its guiding ideologies and capitalist principles will continue to drive the common perspective of what audiences believe news programs are supposed to look like, sound like, flow like, and consist of.

This pre-formatted news spectacle is something The Daily Show simultaneously borrows from and problematizes, both in a visual and verbal sense. The Daily Show suggests the phenomenon of the “CNN Effect” is a crisis of communication, but The Daily Show itself lies somewhere on the spectrum between a tool to revolutionize the news media and political landscape and a so-called “alternative” programming to advance a capitalism motivated agenda.

Concerned about the current political landscape, Jon Stewart disclosed that, “I think not even so much that there should be a liberal bias or a conservative bias, but there should be skepticism. News organizations should be discriminating enough to say ‘no’” (Nawrocki 36). Although Stewart is critical of a political bias, even claiming that The Daily Show is “neutral” territory, his stance resembles a liberal mentality like that of late-night talks shows, rather than the “fair and balanced” network news programs. The show tends to criticize the more conventional or hegemonic officials and organizations, his favorite being the news network CNN: “The one that disappoints me most is CNN. You ever watch Crossfire? I’ve never seen a more retarded show” (Nawrocki 36).

On October 15, 2004, Jon Stewart was able to take his grievances directly to the source. He appeared on CNN’s Crossfire with Tucker Carlson and Paul

Begala. The hosts booked Stewart to promote his recent book, 2004's America The Book: A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction, and to spend some time conversing with "the most trusted man in fake news" (Carlson, CNN 1). Instead, the Crossfire hosts received a stern lecture from Stewart about their contributions to the downfall of the integrity of television news.

**STEWART:** I made a special effort to come on the show today, because I have privately, amongst my friends and also in the occasional newspapers and television shows, mentioned this show as being bad...It's not so much that it's bad as it's hurting America....Stop, stop, stop hurting America....

**CARLSON:** Wait, Jon, let me tell you something valuable that I think we do that I'd like you to see...It's nice to get [politicians] to try and answer the question. And in order to do that, we try and ask them pointed questions.

**STEWART:** If you want to compare your show to a comedy show, you're more than welcome to...You're on CNN. The show that leads into me is puppets making crank phone calls.

**CARLSON:** Jon, Jon, Jon, I'm sorry. I think you're a good comedian. I think your lectures are boring. ...

**STEWART:** You're doing theater, when you should be doing debate...What you do is not honest. What you do is partisan hackery...You have a responsibility to the public discourse, and you fail miserably.

**CARLSON:** Wait. I thought you were going to be funny. Come on.

Be funny.

**STEWART:** No. No. I'm not going to be your monkey.

In addition to these comments, Carlson called Stewart a “butt boy” for catering to government officials during his political interviews, and repeatedly inquired as to why Jon Stewart was refusing to be comical. In return, Stewart compared Crossfire's debate format to a pro-wrestling match, and insisted that Carlson was “as big a dick on your show as you are on any show” (Carlson, CNN 12). The root of Stewart's critique is that Crossfire, a political debate show, does the public a disservice by not providing viewers with any political insight, just creating noise about a political topic.

Stewart was praised for his performance on Crossfire: the comedian confronted the media enemy head-on, on his turf, on live television (Winters 107). He departed from the security of The Daily Show desk to mock the CNN monolith face-to-face. Four days later, over one million Internet users had downloaded the Jon Stewart/Crossfire video, causing some websites to crash due to volume (Zerbisias 5). Other critics claimed that Jon Stewart was being disingenuous on Crossfire; he was scrutinizing Carlson for political bias, when The Daily Show itself, whether intentionally or not, embraces more of a liberal slant.

Nevertheless, The Daily Show continues to serve as a vehicle to criticize the political spectacle of traditional news organizations. Many news programs and personalities may not be inherently funny, but, drawing from the Crossfire

example, when moments are isolated from the bravado and build-up, often the presentation of the story of the behavior of the anchors may seem somewhat ludicrous. When news programs are swept up in the hegemonic norms, when the appearance of news stories becomes more important than the content of the program, this is when the role reversal between serious news and “joke” news becomes most evident (Peterson 14-15). This is when the pre-formatted presentation of conventional news becomes so overplayed that certain phrases and appearances that used to signify the big news stories now carry a minimal amount of rhetorical weight.

Students of journalism, as they are learning to write their hard-hitting yet strikingly similar broadcast news scripts, are sometimes directed to an online writing resource called [Newswriting.com](http://Newswriting.com). One of the most popular items on this site is the list of “The 100 Worst Groaners,” a collection of the most “hackneyed, overblown, stuffy or just plain silly cliché(s) that turn up time after time in news scripts” ([Newswriting.com](http://Newswriting.com)). These items may seem somewhat passé, but they are spoken or appear in television newscasts everyday. Terms such as “aftermath,” “breaking news,” “clinging to life,” “firestorm of controversy,” “major breakthrough,” “recent memory,” “unanswered questions” and “wreak havoc” are the go-to phrases of choice. These “groaners” also provide a small glimpse at a much bigger problem: as the television news industry comes to rely more on their efficient, expertly-tested formats, they begin losing authority as they lose themselves within the style and presentation of the story, thus creating a disconnect between the network and the audience (Tolson 78).

Within the realm of traditional news media, spectacle functions on at least two levels. On the one hand, it is the flashy, over-dramatic presentation of the stories that hooks viewers and grabs their attention, but, on the other hand, it is this same spectacle that transforms the content of the television programs from newsworthy to ratings-worthy. The foundation of this spectacle is the production of the new program, the formatted visual and verbal cues which make each broadcast repetitive and, therefore, recognizable and dependable. By reinforcing these camera techniques, graphics and story packaging, the news industry has in a sense formed a hegemony of news, a strict visual, rhetorical and contextual standard by which other news programs are expected to conform.

Hegemony in news format and content is a dominating and overbearing force within the news media industry for two reasons. First, the news networks have come to depend on this type of repetitive yet flashy style to remain competitive with the other network's coverage as well as in the ratings game. And second, the audience has become so accustomed to a certain visual style when they watch their nightly news programs that any abrupt changes in the layout of the set, how the anchors appear on camera, or how the stories are presented, might cause the viewers to question the authority of the program, or simply, they may change the channel to something that looks a little more familiar.

One of the most prevalent proponents of the current hegemony in television news is CNN. When CNN first began broadcasting, they were marketed as the underdog station that had the fight for their stories as well as

their place within the “big three” of television news networks: ABC, NBC and CBS. As CNN started to gain its reputation for breaking news, and more people started to turn to the network for the latest coverage, America began to be inundated by the 24-7 network, and in turn, this viewership perpetuated the domineering ideology behind the news industry. CNN and Turner Broadcasting leveraged their growing success and ratings to become part of a conglomerate operating other areas of mass media: film production, television production, sports networks, sports arenas, children’s programming and magazine publishing. Through these mergers, CNN became part of a vertically integrated industry, exposing audiences to the dominant format without even having to have watched their network news programming. CNN became such a force within the news industry that its treatment of foreign policy and coverage of political events actually began to shape how government operated. CNN, in a sense, was able to influence and shape the news stories that would later become a part of its daily broadcasts. While CNN may have started out as the underdog news network, its popularity and prevalence grew exponentially, and where the network was perhaps once the perpetuator of the traditional news formats, it is this overwhelming news ideology that puts CNN and the other major news networks at risk of becoming cliché. It is this cliché, this spectacle of television news, that The Daily Show attempts to expose, and it does this by borrowing the regimented visual and verbal cues that are utilized in the more traditional television news programs.

### CHAPTER THREE: COMPREHENDING THE INCONGRUITIES

Networks such as ABC, NBC and CBS all developed during the same generation, hence, they are the channels that tested the waters and then laid the groundwork for what we know today as traditional, or conventional, news programming. It is their camera techniques, their studio layouts and the candor of their strongest anchors that helped shaped the television news industry. When CNN and FOX came into the picture, they borrowed from these tried and true formats, gave the stories their own flashy graphics, dramatic music, and helped mold the television news into something that would not only hold onto the older audiences, but also that would captivate the younger generations of the 1980s and 1990s. Barely a decade later, the creators of The Daily Show would also borrow production techniques from the traditional network programming, but not to renovate the look of the news show as CNN and FOX had done. The Daily Show used the look and feel of more conventional news programs to instead create a parody of the entire television news industry. Through comedy, the show tapped into an area of politics that really was not being covered or exposed at the time – the daily occurrences in government that, when the seriousness and formalities were stripped away, were in a sense rather humorous.

Being a show on the Comedy Central Network, one would expect that The Daily Show would incorporate humor into their program. However, it is The Daily Show's specific brand of political comedy that first attracts the audience and then keeps them watching. Through comedy, the audience gains not only 30 minutes

worth of entertainment, but also they are exposed to a markedly different perspective on what happens in Washington.

Comedy, humor and jokes are all concepts which took thousands of years to develop. A sense of humor and a love of laughter are characteristics that have always been associated with human beings, but it was in the Middle Ages that people began to celebrate and document their conception of comedy. During this time, comedy was present in the carnivals and carousing of the common man especially, the members of the working class. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains, carnival became “the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter...(it) freed them completely from all religious and ecclesiastical dogmatism, from all mysticism and piety” (4). These carnival rituals provided the feudal culture a brief opportunity to free itself from the stoic trappings of the official and the religious, manifesting itself in ritual spectacle, comedic verbal oppositions (to official and religious figures), and other written and performed proclamations. During this era, the carnival’s comedic performances were endowed with the frankness and familiarity of the common man. Carnival laughter was festive laughter – a laughter of the people which was both universal in scope and ambivalent in nature. Medieval humor celebrated freedom within the masses and related to the people’s “unofficial truth” (Bakhtin 90). During the next era, comedy held a higher cultural status; through the unbiased and unscripted nature of humor and of laughter, man learned the truth about his character and how individuals operated within society. Comedy became an ultimate truth.

The Renaissance conception of humor was that laughter has a deep, philosophical meaning that provides an essential truth about the world. During this age, philosophers believed that humor and comedy provided a different view of the world and of the history of man (Bakhtin 66). Perhaps this was because comedy was still considered a product of the average man, the backbone upon which most of society stood. To understand the substance of common man's jokes and their sense of humor was to get an insider's glimpse into the inner workings of society. Those who examined and studied the concept of and founding principles of laughter came to view humor and comedy as a sort of mental and physical release for the population, and through this release society was able to stay happy and healthy, their minds prepared to tackle some of society's more difficult and taxing obstacles. Within a few hundred years, however, this would all change. When society entered this new period, where religion and refinement was favored above comedy, the voice of the common man, humor, would be dubbed the scourge of society.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, laughter was considered an individual phenomenon, belonging only to the lowest genres. Daily, incidental occurrences might be considered to have a humorous quality, but overall the foundation of society and the way that people functioned within it was not considered funny. Comedy was separated from everything deemed important to man and the study of culture, for philosophers believed "neither history nor a person representing it [could] be shown in a comic aspect" (Bakhtin 67). Laughter became restricted to the lighter amusements, serving only the most

“inferior” social levels, the absolute dregs of society. As society progressed into the nineteenth century, however, and when people began to break free of the auspicious and tedious molds of imperial mandates and religious decrees, the French Romanticists rejuvenated comedy from a cultural by-product to a veritable art form.

Comparing the history of comedy and the development of the hegemony of news, a parallel can be formed. Humor was once seen as the voice of the common man, a mediocre production at best, which can also be applied to the early days and production qualities of the first television news broadcasts. But as comedy began to take hold of society through colorful celebrations and over the top carnivals, the news industry also began to captivate its audiences by adding flash and music to an otherwise contextually enlightened but visually somber program. Both comedy and television news experienced periods of time where society took a step back and re-evaluated where they stood. For humor, this occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth century; however, some may argue that the reexamination of television news is going on right now.

This phenomenon could have been caused by people’s growing dissatisfaction with the overly regimented nature of society and politics. Comedy, Henri Bergson writes, “begins with what might be called growing callousness to social life...[the] comic is equivocal in nature, belonging neither altogether to art nor altogether to life” (134-135). Humor works by exposing the conventions and spectacles of society, by balancing the line between reality and art in an effort to

reveal a different perspective of the world, and at the base of this cultural phenomenon is the comedian.

The foundation of humor is the comic himself, also known in some circles of society as the “trickster” (Ellison 101). Somewhere between the key figures of society and the texts which those icons produce, Ralph Ellison writes, “there needs to be the human being in a specific texture of time, place and circumstance who must respond, make choices, achieve eloquence and create specific works of art” (101). Such is the role of the comedian: to serve as the middle ground between man and society, and to provide several different interpretations of each. Ellison describes these characters as part man for his ability to experience and express human emotions, but also God-like for his ability to remove himself from society and expose what is disorderly about a supposedly orderly existence (101). Whereas the comic has developed a plane of existence outside of the more traditional citizen, he has also developed his own specific brand of comic logic.

Henri Bergson divides society into two categories: those who use professional logic and those who use comic logic (2). Professional logic relies on certain ways of reasoning which are considered customary and acceptable within society, and this type of logic excludes all other methods of reasoning as invalid. Comic logic makes a deliberate break from this frame of thought; it is the logic of the absurd. The comic spirit “has a logic of its own, even in its wildest eccentricities” (Bergson 2). Comics find logic in that which is conventionally

illogical: faulty reasoning, the reversal of causation or intention, aesthetic incongruities, intellectual fallacies and moral deficiencies (Davis 68-101).

Psychologist Sigmund Freud explains that the process of becoming a comedian does not have to be a deliberate one: the comic simply "arises from the uncovering of the modes of thought of the unconscious" (213). Freud identifies three different types of comedians. The first is a person who finds something humorous, or someone who makes an observation about their environment that they believe is funny. A second type of comic is the person in which a humorous quality, trait or behavior is found. This type of comic can be thought of as a humorous person -- someone who does or says something funny. Finally, a third category of comic is a person who repeats someone else's humorous observation but does not add anything to it (Freud 181). This third type of comic focuses on the performance of humor, not the construction of the joke. The process of creating a joke is more generalized; it is a product of a comic's observations of society.

In his book Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, Freud defines a joke as a "judgment which produces a comic contrast" (11). Utilizing their comic logic to make inferences about society, comedians create jokes by making observations about the humorous differences between real human existence and the spectacle of human existence. A joke can consist of a contrast of ideas, as with the discrepancies between reality and spectacle, it can make sense of something seemingly-nonsensical or "silly," or the joke can provide illumination to an audience that would have been otherwise bewildered and confused by a

certain situation or public figure (Freud 12). Jokes can be visual or verbal.

Visual humor consists of actions, gestures or behaviors which seem to belie the conventions of what society deems "normal" or "acceptable," whereas linguistic humor relies largely on a play on words.

Jokes and comedy are created for the purpose of being shared with others, to muster laughter and create a common bond over common frustrations. These frustrations can be superficial, dealing with daily obstacles, or they can be more substantial and subjective, revealing racial, sexual and other aggressive aspects of individuals and society. Humor is a social process.

Jokes can develop from incredibly complicated and super-involved social situations and stigmas, but at the base of all classifications of jokes lie the most simple: the pun. Many consider puns to be the foundation of comedy and wit, because puns can be easily made and are typically non-offensive (Davis 33; Freud 45). By definition, puns are two words similar to each other in subject, spelling, sound and so forth. Kenneth Burke describes the pun as a "perspective by incongruity," a series of words that are supposed to be an element of one system but are intentionally and humorously assigned to a system which on the surface would seem unrelated (1964, 94). The humor associated with puns is derived from the incongruity - the audience is surprised to hear a phrase which has been wrenched loose from where they would typically hear it, and applied to another category of rationality, causation or tone. This re-arrangement of words from their usual setting forces the audience to interpret new situations (95). Reactions to this type of linguistic humor, however, can be mixed. Throughout

history, individuals have had different opinions of punning. On the one hand, those who enjoy puns, or "punnifiles," enjoy these types of jokes for their creative ability to associate what has not been tied together before. On the other hand, "pun haters" consider the pun as the bowel of the language system – creating an obstacle to a system that should be able to operate on a more substantial level (Davis 58-59). As Murray Davis observes, "bad puns make us aware of those we already know and would prefer to forget: the imperfections of language" (Davis 65).

With The Daily Show, the function of the pun is to introduce or setup the humorous or light mood of the story at hand. Typically, the puns are used with graphic inserts or banners of the stories. For example, on the October 31, 2005 edition of The Daily Show, the story on Scooter Libby, who was being indicted for leaking classified government information, has the bottom-third banner: "Libby Indicted: As You Leak It" ("October 31, 2005" The Daily Show). The pun serves two purposes here. It not only exhibits a play on words (as you leak it, as you like it), but the banner also very neatly provides the information that Libby was indicted on charges related to leaking information. Similarly, on the November 2, 2005 program, the top story was on the dramatically increasing oil prices and how they were affecting America's motorists. The graphic banner of the video was "Grand Heft Auto," a reference to the video game Grand Theft Auto, in which the main character performs mob-related missions, all the while stealing their fair share of vehicles. The pun Grand Heft Auto refers to the hefty influence of the oil barons, the hefty price Americans are paying to fuel up their car, as well as infers

that some sort of theft is taking place. The oil industry puns made a reappearance on the November 10, 2005 show, when the CEO's of the oil industries had to face a senate committee about the rising price of oil. On that day the banner and graphics insert read: "That's Oil, Folks!" (The Daily Show "November 10, 2005"). This pun makes reference to the cartoon-like characteristics of the executives themselves, and, also, to the somewhat absurd nature of the proceedings during the meetings. The following week, The Daily Show revisited the oil pricing and executives story, and the banner of the video was "Oil Executives: Get Rich or Try Lying" (The Daily Show "November 17, 2005"). Typically, this phrase ends with the ultimatum "or die trying," but, in the oil executives case, the pun suggests the options are make money or lie until you make money. Verbal inserts and banners are two types of graphics that "serious" news incorporates into their shows, but it is from this normative standard that The Daily Show creates a platform of humorous, rhetorical cues.

Puns can also be a visual, a sort of play on pictures. On November 1, 2005, the top story was Samuel Alito's nomination for the Supreme Court. To set up the story, over Stewart's shoulder was a picture insert reading "Sam's Club" (The Daily Show "November 11, 2005"). This pun simultaneously incorporates the face of the discount superstore Sam's Club with the story about the people who were backing President Bush's nomination of Alito. In this same vein, an altered picture insert also adorned the top stories on November 14, 2005 – a voice-over and sound bite on President Bush's Veteran's Day address. On that day the insert showed the terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi with the title

“Zarqawi’s Kids” written below it (“November 14, 2005”). This pun references actor Jerry Lewis’ charity organization “Jerry’s Kids,” which functions in the opposite direction of the violent actions of Zarqawi. Puns like the Alito and Zarqawi banners are an example of Burke’s perspectives of incongruity, because they connect two ideas or concepts that would not normally have been associated with each other. These two particular puns connect Alito with the working class and mass consumer culture; the Zarqawi banner connects Bush with a terrorist leader and a slap-stick organization that raises money for sick children.

Whereas some of The Daily Show’s puns reference deeper concepts, some of them are simply plays on words. On November 7, 2005, the political realm was focused on riots in France. The voice-over from The Daily Show was bannered “Riots in France: Burn Bebe Burn” (“November 17, 2005”), which is a play on The Trammps’ disco song “Burn Baby, Burn,” in the sense that people in France would likely pronounce the word “baby” by saying “bebe.” It’s not too complex. On November 14, 2005, following President Bush’s Veteran’s Day Speech, The Daily Show reported on the story by showing video on the address with the banner “Presidential Address: Justify My Gov” (“November 14, 2005” The Daily Show). This pun is another play on words from a pop song, Madonna’s “Justify My Love.” Later in this same story The Daily Show re-played sound bites from the portion of Bush’s speech in which the President defended his recent actions in the Iraq War. This part of the voice-over and sound had a

graphic banner “Defending Your Strife” (“November 14, 2005” The Daily Show), which is derived from the phrase “defending your life.”

Some of The Daily Show’s most celebrated puns are the titles of long running segments, such as those covering the Iraq War, or high-level election campaigns. The Daily Show’s collection of Peabody Awards is based on their coverage of the 2000 and 2004 Presidential election campaigns, called “Indecision 2000” and “Indecision 2004.” These puns, or plays on words, were a direct reference to the voters’ hesitation and the seemingly unwarranted political debates that surrounded the elections. Sometimes this pun is slightly altered, typically in the date format, for senate and governor elections, as with the November 9, 2005 show. On that day, The Daily Show titled their review of the senate elections “Indecision 2005” (“November 19, 2005” The Daily Show). Similarly, on November 16, 2005 The Daily Show put together a montage of the network news channels’ interviews with the probable 2008 Presidential candidates, and the banner on that story was “Indecision 2008: Talk, Don’t Run” (“November 16, 2005” The Daily Show). That particular banner contained two puns, the reference to voters’ indecision when it came to the election, as well as the political figures’ coy way of talking about whether or not they would run for President. Another pun that keeps on making an appearance on The Daily Show is tied to their coverage of the Iraq War and Middle East Crises, called “Mess-o-Potamia.” This pun blends Mesopotamia, one of the original names of middle-eastern Asia, with the word mess – a reference to all the hectic, violent occurrences which plague the region. As with most of the puns used in The Daily

Show, they are used to create a comic effect, but they are not often seen as offensive or derogatory. There are some instances, however, when The Daily Show does ignore political correctness and goes for a more mocking style of humor. This comedic strategy is known as satire.

Satire is a form of humor that relies exclusively on criticisms or biting observations. The roots of this type of comedy can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. Performers developed a type of play called the satyric drama (Bakhtin 88). The subject matter of this genre dealt with the tragic trilogy, and on rare occasions, focused on theology. These plays incorporated religion into their plot, but at the same time created a humorous opposition to it. The culture of humor during this era was the drama and spectacle of human existence. Satiric comedians used their humor to create something Davis calls "down-transformations," or debasing the essential tributes of gods and men (Davis 111). Satire is used to expose and express that which is negative and gruesome about mankind. The comic becomes a satirist "when he takes as the subject the distance at which things are from nature, and the contrast between reality and the ideal" (Davis 101).

On The Daily Show, satire serves the purpose of debasing the personalities and symbols who operate within the political realm. This is where The Daily Show's reputation for being a mock newscast comes in, because many of the program's satirical jokes are mocking, or making fun of people and events. For example, on the November 11, 2005 show, Jon Stewart was talking about a recent story in which Democrats stood up to the Republican party, and over his

shoulder appeared a picture insert of the Democratic donkey with oversized testicles (“November 2, 2005” [The Daily Show](#)). Along the same lines, on the November 17<sup>th</sup> show, following a story about Bush falsifying intelligence, [The Daily Show](#)’s graphic team made a mock-up of an old Eisenhower campaign button reading “Ike Likes C\*\*K” (“November 17, 2005” [The Daily Show](#)). These types of altered pictures incorporate a type of satirical humor that is also a staple of the comedy program. Portions of the program have smart, makes-you-think twice jokes, and then, sometimes, one of the largest laughs of the program come from a voiced-over video of the gregarious Prime Minister Ariel Sharon talking about food (“November 14, 2005” [The Daily Show](#)) or from footage of a Senate fight between Bill Frist and Harry Reid that transitions into a “Three Stooges” fight (“November 15, 2005” [The Daily Show](#)).

Satirical humor at its most basic provides an easy, cheap laugh, but it also can show the audience that public figures are people too, and that the actions of the highly-educated and highly-trained can sometimes be just as silly as the next guy. For example, on the November 15, 2005 show, Samantha Bee and Jason Jones re-enacted a meeting with Bush and Ahmad Chalabi about falsified intelligence, and the interaction goes from heated debate to the two characters savagely kissing each other at the end (“November 15, 2005” [The Daily Show](#)). Ridiculous behavior is also the thread running through Dan Bakkedahl’s November 17 piece on celebrity casting, which ends with Bakkedahl rubbing his nipples, crying out “I just want to act” (“November 17, 2005” [The Daily Show](#)). Both of these situations, the meeting between public figures and the casting-

couch audition, would have been seen as serious, dramatic occurrences if they were portrayed on traditional newscasts. But when The Daily Show isolates these stories, and applies a satiric twist to them, the audience realizes that maybe the actions of the President should not be seen as absolutely authoritative, and maybe the actions of Hollywood celebrities are not really all that glamorous.

The Daily Show, however, does not always need Washington D.C. to provide them with their stories and ideas. Some of the more-involved satirical pieces are the comedians' own creations. On November 8, 2005, Ed Helms presented a satirical news package that stemmed from an earlier Daily Show story about hypothetical terrorist situations. The segment started with a terrorist scare and then followed Helms as he went through the process of making his dinner using the microwave at The Daily Show's break room ("November 8, 2005" The Daily Show). This particular package was satiric in the fact that a story on a terrorism scare so quickly turned into a story about what the correspondent was thinking of having for dinner. Two weeks later, correspondent Dan Bakkedahl was talking about President Bush visiting Japan, and then showed a mocked-up commercial that Bush supposedly made while in the country ("November 11, 2005" The Daily Show). This footage is a satire in the sense that Bush was mispronouncing Japanese words and pushing a product that an esteemed public figure would not normally be associated with.

In fact, much of The Daily Show's coverage of President Bush is topped off with Stewart doing a less-than-favorable impersonation of Bush. During the

three weeks worth of The Daily Show programs explored in this thesis, Stewart did three different Bush impersonations (“November 3, 2005;” “November 7, 2005;” “November 14, 2005” The Daily Show). It is unclear whether these impersonations are adlibbed or in the script, but Stewart makes them seem as though he is making fun of the President on the fly. When the coverage ends, Stewart squints his eyes, leans forwards, starts gesturing with both of his hands, and speaks in his best “aw shucks” Texas drawl. Stewart’s impersonation of Dick Cheney is similarly degrading. On November 17, 2005, following a story in which Cheney defended Bush about allegations of falsifying intelligence, Stewart started groaning at the camera, hunching over and speaking in a way that resembled the Penguin character from the Batman television series (“November 17, 2005” The Daily Show). Stewart’s impersonations of Bush and Cheney are definitely satirical; he portrays the public figures as stumbling, confused men with Texas drawls and comic book character groans. Perhaps these comedic impersonations lead the audience to realize that the President and Vice President are just men like everyone else, their esteemed positions and team of advisors cannot change that.

Satire is closely linked to another classification of the joke – irony – in that both problematize conceptions about individuals and society. Irony, like several of the terms explored in this section, has become a concept that over time has come to stand for many different things. In fact, some theorists argue that irony incorporates so many meanings that it is in danger of losing its status as a useful term (Booth 2). Generally speaking, it can be defined as humor that underlies, or

creates an alternative meaning to, an observation about society. Irony and humor have a complicated relationship: irony depends upon the social context of humor to come to fruition, but then functions by legitimizing or undercutting that social context. Without humor, there would be no irony, but without irony, a portion of humor would not be substantiated. Although the exact definition of irony may be difficult to pinpoint, the presence of irony more easily identified, and more frequently established.

In practice, the author will typically give a clue or a hint to their use of irony. Sometimes this can be a direct acknowledgement, an evident departure from the writing style of the rest of the text, or a conflict between the author's views and the main character's views (Booth 57, 67). There are two classifications of irony: that which is indistinct in assertions is unstable irony (Booth 240), whereas irony that is intended, deliberate and has a finite set of meanings is called stable irony (Booth 5). When describing the functions of irony, one is typically dealing with stable irony, because this type of classification has a definite and finite quality to it.

In his book, A Rhetoric of Irony, Wayne Booth outlines several different functions of comic irony. At its most basic, irony functions as a reinforcement to underline the author or comic's point: irony implies a deeper meaning or the possibility of an alternative perspective (48). Some may argue that irony merely complicates an issue or is used simply to tease the audience into thinking there may be a more involved meaning, but, either way, irony creates a distance between the author who generated the text or code and the audience who has to

interpret the code they receive. Irony does not always have to engage the audience, however; it can create opposition (52), be aggressive (53), or critical to the point of being scathing. Irony at its most extreme creates a divide between those who get the joke and those who do not: the interpreter does not always have to understand the irony, or be able to reconstruct the apparent meaning, for irony to exist.

The act of reconstructing ironic meaning is a four-step process. First, the audience member must surmise that the text may have another meaning below the surface (Booth 10), and, subsequently, they must try out other meanings and interpretations of the humor (11). The third step is to entwine the interpretations of the audience member with what they feel the author's own beliefs may be (11) to come up with a final decision about the underlying meaning of the ironic text. Through their reconstruction of the ironic text, the audience discovers a new form of interpretation: a sort of deductive knowledge through irony. As Linda Hutcheon explains, "irony engages the intellect rather than the emotions," which can be a powerful tool against dominance and hegemony, but "the degree of unease irony provokes might suggest quite the opposite" (14). Irony can become a destructive weapon, used for attack, but it can also be used as a sort of social weapon, which uses humor and distance to exercise authority over ideology.

On The Daily Show, irony serves the purpose of simultaneously making you laugh and making you think. Ironic comedy skews images and matches up different clips of video and sound so that the initial intention of the political message is overshadowed by how the message may actually come across. For

example, on November 10, 2005, The Daily Show covered the Presidential Medal of Honor Ceremony. Winning the Medal of Honor is a huge, some might say lifetime, achievement, but on this day The Daily Show focused not only on the fact that the award ceremony took place, but they also looked at the mishmash of honorees who won the medals. 2005's winners included the man who inspired the film "Hotel Rwanda," as well as "Queen of Soul" singer Aretha Franklin and actor Andy Griffith ("November 10, 2005" The Daily Show). What is humorous or ironic here is the fact that an award given to a man who saved people in Africa from genocide can be included in the same list as the actor from a television comedy about a fictional, podunk town.

Another way that irony is used in The Daily Show is through comparisons with other events, whether similar in nature or the complete opposite. On the November 17, 2005 program, Jon Stewart was reading a story about Bush, who had recently been accused of allowing the torture of foreign prisoners of war ("November 17, 2005" The Daily Show). Following this story, The Daily Show played a string of clips of an irritated Bush insisting "we do not torture," which was coupled with the infamous clip of President Bill Clinton saying "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." These two sound bites on their own are not ironic, but when they are played back-to-back they give an ironic impression. When Bush says he does not torture he may be making the same false claims as Clinton when he said he did not have sex with Monica Lewinsky – which was later proven to be true. Along the same lines, during the November 16 show, The Daily Show replayed a portion of President Bush's speech given at the

beginning of his Asian tour (“November 16, 2005” The Daily Show). This is when Stewart interrupted the video and announced to the audience that Bush’s address was in fact a haiku. Asian-themed music began twinkling in the background, and the President’s words were rearranged and re-timed so that they followed the format of a Haiku. The irony in this particular story is that President Bush is not exactly known for having very strong rhetorical abilities, so it would be very unlikely that a trip to Asia would turn him into a talented poet. If the network news covered this story, the straight-forward approach would have been that the President was in Asia and he made a speech while he was there. On The Daily Show, they incorporate irony and humor to once again take a stab at the capabilities of the President. The irony exhibited here serves as a tool to criticize the President, allowing the audience to take a second look at the capabilities of the man chosen to lead the country.

Thought-provoking, ironic news segments are a staple of The Daily Show. Whereas some stories may not seem like they have any deeper meaning, or when they are shown on traditional news programs they are not presented as though they provide multiple perspectives, The Daily Show takes the opportunity to show a different view on the day’s headlines. For example, on November 1, 2005, The Daily Show aired footage of Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito attending Coretta Scott King’s funeral (“November 1, 2005”). Some may see this story as a public figure taking the opportunity to pay his respects to a groundbreaking, inspirational woman. But The Daily Show implied another reason: that Alito attended the funeral as a sort of public relations move to

associate his name with an esteemed figure like Coretta Scott King. Another ironic clip shown on The Daily Show came from NBC's Good Morning America. On Halloween, as many of the morning infotainment personalities do, the anchors were all dressed in their extravagant Halloween costumes. The element of this segment that The Daily Show focused on was what the anchors were talking about. The on-air talent, donning Halloween outfits, a holiday derived from pagan traditions, were talking about the integrity of Christian religions. A third clip from The Daily Show that exemplifies its use of comic irony comes from the November 15 show. On this day, Stewart spoke about a recent terrorist attack in which two suicide bombers tried to blow up a wedding reception ("November 15, 2005" The Daily Show). The irony here lies in the fact that it was a married couple who were blowing up the wedding – and if this fact was not made clear during the story, Stewart made several comments following the story about what his wife could and could not convince him to participate in. The Daily Show uses irony to create the space for different opinions and considerations, many of which turn out to be humorous in the end.

Another comedic element employed by The Daily Show, which also creates a critical distance, is parody. The category of humor known as parody takes on many approaches and attitudes, but one of the more concise definitions is that parody is "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance" (Hutcheon pxii). The word parody is derived from the Greek word "parodia," the first portion "para" meaning to counter or go against, and the half "odos" meaning song. Translated literally, parody means text that goes against something.

Traditionally, parody has been defined as language which mocks and insults with ambivalence (Bakhtin 16), language that destroys the unity between people's actual characters and their simulated actions (Freud 201), or comedy that transposes elements between the styles of people and society (Davis 21). Linda Hutcheon, however, takes these definitions with a portion of philosophical salt, claiming that "parody, like all art forms, cannot escape its historical, social and ideological context" (100). The concept of parody evolves as culture and history evolves; the objects of parody and the meaning behind these references will change from year to year. Hutcheon describes parody as a textual doubling that both unifies and creates differentiation between text and reality (101-102). Many current forms of art, whether literature, visual art, or music, somehow use parody to comment on the world and on society. On The Daily Show, Stewart's humorous reactions, impersonations and retorts could be considered a form of verbal parody, because the humor both takes a critical step away from the material and unites the audience with laughter.

Parody today, Hutcheon writes, "cannot be explained totally in structuralist terms of form, in the hermeneutic context of response, in a semiotic-ideological framework, or in a post-structuralist absorption of everything to textuality. Yet the complex determinants of parody in some way involve all of these current perspectives – and many more" (116). While it may seem difficult to encapsulate parody within a single definition, the function of parody can be expressed in two categories: comic and critical.

The comic nature of parody is to ridicule, to make an individual or element of culture ludicrous (Hutcheon 51), and so in this sense parody and satire are very closely linked. In the Middle Ages, humor belonged to the folk carnival humor. The target of parody during this time consisted of sacred texts and rites, namely, the spectacle of the ancient rituals. The purpose of this Middle Age folk comedy was to expose or unravel the spectacle of the sacred and official (Bakhtin 4). Bakhtin often calls this type of humor “grotesque realism,” which is the degradation of all that is high and ideal and a transfer from the spiritual to the human. Often this humor deals with the basest functions of human existence, the internal and physical (Bakhtin 19). The physical quality of human behavior and tradition is also what Bergson highlights as a target of parody. He describes the spectacle of human behavior as mechanical in-elasticity or mechanical arrangement. “Something mechanical encrusted on the living things will represent a cross at which we must halt, a central image from which the imagination branches off in different directions” (Bergson 37-38). The comic’s purpose here is to establish the laughable element of the artificial mechanization of the human body, or the social mask. If the audience devotes their attention to the target of parody, Bergson claims, they will “probably find that it is generally comic in proportion to the clearness, as well as the subtlety, with which it enables us to see a man as a jointed puppet” (30). Through parody, the audience sees what is mechanical, what is a spectacle of human behavior.

A second function of parody is to criticize; it is an active exploration of culture and society. Hutcheon identifies parody as a critical tool because parody

can function as a form of inter-art discourse, a form of modern self-reflexivity (2). Through the act of encoding and decoding the humorous message, the parody can provide the audience with a sort of knowledge about society and culture. Parody creates distance: the distance between the comic and his observations create for the audience a distance between their current perspective of society and a potentially altered view of the spectacle of society. This distance provides the comic a means of freedom, a space to criticize society – and, through this criticism, humor plays a role in a social revolution. On The Daily Show, parody exists on many different levels, from the comedic elements applied to otherwise mundane stories to the news packages that are completely fictitious and can be extremely funny.

At one end of the spectrum, The Daily Show parodies certain news stories by slightly altering the look or presentation of the footage. For example, on the November 10, 2005 show, the audio of the Senate hearing with the oil executives was replaced with game show music and announcer introductions (“November 10, 2005”). This is an example of one of the verbal cues, or visual representations of rhetorical elements, that The Daily Show incorporates into the parody-based segments. Changing the sound creates a parody of the Senate hearing, because the serious meeting is set up to resemble something that you would see on *The Price is Right*. By changing the music in the very beginning of the story, The Daily Show is setting the meeting up as though it is a joke, and the audience therefore takes it that way.

The second level of parody exhibited by The Daily Show is the fictitious devices created to go along with the news packages or voice over. Before Samuel Alito was appointed to the Supreme Court, The Daily Show gauged the credibility of his nomination by showing off something they called the “Robe-inator 6000” (“November 1, 2005” The Daily Show). The Robe-inator was a device created by the graphics department, and it was shown on a split-screen with Jon Stewart. It featured a naked statue of Samuel Alito, to which articles of undergarments and a judge’s robe would be applied and removed, based on the positive, funny, or just interesting facts surrounding Alito’s life and career. The Robe-inator creates a parody of the nomination process, the Supreme Court, and of Alito himself, because the judge is shown in the nude, and his credibility and likelihood of selection was based on random parts of his background. A handheld, physical device was created for Ed Helm’s package on “Gay Marriage in Massachusetts” (“November 3, 2005” The Daily Show). The machine was called the Homometer 2000, and it gauged the gay and fabulous qualities of everyday objects and people in New York City. When the Homometer 2000 got close to an object, it would begin speaking in a campy, male voice who said “haaaaate it!” “FABulous!” or “Oh, that is SO GAY!!” This device created a parody of the problems gay marriage activists were facing in Massachusetts, because the Homometer played off of the campy and stereotypical, not the actual concerns of those who were pushing for gay marriage. Perhaps the Homometer 2000 was designed to challenge the audience’s perceptions of the whole gay

marriage issue, and the supposed characteristics and lifestyles of those who would be engaging in gay marriage.

A third level of parody in The Daily Show is the news packages that are derived from actual stories, but whose content are contrived for comedic purposes. On the November 7, 2005 show, The Daily Show was covering the riots in France, a time when residents were torching cars and buildings and getting into fights, and The Daily Show's version of this story consisted of footage from old French film noir films, which were dubbed over by a man with a French accent talking about the riots. This segment becomes a parody because the drama and spectacle of the riots are compared to and supported by the drama and spectacle of the black and white films.

The behind-the-scenes drama of political campaigns is a favorite and frequent topic addressed on The Daily Show. On the November 9 and November 15 shows the recent Senate races, as well as the international races, inspired fictional, overly-dramatic mudslinging ads in which the leaders of the race share insults over menial details, like the way a person speaks ("November 9, 2005" The Daily Show) or how many cows a community will REALLY get if they elect a certain leader ("November 15, 2005" The Daily Show). Through these parodies of political advertisements, The Daily Show suggests that when the nominees become desperate to win they may exhibit qualities that are more pompous than distinguished.

Along the same lines of drama and spectacle, on the November 3, 2005 version of The Daily Show, the bird flu pandemic was the story at hand. To

introduce the piece, the big screen monitor (BSM) behind Jon Stewart began playing footage from Alfred Hitchcock's The Birds, from which Stewart then tries to run away. Things calm down, and Rob Corddry appears on the side of the studio. Corddry, acting as a reporter and Senior Health Correspondent, presents a news packages titled "The Bird Flu Pandemic: You, Your Health, and You" ("November 3, 2005" The Daily Show). Even from the very beginning of the piece, looking at the name of the news package, the audience understands that Corddry will be presenting a parody of the avian flu scare. The parody consisted of picture inserts of a fake college called Pandemic Flu University, showed cardboard chickens invading Asia, and featured an animated chart with a silhouette of a chicken making out with the silhouette of a man. When the news package is thrown back to Corddry, the correspondent begins screaming and he then shows his hand been has transformed into a giant, fake bird claw. All these overblown elements, "The Birds" footage, the cardboard chickens, plastic bird claw and man-on-chicken action, leave the impression that the whole bird scare itself is an overblown threat.

Rob Corddry is also at the helm of another, more-involved use of parody which is the video montage. Every week on The Daily Show, Corddry fronts a segment called "This Week in God" in which a big screen monitor shows flashes of religion-themed footage, all controlled by a large, game show-like button on a post, which when slapped down makes a beep-boop-bit-bop noise that is not produced by an instrument but by a person's voice. On November 10, 2005, "This Week in God" compared The Daily Show's stock candle footage versus

NBC's stock candle footage, as well as showed clips from the Islamic and Jewish versions of "The Simpson" and "Ziggy" ("November 10, 2005" The Daily Show). While Corrdry is speaking about how American cartoons are reinterpreted in foreign countries, there is a scrollbar running along the bottom of the screen called the "God Exchange," in which different religious symbols are given a plus or minus amount, similar to the running scroll bars on the stock exchange. This weekly segment is a parody because it collects the religious footage shown on traditional network news programs, and then, through humor, breaks down its air of tradition and moral superiority.

The big screen monitors played a large part in one of The Daily Show's most involved uses of parody and satire: a story about Vice President's Dick Cheney's refutation of allegations that the President falsified intelligence about the Iraq War ("November 16, 2005" The Daily Show). On this day, the three big screen monitors that sit behind Stewart's desk transformed into one large slot machine. Each monitor played rapid-fire clips of Cheney talking about the war, the content of the clips typically contrasting and clashing with each other, and, in between clips, the monitors rolled slot machine symbols and played slot machine music. Stewart was turned in his chair when all this was going on, looking from one screen to the other like he was being bombarded by Cheney and did not know what to do next. When all the clips were done being played, the monitors kept playing the slot machine graphics until the word "JackA\$\$" started flashing across the screen, in front of all the action (like when you see the credits roll over live footage of when the word censor appears over somebody). This is probably

one of the most involved uses of parody and satire for The Daily Show. The whole studio was utilized to create a “live” moment in which Cheney’s words were edited and presented in a way that Cheney became a parody of himself, speaking about people and events which he eventually had to backtrack about or completely negate. This clip is an example of satire because it downplays the air of authority and know-all surrounding the Vice President, and it also serves as an example of parody, because it simultaneously creates humor and incites thoughtful criticism of Cheney’s political capabilities.

Taking all these forms of humor into account (i.e. the puns, satire, irony and parody), The Daily Show has created its own form of comedy called the Moment of Zen. These daily segments are unlike any of the other types of comedy because the clips are isolated from the rest of the show. Stewart may introduce them, but his introductions are always the same, and the only banners applied to this footage are locators, so the audience knows the time and date they happened.

The Moment of Zen is an isolated, ten to fifteen second sound byte, introduced by Stewart every night with the phrase: “Here it is...your moment of Zen.” Sometimes the moment is a hyphenated version of a news story covered earlier in the show, sometimes it is a video taken from CNN, FOX News or C-Span, or the clip could be from a seemingly random story or obscure, international news source. Stewart once described this segment as “a piece of disquieting footage, something eccentric or quirky” (“September 20, 2001” The

Daily Show). The Moment of Zen, while it is never predictable, is always an attention grabber.

“Political performances and spectacular media events,” James Compton writes, are moments of “production, distribution and consumption” (137). The Daily Show’s Moment of Zen, therefore, is not just a collection of the day’s most outlandish sound-byte and video clips, for images also serve as a mediator for people’s social relationships.

Based on the Buddhist School and Japanese Philosophy, Zen designates a state of mind “roughly equivalent to contemplation or meditation.” Zen is a means of seeing the world as it actually is, without the trappings of emotion and materialism. It can be considered a religion, a philosophy, or simply the practice of sitting in meditation in pursuit of enlightenment. Over the past fifty years, Zen has become adopted into the mainstream and its practices a popular form of meditation (Encarta).

The reason why the producers choose the clips they do is unclear, maybe it is up to the audience to decide why the footage was selected. Perhaps it is Stewart’s transition into these isolated visuals that is most important. When he says “here it is, your moment of Zen,” it serves as a recapitulation of the program, a sort of “here’s what we have learned today.” Whereas the byte or clip might just be something funny that happened in the news, or one of the political moments around which the show is hinged, it is the dramatic spectacle of the news that the isolated clip is aimed at exposing. Our TV-based knowledge of political events and sense of political “reality” is framed by visual cues, and, if

nothing else, The Daily Show is dedicated to problematizing those visual cues by using humor and comedy to expose the spectacle of traditional news.

The spectrum of the Moments of Zen shown from October 31, 2005 through November 17, 2005 is wide. The footage ranges from celebrations of a panda wedding (“November 15, 2005” The Daily Show) and a 175-year-old tortoise’s birthday (“November 16, 2005” The Daily Show), to C-SPAN footage announcing “The Senate is Meeting in Closed Session” (“November 2, 2005” The Daily Show), to an emotional FOX News segment recapping a meeting on CNN between Mike Wallace and his son Chris (“November 7, 2005” The Daily Show). On several days the Moment of Zen was taken from the day’s headlines and news packages: footage of the Supreme Court members sitting for press pictures (“November 1, 2005” The Daily Show), the cardboard chickens from Rob Corrdry’s Bird Flu package (“November 3, 2005” The Daily Show), video of World War II Veterans fighting for freedom as a part of Lewis Black’s story on Wal-Mart’s Veteran’s Day advertisements (“November 9, 2005” The Daily Show), or footage from a CNBC interview with Dick Cheney about the country’s involvement in the Iraq War (“November 14, 2005”). Frequently, the curious behavior of on-air personalities becomes the subject of that day’s Moment of Zen, as with the footage of the CNN anchors laughing at one of their colleagues being tasered (“November 8, 2005” The Daily Show), the anchors of Fox & Friends being excited about talking about a school shooting story (“November 10, 2005” The Daily Show), or the Katie Couric interview with Bill Frist in which the phrase “cut and run” which he often uses, is butted to clips of him saying it in

other programs (“November 17, 2005” The Daily Show). Out of all of these shows, the Couric/Frist Moment of Zen is one of the few that is obviously edited. The other Moment of Zen which was manipulated by The Daily Show is the October 31 program in which President Bush’s acceptance of Scooter Libby’s resignation had Halloween-themed, howling music playing in the background.

So what is the audience supposed to learn from all of these clips? First and foremost, they are meant to be entertaining. Second, when these moments are isolated, stripped from any animation or complex graphics, the audience has a different perspective of them. When the footage is separated from all the spectacle and hype, the audience can see the nuts and bolts of the story – they can see and understand the action and context of it. And no matter their opinion of the featured public figure, or the network by which they are employed, they are getting an untainted look at the people and events that shape the mediated realm. The Moment of Zen may create a space for the audience to say, “ah, I get it now,” or perhaps it may elicit the response of “that is what they were really saying?!” or “why would they show that, how is it possibly important to me?”

The Moment of Zen, as well as the other comedic tools used by The Daily Show, functions in two dimensions: first, there is the inherently funny, the set-ups and jokes that are designed to make the audience laugh. Then, once the show has the audience’s attention, humor is used to provide the audience with a different perspective on the public realm. As with satire and irony, this view may be mean or critical, as with puns it may be innocuous, and as with parody it may be thought-provoking, but, either way, The Daily Show’s brand of humor breaks

down the spectacle of conventional news and suggests to the audience not what news stories are important, but that the stories that are deemed important by other networks and stations almost always can be seen from a different viewpoint, a different perspective, a different choice of newscast.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ASSAULT WITH A MARKETING WEAPON

One of the primary reasons why The Daily Show is in existence is to serve as a front against the growing commercial trends of assault on choice, to function as an alternative program to those who may be dissatisfied with watching the more mainstream traditional news programs. The networks, through their branded graphics and regimented formats, have created a sort of news broadcast that is repetitive and predictable. The meaning of the story becomes lost in its presentation: events are drowned in a sea of dramatic “Breaking News” music themes and “War on Terror” graphics. The Daily Show is celebrated by some who believe the program is the answer to conventional news, but, as others argue, The Daily Show is nevertheless a program developed by a commercial industry, with its rise in popularity negating its reputation of being the ratings underdog. While The Daily Show is praised for its so-called alternative characteristics, others could argue that The Daily Show is merely a corporate ploy to capture those not caught in the net of the more straightforward television news programs. Media critics pose that The Daily Show is a product of the “cool marketing” phenomena, in which advertisers hack into the rebellion and spirit of the younger generation in order to create something that is fresh and marketable (Barker 1, Kurtz 1, Tucker 2). Through the branding of the youth culture, advertisers create a tipping point: a trend that grows exponentially in popularity until the product or concept becomes a way of life, or, in a sense, a sort of hegemony. It is when this dominance forms within the culture that the originator of the message, the rebellious and “cool” youth market, does what is in their

character to do: rebel. This chapter explores the emergence of a youthful marketing trend, its integration into our culture, the eventual backlash to the message and how The Daily Show fits into this pop culture phenomenon.

The Daily Show's huge audience numbers and the popularity of its cultural parody can be explained by a phenomenon called "the tipping point." The tipping point is the sudden and overwhelming emergence of a trend, whether in economics, fashion, politics, academia – anything that is a part of everyday life. It is the boiling point of an idea that transforms into a way of life. Malcolm Gladwell compares the phenomena of the tipping point to an epidemic in action, because the message spreads just as viruses do (7). The tipping point is contagious, spreading across society; it is incremental in size, a tiny message that causes a big effect, similar to epidemics. The change happens in a hurry, in one sudden, dramatic moment. The propensity for an idea to gain hegemonic force depends on what Gladwell calls the three "agents of change," the first of these agents being the "law of the few" (19). The law of the few explains that social epidemics are driven by the efforts of just a few people, whose personalities are often overly sociable, enthusiastic, or those who exhibit an air of knowledge and expertise. These three actors of the law of change are nicknamed the connectors, the maven and the salesmen. "Change the messenger," he writes, "and you change the message itself" (255). Connectors are people to whom others gravitate – their outgoing personalities help bring people together to function as a whole and to share in collective interests (46). The connectors are the on-air personalities, the anchors like Jon Stewart whose

demeanor, dress and presentation make the audience feel comfortable, entertained, and this helps to draw in the viewers. The second actor of the law of change is the maven. These are the behind-the-scenes people, the producers, researchers and writers who watch all the newscasts and create the moments of comedy. Mavens accumulate knowledge about members of society and how culture functions – they become the go-to experts who have the social skills and trend-spotting abilities to start word-of-mouth social epidemics (67). Salesmen, being the third actor in the law of change, are more personable than knowledgeable; they have the people skills required to persuade people and convince them about the verity of burgeoning trends (70). But what causes the actor's messages to "stick" is what Gladwell identifies as the second agent of change, the Stickiness Factor, which is defined as the presentation and structure of a message that makes it memorable. By tinkering with the presentation, he claims, one can cause the message to "tip" (131), and for The Daily Show the element that makes their stories "stick" is the humor which is applied to them. When people laugh and are entertained, they become more likely to pay attention to the program, and, subsequently, when they pay more attention to the program they remember more of it. The third agent of change is the Power of Context (26). Social epidemics are strongly influenced by the conditions of their environment. People are sensitive to their environment and those who surround them, and, as such, they make decisions differently as a group than they would if they were by themselves. Perhaps this is why The Daily Show is taped in front of a live, studio audience. When the at-home audience hears the anchors,

reporters, or audience members laughing, they realize “there may be something funny about this clip,” and then they too are more inclined to laugh and try to figure out why something is funny. Reaching the tipping point is a tri-fold process, depending on the effectiveness of the message, the messenger, and the circumstances surrounding the presentation of that message. The Daily Show itself can be considered a tipping point, giving rise to the popularity of news stories that are comedic yet critical.

Cultural trends have in the past fifty years become a focus for economic theorists and social strategists, and, more specifically, the overblown presentation of traditional news programs has become the focus of The Daily Show. As ideologies formed and culture accepted them, an alternative movement also develops -- one whose purpose is to criticize the dominant ideologies. In the 1960s, America was a terrain of conflict, and during this decade hegemonic forces went head-to-head in a literal culture war. Although those who were members of the counter-culture were often written off, their numbers could not be ignored. The advertising industry recognized the potential of this revolutionary group, their grasp of what was new, fresh and hip, and then they capitalized upon it.

Subsequently, co-optation developed. Thomas Frank describes co-optation as a symbiotic relationship between the adman and the consumer, an effort of the advertising industry to “dilute a meaningful, even menacing uprising and sway a large body of consumers at the same time” (106). The imagery and language of youth was applied to a plethora of products, and marketed to

consumers as the “cool” spin on an older product. When a thing is current, it creates currency (Klein 72), and the marketing of cool and hip consumerism soon became the mission of corporate advertising executives. When businesses observed the youth culture rising around them, “they saw both a reflection of their own struggle against the stifling bureaucracy of the past and an affirmation of a dynamic new consuming order that would replace the old” (Frank 28). And so the admen became cool hunters, desperate to tap into the excitement of those who rebelled against dominant culture, the cool youth culture. From this pursuit of the youth culture, however, came another hegemonic force, subtler but ultimately just as dominating. For those who were not interested in conventional consumerism, marketers provided them with a just as regimented and planned out product: new and cool. Naomi Klein describes this consumerism as a set a well-worn grooves: “step off the straight and narrow career-and-materialism groove and you just ended up on another one, the groove for people who step off the main groove” (64). From the co-optation of cool to sell products, culture itself became a product, marketed as a commodity and as an ideology.

One could argue that The Daily Show falls into this category, and that the show that seems like it provides the answer to the other humdrum newscasts is really just a vehicle of a capitalist television industry to catch the viewers that traditional news does not. Members of The Daily Show may say they do not purposely go for the younger, “hip” audience (Love 28); however, many of the show’s viewers fall in the late-thirties and younger range (Douthat 56).

As the youth culture became a marketable product, packaged and figuratively “sold” back to society, culture itself became part of the advertising campaign: life consisting of the brands and gimmicks used to sell ideology to society. Branding, Klein writes, has become such an explosive industry that the logo has come to represent more than the object it adorns. In the so-called “medium-as-brand” phenomenon, with the idea that broadcast communication is merely an extension of advertising: “branding becomes troubling when the balance tips dramatically in favor of the sponsoring brand, stripping the hosting culture of its inherent value and treating it as little more than a promotional tool” (39). This raises the question, how much is The Daily Show monitored and edited by money-minded executives at Comedy Central, or by the agents and managers who bring their movie star and author guests to the shows? This is a question that probably can only be answered by the top executive producers of the program. But perhaps the branding of culture, via the influence of the commercial television industry, has reached a tipping point in The Daily Show.

Consumers are constantly surrounded by choices, all of which are “branded” by political, social and economic ideology. But what consumers might not realize is that the overabundance of branded products is controlled by only a few synergized companies. Take The Daily Show for example: the show is owned by Comedy Central, which is in turn owned by Viacom, who owns many of the other television networks, including those which The Daily Show parodies on a daily basis. This does not mean that The Daily Show is devoid of any progressive benefits, because, at the very least, even though the program is

owned by a corporate conglomerate, they still provide the audience with news content and perspectives unlike those presented on the more traditional television news programs. Still, as television networks continue to blur the boundaries of capitalism and production, they have become vertically integrated corporate powerhouses: retail, entertainment, publishing, distribution, and content production are all contained under one industrial roof. These major mergers are a direct cause of what Klein argues is an assault on choice, through the over-commercialization of culture. Commercialization occurs through the continual expansion of branding. Through the relentless advertising in places like media, businesses, schools and other public places, people's identities and lifestyles were shaped by products and consumption. As a result, commercialization means the loss of choice and the growth of corporations that disenfranchise consumers and exploit the working class.

Despite this trend, while attempting to saturate our collective identity with formulated, corporate messages, the commercial industries have inadvertently created a cultural backlash. In the 1980s, a band from San Francisco known as "Negativland" coined the term "culture jamming" to describe the backlash (Klein 281). Culture jamming was a way of physically altering billboards to reshape the corporate message for the public. A good jam, Klein explains, is an "x-ray of the subconscious of a campaign, uncovering the deeper truth hiding beneath the layers of advertising euphemisms" (281). In the early 1990s, the culture jam moved from the billboard to the streets, as the hip crowd, the students of the youth culture, revolted against the school-logos and the marketing of cool by

holding public protests. New organizations formed whose purpose was to distribute publications directed at exposing the politics of multinational corporations and the parasitic nature of the corporate advertisers. Groups such as the Worker's Assistance Center brought corporate advertisers to court in an attempt to restore the basic policies of economic equality and citizenship. In the past several years, technical advancements and the Internet brought about a culture jamming resurgence. Whether by paint-splattered billboards or photo-shopped pictures, Klein claims "the public sphere is delighted to see the icons of corporate power subverted and mocked" (287). Ultimately, the message of the culture-jammer is a citizen-centered alternative to international branding companies (281), and in this sense, The Daily Show may be classified as a culture-jammer.

Those alternative groups who see hegemony as a type of societal spectacle, such as with The Daily Show, may cause a rift in what is perceived as the appropriate ideology. Here, the dominant regimes have three options: ignore, address, or incorporate. As with the advertising industry, the dominant regimes have adapted the counter-culture as the cool, trendy "tipping point" product. Thus, hegemony has come full circle. An ideology develops and is incorporated into society. A subsequent ideology develops, challenges hegemony, but then that opposing force also becomes a product of culture. Therefore, what may seem new and contemporary may really just be an integral part of the hegemonic strategy. So what will become of hegemony? Eventually, perhaps society will burnout on the current cultural branding and become

immune to the current message. When that happens, the hegemonic concept will either have to evolve, or succumb to the next, emerging ideology. And what will become of The Daily Show? Will the program become over-run by critics who feel that the show is merely a ploy by the commercial industry to capture the younger demographic, or will The Daily Show be recognized for its democratizing potential, its ability to problematize the traditional television news through humorous and possibly progressive ways?

## CONCLUSION: AND HERE IT IS, YOUR MOMENT OF ZEN

When The Daily Show was developed in 1996 as a replacement for Politically Incorrect, the creators could not have imagined that the show would eventually come to be seen by some as a sort of watchdog for the politically incorrect. Borrowing from the visual and rhetorical cues of traditional television news and adding their own comedic twist, The Daily Show creates a tool by which the spectacle of traditional television news is problematized. The Daily Show maintains the appearance of a more conventional news program by utilizing camera and production techniques such as double boxes, picture inserts, voice-overs and banner graphics. This is a format which the audience will easily recognize, and, therefore, it may cause them to pay closer to the content of the story rather than the presentation of it. Where the program makes a decisive split from the news mold is the framing of the story. The Daily Show applies a humorous slant to its stories that both entertains the audience and provides them with a new perspective on the political realm. Innocuous jokes relying on puns and pop culture references are frequent, but it is through The Daily Show's use of satire, irony and parody that the viewer may take a step back from the spectacle of the news stories, look at why certain events and people are spotlighted, and consider how that may affect them. Through thoughtful humor, the program does not show viewers what to think and what is important, but instead it enables them to develop alternate ways to view political figures and events. Additional quantitative research into this area could perhaps provide a better estimate of how many of The Daily Show's viewers experience this new perspective

compared to how many of the viewers watch the program strictly for entertainment purposes.

While some critics view The Daily Show as thought-provoking political programming, others argue that the only perspective the show pushes is that of the commercial industry (Barker 1, Tucker 1). Like other television news programs, the show was created by and is now supported by a commercially-driven television industry, and like, the conventional news programs, the show uses many of the same visual and verbal elements. The Daily Show is often touted as the "alternative" political program, but some say that is because the show was created to net the portion of the audience that "alternative" programming appeal to, namely the younger demographic (Barker 1). The youth culture has been the driving force of "hip" advertising campaigns for some fifty years, ever since the admen began tapping into the fresh and rebellious spirit of the counter-culture. As hip consumerism became the new tipping point, infiltrating the commercial television industry, messages began to become overwhelming, predictable and inescapable, and into this realm entered the culture jammers. When The Daily Show began to rise in popularity, some could have argued it was because the program was itself a sort of culture jammer, a political underdog set to revolutionize the television news industry. Others, however, could hold a different view: that The Daily Show has adopted a sort of "I'm the cocky show that's here to win the TV politics war," and because of this mindset the program will eventually succumb to its own narcissism and become just another failed corporate project. This study is limited in the fact that only the

creators of the show, the team of current executive producers, and the members of corporate management would know to what degree the content of the show is shaped by the network. Perhaps an interview with one of those players would provide further insight into the show's behind-the-scenes operations.

So where does The Daily Show stand in this consumer paradox? In a sense, the program straddles both lines, balancing an image and a content that is just as much "alternative" as it is "corporate." The Daily Show will always have a corporate and commercial foundation, because it is owned by the Comedy Central network, because it is financially back by commercials, and because it relies on healthy ratings to stay afloat. The reason The Daily Show is able to have fancy graphics, use new studio technology and employ talented comedians is because of the money they get from the network. However, it is unclear to what degree The Daily Show has to answer to the Comedy Central suits, or to what degree they have to at all shape their content to the network's specifications. While the look of the program is polished and professional, like other commercially-driven television productions, the content of the show is what sets it apart from other news programs.

In the face of accusations that The Daily Show is a corporate entity designed for the youth market, the program responds with segments such as Lewis Black's "Back in Black" caustic packages on corporate America, and Demetri Martin's satire of the listless youth demographic in "Trendspotting." Although these two correspondents are not major players on the show, they do serve as a sort of reminder that, while The Daily Show does not present itself as

the perfect political commentary program, it does have something to say to the critics that try to disparage, or to read too much into, its mock newscast format. The Daily Show may not be the be-all-end-all program that will revolutionize the television industry, but it undeniably does portray a different perspective on the daily operations of politics and politicians.

Audiences may not always understand Stewart's jokes about little-known legislation or state representatives, they might not always recognize irony or parody when they see it, but it is through this comedic slant that the audience can at the very least see a different version of a news story. And when more than one version of a news story is shown, it is that "alternative" material that creates a problematizing affect for the television news networks that tend to push the same, overly-formatted and under-developed stories.

The Daily Show may not be a permanent fixture on Comedy Central, there will come a day when the program will end, but what the show's audience will have gained is a lot of laughs and a new perspective on politics; what the television industry will have gained is a program that, through visual and rhetorical cues, skews the balance and raises the question of which news programs are "fake" and which are "serious."

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