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POLITICAL SATIRE AND POLITICAL NEWS:

ENTERTAINING, ACCIDENTALLY REPORTING OR BOTH?

THE CASE OF *THE DAILY SHOW WITH JON STEWART (TDS)*

by

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And approved by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Political Satire and Political News: Entertaining, Accidentally Reporting or Both?

The Case of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart (TDS)*

by ELENA-DANIELA NEACSU

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John V. Pavlik, Ph.D.

For the last decade, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (*TDS*), a (Comedy Central) cable comedy show, has been increasingly seen as an informative, new, even revolutionary, form of journalism. A substantial body of literature appeared, adopting this view. On closer inspection, it became clear that this view was tenable only in specific circumstances. It assumed that the comedic structure of the show, *TDS'* primary text, promoted cognitive polysemy, a textual ambiguity which encouraged critical inquiry, and that *TDS'* audiences perceived it accordingly. As a result I analyzed, through a dual - encoding/decoding - analytical approach, whether *TDS'* comedic discourse educates and informs its audiences in a

manner which encourages independent or critical reading of the news. Through a multilayered textual analysis of the primary and tertiary texts of the show, the research presented here asked, "How does *TDS'* comedic narrative (primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news?" and "How does *TDS'* audience decode its text?"

The research identified flaws in the existing literature and the limits inherent to any similar endeavors. It became apparent that, due to *TDS'* comedic discourse and its host's political transparency, the primary text does not promote cognitive polysemy, because it offers one dominant reading that is easily deciphered. Furthermore, due to its specific comedic structure, the primary text does not encourage dissenting or critical reading of the show's presentation of the news. Close reading of specific audience-authored tertiary texts indicated that *TDS* offered a dominant encoded reading which was either easily accepted or slightly negotiated, according to the views of the news outlet presenting the *TDS* excerpt.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Professor John Pavlik for chairing this committee with unwavering support for my research interests, and channeling them into this project. I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement and support I received from Professor Susan Keith and Professor Jack Bratich during my studies at Rutgers University. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Professor Michael Schudson. His writings, especially his *Good Citizen*, fueled my media research. His work ethic I strive to emulate. My friend Carissa had the ignoble job to tell me what was boring and had to be changed.

Without Mickey, these acknowledgments would not have been possible.

Thank you.

Dedication

To my little girls, Zoé (Zouzou) and Isadora (Izzie), for making sense of my personal chaos, and to their father, Mickey, for having given me what I did not dare to dream I could have. Thank you, darling.

To Tică Neacşu, who died before I could say "Imi pare rău," and to my mom, Viorica Neacşu, to whom I still have to say "Mulţumesc."

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Chapter 1. On Televised Political News

1. The Daily Show *(TDS)* at a First Sight

Political satire, as a television phenomenon, is not new. But as shown in more detail later, its symbolic value has certainly changed. In the 1970's, NBC's *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* rose to an emblematic cultural role because of its eclecticism. Its producer, Lorne Michaels, recently described it as a variety of different types of comedy. *SNL's* entire cultural affectation ("not ready for prime time") tagged its weekly news segment, *Weekend Update*, as more culturally hip than politically relevant. Overall, few scholars viewed *SNL* as anything more than entertainment. To the contrary, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, many scholars have attached dreams for a better, more critical, more vital journalism to the success of a different late night comedy show, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (*TDS*).

TDS first aired in July 1996. Comedy Central produced it to replace another political satire show, *Politically Incorrect* (with Bill Maher), which a network, *American Broadcast Company (ABC)* had just acquired. While news-based, its first incarnation with host Craig Kilborn, a sports

commentator from ESPN, spent as much time on political news (such as Fidel Castro's speeches) as it did on celebrity trivia: ***TDS*** covered celebrities' birthdays, or their careers in segments entitled accordingly, such as, "This Day in Hasselhoff History," about the star of the (ill)famed TV show, ***Baywatch*** (James, 1996, p. C-14). However, from the beginning, the show was a financial success, and met the expectations of Doug Herzog, the president and CEO of Comedy Central: ***TDS*** became "the broadcast-news parody" that Herzog wanted as "the flagship of his network" (Bargmann 1998, p. 41).

Three years later, an ***Esquire*** interview reported on Kilborn's "tempestuous and sometimes nasty dynamic" (Bargmann 1998, p. 42) with Lizz Winstead, one of co-creators and head writers, with Madeleine Smithberg. As a result, dirty laundry aired. Kilborn was replaced with Jon Stewart. Stewart, hired as co-executive producer and co-writer, changed the tenor of the show. He reduced the volume of trivial jokes while making politics look trivial.

Under Stewart's stewardship, ***TDS*** airs between 21 and 22 minutes of comedic content four times a week, for about 40 weeks each year, on Viacom/CBS' comedy channel. ***TDS'***

cablecast begins in a self-important, overly dramatic manner supported by visual and aural cues.

A rock-sounding musical introduction with ominous overtones accompanies the baritone announcer introducing Jon Stewart. Camera shots of patriotic red, white and blue title graphics jazz up an all-encompassing sweep of the studio where Stewart, in business attire, reigns at his corporate-looking desk (Bargmann 1998; James, 1996). Stewart feigns interruption of his mad scribbling and looks up from his pile of blue notes. He acknowledges his audience with a passing reference, and starts the cablecast with his take on what *TDS* writers consider the top stories of that day (Bargmann 1998; James, 1996). In addition to his monologue, the show continues with other segments, which frequently include a "fake" correspondent segment and a real interview with a political guest.

For the last decade, much like any form of political journalism, *TDS* has covered political news. *TDS* has focused on domestic political news about "corruption, conflict, protest, and bureaucratic malfunctioning that lead government to deviate from 'an unstable ideal'" (Gans, 1979, p. 43). However, it remains unclear what type of journalism *TDS* engages in, if any.

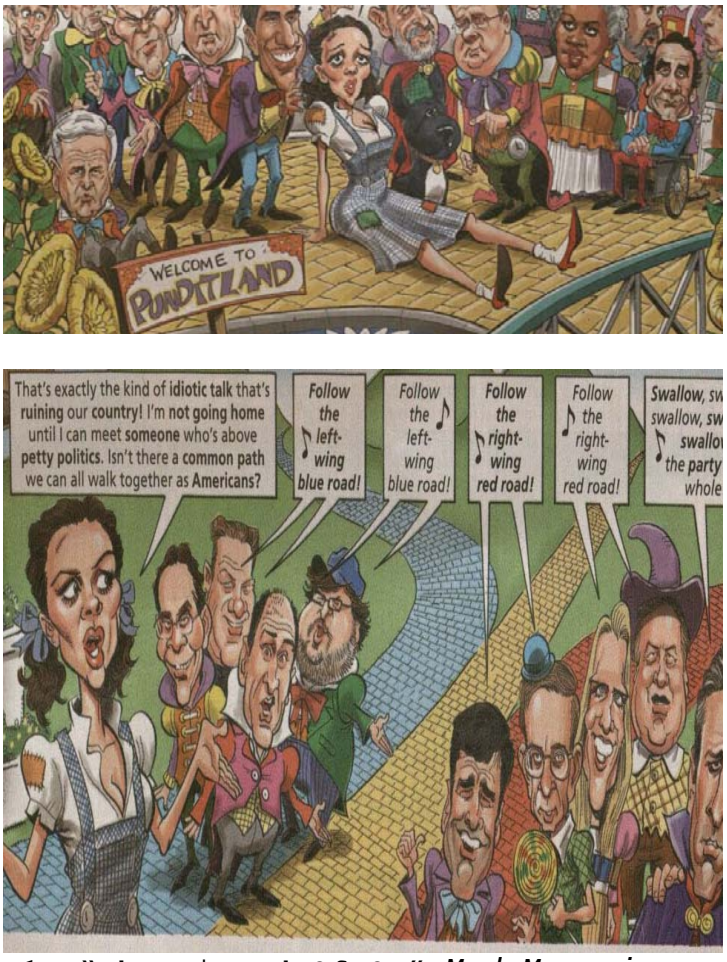


Image 1. "The Wizard Of O." ***Mad Magazine,*** October 2010, p. 49

TDS' host Jon Stewart started as a stand-up comedian. Today he is a media personality. ***Mad Magazine'***s Desmond Devlin (writer) and Tom Richmond (artist) portrayed (2010) Stewart as another "ordinary" pundit in "The Wizard Of O" (p. 47). Stewart describes himself as a "comedian dash pundit" (***TDS*** - November 8, 2011).

As of 2005, Jon Stewart was "the most trusted name in fake news."[1] Stewart's "wise-guy-poking-holes-in-the-news" satire has become so popular and consequential that a 2009 time.inc poll showed Stewart as "America's most trusted

[1] Tucker Carlson introducing Jon Stewart on CNN's now defunct ***Crossfire.***

newscaster."[2] *Time* broke out the results, state-by-state: NBC's Brian Williams (who managed to finish second with 29%) won Arizona, Wyoming, Nebraska, North Dakota, Florida, South Carolina, Indiana, Delaware and Vermont, and tied in Kentucky and Alaska. Then, ABC's Charlie Gibson won big in Tennessee and Montana, and finished third with 19% of the vote. CBS's Katie Couric won one state: Iowa, and finished last with 7%. Some view Stewart's victory in most states and first place finish with 44% of the 9,411[3] votes cast to be a result of his "odd man out [status] in a field of network news anchors."[4] Perhaps. I view it as an indication that a rather important cultural shift is taking place in the news industry.

TDS´ 11 o'clock cable case frequently attracts as many or more viewers than any of the 11 PM cable news shows. While older estimates put TDS' cable audience at 1.1 million in 2004, to 1.6 million in 2006, more recent results average at 1.9 million viewers for its 11 PM airing.[5] In October 2010, *TDS* became the most viewed nightly

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[2] http://politicalhumor.about.com/b/2009/07/22/jon-stewart-americas-most-trusted-newscaster.htm and http://www.timepolls.com/hppolls/archive/poll_results_417.html.
[3] http://www.timepolls.com/hppolls/archive/poll_results_417.html.
[4] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/22/time-magazine-poll-jon-st_n_242933.html.
[5] http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/28/nearly-3-million-watch-as-obama-visits-daily-show/?ref=media.

talk show, with nearly 3 million people watching President Obama's appearance on October 27, 2010.[6] Those numbers do not include the number of times the show was viewed through its website.[7]

Thus, it came to no one's surprise that, for the last decade, *TDS* has been increasingly perceived as a new, even revolutionary, form of journalism, or something like journalism. However, I believe its role has not yet been explained persuasively. Among the many models of journalism practiced today, some are committed to the "neutral transmission of relevant political facts," as well as to "making news interesting" (Schudson, 2007, p. 140). Others, such as opinion journalism, interpret the news. Among the latter, some deliver it by blending reason and affect. *TDS* belongs to the latter group, but it is unclear how it performs that role.

2. The Many Faces of Fake in News

News programs, or more specifically political journalism, are supposed to truthfully inform the members

[6] http://www.businessinsider.com/nearly-3-million-people-watched-president-obamas-appearance-on-the-daily-show-wednesday-night-mdashnyt-2010-10.
[7] http://cornellsun.com/node/23180.

of their audience to enable them to make their own judgments. Most scholars expect political journalism to be "educating citizens as well as informing them" (Schudson, 2007, p. 140). Journalists themselves, as Walter Lippmann pointed out a century earlier, have strived to build their professional reputations on the integrity with which they informed the public (Steel, 1980). Walter Lippmann, a journalist turned successful pundit, never surrendered his role of "political teacher" who explained to his compatriots the kind of world they lived in and what they needed to do to help "their country survive, prosper and grow" (Aron, 1959, p.114). Few journalists today seem to perform their job in a manner befitting this description.

In this environment, it becomes understandable that televised political journalism has experienced many transformations.[8] Among its latest incarnation, scholars and

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[8]While aware of ***Nation*** columnist Eric Alterman's recent opinion that TV news is nothing more than pseudo-event journalism and, in a way, the ultimate fake news (that is, so completely false and dishonest that the broadcasts do not even admit to their falsity), I do not share his opinion:

> Fox viewers, according to a study by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes, become more misinformed about the world the more they watch the network. A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found viewers of The Daily Show and The Colbert Report likely to be better informed than the average Fox News consumer. But the impact of Fox's brand of fake news is not limited to its own viewers. When the hapless Katie Couric recently misreported that Barack Obama "grew up praying in a mosque," she was parroting a discredited Fox report that had appeared three months earlier (Alterman, 2007, p.11).

audiences agree, are satirical shows incorporating various degrees of "fake news." Since January 2011, the Onion News Network[9] has aired ***News without Mercy*** every Friday on the Independent Film Channel (IFC)[10]. Though also hailed as "fake news," ***TDS'*** political satire relies less and less on fabricated news items using real news as fodder for its comedy.

Other shows have tried to use this mocking formula. For example, in 2008, CNN also hired a stand-up comedian for a political news show, ***D L Hughley Breaks the News*** only to suspend the program months later, when Hughley referred to the 2008 Republican Convention as "colorless as Nazi Germany." In Spring 2010, PBS revamped its ***News Hour***. It unsuccessfully replaced Jim Lehrer's ***Journal*** segment with ***Need to Know***, whose Friday episode ended with Andy Borowitz's satirical segment called ***Next Week's News with Andy Borowitz***. A stand-up comedian, Andy Borowitz predicted the headlines for the following week.

These are examples of what Jeffrey P. Jones called the attraction of delivering news as comedy. Jones has dedicated much of his scholarship to understanding this cultural phenomenon. He coined the term "entertaining

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[9] www.theonion.com/.
10 www.ifc.com/.

politics" (2005) to express what he perceived to be a new way of informing citizens about government affairs in a manner easily understood by a relatively young, college-educated, one might say self-absorbed, audience. In giving detailed attention to this new television hybrid, Jones brought political comedy, and thus ***TDS,*** to the attention of the academe as a journalistic topic.

In his groundbreaking book, ***Entertaining Politics***, Jones defined ***TDS*** as a "hybrid genre of political talk" (Jones, 2005, p. x). However, he defined that talk in terms usually associated with newspapers ("primary location for new public rhetors"). Almost provocatively, he wrote about three political comedy shows, including ***TDS***,

> I argue [they] have challenged normative assumptions about who gets to speak about politics on television, what issues will be covered and in what manner, and how audiences can engage politics on television beyond simply deferring to expert knowledge. Furthermore, they challenge the boundaries between "serious" and "entertaining" programming erected in the network era, which increasingly have come to be seen as artificial. Finally, the shows have become a primary location for new public rhetors that consistently challenge the policies advanced by political elites and the sense-making on which those policies are founded (Jones, 2005, p. x).

In the second and substantially altered edition of ***Entertaining Politics*** (2010), Jones re-advances his thesis that both the comedic narrative and outsider status of the

relatively new political talk show hybrid generates audience interest and loyalty: "audiences welcomed these new outsider voices (much to the chagrin of Washington elites) as legitimate commentators on politics" (Jones, 2010, x). I find it noteworthy that he never questions nor wonders whether what he perceives as a new type of audience engagement with the political realm is only an artifact of a new type of brand loyalty to the hippest show in town.

Geoffrey Baym, a media studies professor and former television journalist, has also written extensively about this television hybrid. Explaining what prompted his recent book ***From Cronkite to Colbert. The Evolution of Broadcast News*** (2010), he pointed out a singular moment when, several years ago, he interrupted his late night channel surfing to listen to an in-depth conversation with Republican Senator John McCain about campaign finance reform. That conversation was taking place on cable, on Comedy Central. His subsequent research brought him to the conclusion that "[a]long with laughs for the audience, the hosts of faux news programs deliver tough questions for politicians, questions frequently missing from mainstream news coverage."[11] Further below, I will analyze Baym's

[11] http://www.uncg.edu/ure/news/stories/2010/oct/baym100610.html.

belief that Stewart is successful in his attempt to inform his audience and to ask us to be rational and think about politics seriously, while making that demand on us in a silly manner.

During a large part of the last century, in the now-defunct Soviet bloc, people relied on double-entendres and other forms of polysemy to communicate with each other. They used forbidden jokes which had no effect in undermining the soviet regime (Davies, 2007), but acted as a quiet protest which united the teller and the listener:

> A Russian Jew was walking through the suburbs of Moscow when a car stopped. Suddenly a man was thrown out at the side of the road and the car sped off. [Recognizing his old friend Moishe who, beaten by the KGB, was nearly unconscious, the passer by said:] "Moishe, Moishe, it's me Abram. […] We were in Auschwitz together."
> 'Ah," said Moishe dreamily, "Ah, yes, Auschwitz."

(Davies, 2007, p. 295)

All political jokes resemble political satire because they rely on the listener's political knowledge, as well as his predisposition to make moral judgment about the state of politics alluded to by the joke or satire. No one has ever suggested that the Soviet jokes represented a form of journalism. They represented a form of communication and diversion. However, a rather large number of U.S. scholars and journalists regard political satire, or at least a

specific type of political satire, as bona fide journalism. Here I explore that claim because I believe it is neither obvious nor well supported, and perhaps a different label would be both more accurate and more academically helpful.

In other words, I analyze whether comedic discourse educates and informs its audience in a manner which encourages independent or critical reading of the news. The case study used for this purpose is that of ***TDS***, whose jester ***New York Magazine*** recently anointed as the face of the decade.



Image 2. Cover Page *New York Magazine,* September 2010

The general laudatory dialogue about ***TDS*** is that comedy is a better narrative fit for public discourse and public engagement than regular old-fashioned news shows and their authoritative news anchor, usually in the mold of CBS' Douglas Edwards, Walter Cronkite, or even Dan Rather (in his earlier days). Some scholars believe that ***TDS*** performs the functions of alternative journalism, because its format allows a unique coverage of the news, which is

critical of mainstream media while "speaking truth to power" (Baym, 2010).

Alternative journalism represents, according to the British scholars who produced the first book-length survey and analysis (Atton & Hamilton, 2008), an attack on the elite basis of journalism as a practice, on the professional norm of objectivity, and on the subordinate role of audience as receiver (p. 204). As shown below, there is an entire school of thought which believes *TDS* fits the last two prongs.[12]

Scholars approve of *TDS*' comedic narrative and its lack of respect for professional norms of objectivity, which are interpreted as doing more damage than assistance in helping to promote an informed citizenry (Baym). They view *TDS* as an attack on the elite basis of journalism, despite its elite corporate ownership. Similarly connected to its comedic narrative is those scholars' belief that *TDS'* audience does not find itself in a subordinate role to the primary text. This argument is linked to all satire, and thus applies to *TDS*, which like any satire relies on an

[12] The literature does not discuss the first prong in the case of TDS, so I will ignore it too, although not before stating the obvious that *TDS* is as elitist, if not more, than any form of mainstream media news show.

active audience to understand the secondary, desired meaning.

The basis for this high scholarly opinion is *TDS'* textual structure. However, those scholars have left unexamined the question of how the meaning of the news survives its comedic delivery, or whether it is unjustifiably trivialized because, perhaps, not all news is fit to be delivered as comedy. Similarly unclear is the journalistic emancipation comedy has on its audience. This dissertation seeks to remedy some of these omissions.

Chapter 2. Introducing The Daily Show (*TDS*) – An American Moment of Televised Political Satire

1. *The Onion* v. *Mad Magazine* -- Real Fake News. Real Political Satire?

On a Midwest college campus in 1988, two students decided to produce a paper which would publish humorous articles about fake, but plausible, news. The paper is now a successful business venture relying on its ad revenue. Since 1996, it has had a successful online presence, with more than 5 million visitors a month (Tower, 2008), which has not hindered its half-a-million hard-copy paper distribution in more than 10 major cities nationwide, including Washington D.C., where it has a business partnership with the *Washington Post* (Id.) For the last three years, *The Onion* has also had a strong video online presence spoofing Fox News, CNN and MSNBC (theonion.com) (Stelter, 2010).

The Onion has always been smart and funny … but harmless. It has never announced a Martian invasion as young Orson Wells did (Love, 2007). It has never reached *Mad Magazine'*s acerbic pieces. During the Cold War time its articles focused on Cold War spies (Cabras, 2007). More

currently, it debunks politicians. In its October 2010, issue, for example, ***Mad*** reduced the status of the Obama's presidency from Wizard of O to a mere "backroom politician."

Dorothy: You were supposed to be this giant transformative head of state! But you're just another cheap backroom politician!

Obama: To Americans who worry about their children's futures, my message is this: I hear you! I am really good at hearing, but not good at doing! I make Avatar look like something that lived up to its hype!



Image 3. "Wizard of O" ***Mad Magazine***, October 2010, p 51

But none of the other, older, print news/humor hybrids, including ***Mad*** magazine reached the level of success the ***Onion*** did (Sheagley, O'Loughlin, & Lindberg, 2008, p. 82). One reason may be its style and targeted content. For example, ***Mad Magazine*** is dedicated to sarcastic humor about all things real that may interest its readers (Evanier, 2002), including political satire, but its editorial board would never describe their work as political journalism. ***The Onion*** is only about "real" fake news. Moreover,

contrary to *Mad*, its editors believe they are engaged in political journalism.

In an inversion of the traditional editorial process, *The Onion* chooses its headlines and then individual writers invent stories to fit them. This tradition continues with its online product as well (Stelter, 2010). For example, a headline published in 2008, "Bill Clinton Sadly Folds First Lady Dress Into Box," was subsequently supported by a story, whose creation process Wells Tower, a *Washington Post* magazine contributor, describes in the following manner:

> The Clinton/dress had barely escaped the editorial guillotine. A slim consensus had it that Hillary Clinton had already taken enough slugs in the primary contest and that a post-mortem ribbing about the candidate's loss might be beating a dead horse. There was also the point that a joke about the president in a dress felt sort of like warmed-over Benny Hill. "It just seems toothless," said [a senior writer]. "It's a joke about a man in drag."
>
> "But it's not," said [writer B]. "It's a different story. It's more an emotional story -- it's about sad Bill. Just as Hillary had these deep emotional reasons for wanting to be president, Bill had deep emotional reasons for, you know, welcoming heads of state to the White House in a dress."
>
> [writer C] agreed. "It's not so much as a man in drag as Bill Clinton wanting to be really elegant, to be the center of attention. It's about getting back to our crazy Clinton character," who in previous issues of the paper: wrote a fan letter to Joan Jett, poured out malt liquor in the Rose Garden for "dead homies" Ron Brown and Vince Foster, was molested by his visiting uncle, became a spokesman for Manwich, captured a Nazi submarine, Googled himself and used the power of his imagination to turn a bar of soap into a tugboat.

After a period of spirited debate, [the senior writer] conceded that he was willing to get behind the headline provided that "the dress comes with a pillbox hat."

"And the pearls he planned to wear," said [writer D].

With the headlines selected, and the issue's skeleton propped into place, the writers convened after lunch to brainstorm each story, to probe and test the jokes, and gestate their conceits into embryonic pieces of comic reportage. In committee, the Bill Clinton/first lady dress joke underwent a transformation from imperiled underdog to unlikely favorite. The process worked like this:

[writer A]: "Okay, so the joke is all about Bill Clinton wanting to be the first lady. So what we're satirizing is the foolishness of the role of the first lady."

[writer B]: "I don't think that it's the foolishness of the dream, so much as that he wants to be a Jackie O, a figurehead, a fashion icon. It's about the sadness of letting go of the dream, that he never got to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue on the president's arm. We'll want to see him carefully folding the tissue paper over the dress and putting it on a high shelf."

[writer A]: "Do we talk about his dream of being the first male first lady?"

[senior writer]: "I think it's funnier if we leave gender out of it entirely."

[writer B]: "It's like: 'It's such a lovely dress,' said Bill Clinton, the 62-year-old ex-president. I think you want to stick mostly to the sadness."

[writer C]: "I feel a hope chest is in order. He'll put the dress in a hope chest for Chelsea."

[writer A]: "No, I think it's got to be his hope chest, full of all the stuff he's been buying in anticipation of being first lady. He presses the dress to his decolletage, lets out a wistful sigh and carefully lays the box in among the fancy china he'd bought to entertain heads of state with. He'll have a pair of those white gloves with the buttons that women don't wear anymore and imagining all the heads of state he would have gotten to greet."

> [writer E]: (falsetto, pantomiming the wistful proffering of a regal hand): "Good afternoon, Mister Ambassador. How do you do?"
>
> [senior writer]: "While a grandfather clock ticked in the background, he carefully lowered a gramophone needle to a worn LP, held the dress and slowly danced around the room to the crackling strains of 'The Way We Were (Tower, 2008, p. W08).

This may be political satire, but is it political journalism? Sheagley, O'Loughlin, and Lindberg (2008) argue that ***The Onion*** functions as a political information cue-giver although in a manner different from traditional news. For example, ***The Onion*** satirizes mainstream media for bowing to what some view as the lowest type of soft news "infotainment," ignoring substantive political events (p. 91). Those authors believed that though embedded in humor, the information contained in ***The Onion***'s headlines was sufficiently grounded in political reality that the audience recognized the satire and was able to decode it. However, this line of argument only attempts to explain why the text functions as political satire. Indirectly, if we were to agree that criticism is a form of journalism, then it supports a type of political journalism which does not rely on rational discourse, but on utterances of opinions whose strength lies in their ability to produce laughs. For example, on October 11, 2000, ***The Onion*** published the

following article: “CNN Still Releasing News Piled Up During Elián González Saga:”

> ATLANTA–CNN officials announced Tuesday that the cable network is "making good progress" in its ongoing effort to release the vast backlog of news accumulated during Elián González's headline-dominating seven-month odyssey in the U.S.
> [Image of CNN anchor Natalie Allen breaks the news of the Dalai Lama's death, which occurred four months ago.]
> "Ever since little Elián went back to Cuba on June 28, we've been working overtime to get through all the news we bumped during that gripping, emotional saga," CNN vice-president Susan Bunda said. "There are all sorts of stockpiled stories to report, and we feel the American public will find much of it interesting, informative, and even a bit surprising, considering all of it happened three months ago or more."
> Among the backlogged stories to air during recent CNN "News You Didn't Hear" coverage: the formation of the new Eastern European nation of Molbania last December, the French government's Feb. 9 decision to sell the Mona Lisa in private auction and the painting's subsequent purchase by Ted Turner, the discovery of mysterious carnivorous plant spores in southern Missouri in early April, and the June 4 congressional vote to grant federal legislators a 400 percent pay hike.[13]

Perhaps ***The Onion*** is not a good example by which to analyze Jones and Baym’s scholarly contentions about serious comedy. For one thing, although ***The Onion*** has both a print and video presence online, politicians do not pay attention to it, at least not at the level they pay to televised political comedy, such as ***TDS***, which they use to

[13] http://www.theonion.com/articles/cnn-still-releasing-news-piled-up-during-elian-gon,241/.

monitor the popular perception about how they look and act (Dagnes, 2010, p. 88). Despite this and other distinctions, *The Onion* engages in political discourse, which can be analogized to that of televised comedy, such as *The Daily Show*. Perhaps like the *TDS'* staff, The *Onion* staff members believe that their spoof does a better job than mainstream journalism in satisfying some public thirst for political content (Sheagley, O'Loughlin, & Lindberg, 2008), but still, their private belief cannot constitute a winning argument. The question remains whether, absent professional journalists and faced with a ratings demand for entertainment, comedy, especially the *Onion*'s version of it, can become a conduit for political journalism.

2. Italian and French Political Satire -- L'Asino, Le Canard Enchaîné and Marianne: Unadultarated Political Satire

Political satire has had a well-defined role in foreign political journalism. For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, its role was significant. Satirical journals such as *Becco Giallo* (*The Yellow Beak*) meaningfully gave voice to antifascist voices, and its satire, Chiesa says, was "biting" ("Becco Giallo che morde") (Chiesa, 1984, p. 7). In a similar tone, Ehfaris Mascha

argued (2008) that, during the first years of the Mussolini administration, Italian political satire was a discourse "expressing revolutionary sentiments and occupying a middle space between the dominant ideology and the discourse that resists it" (p. 126). Written in a popular style, it allowed Italians to laugh at Mussolini's megalomaniacal desires in a manner, Mascha argues, similar to a "silent revolution" (Id.).

The example below from another satirical periodical of the era, ***The Donkey (l'Asino)*** shows how with few words and precise caricature, political satire pinpointed the vacuous dictator. When Mussolini asks his war minister what he is missing from his dressing table so he can look magnificent (in a move reminiscent of Snow White's step mother obsessed with the magical mirror), the latter answers: "Only a small thing, the Empire!" (Mascha, 2008, p. 73).



Image 4. ***L'Asino***, reproduced in Mascha, 2008, p. 73.

However, after WWII and during most of the Cold War, Italian political satire changed orientation and content.

Chiesa explains that the only political satire of that time was anti-communist. It was done by the vilified Giovannino Guareschi, in cartoons which depicted the Italian communist party as subordinate to the Soviet party and thus guilty of the Soviet sins. Later, his ***Peppone*** and ***Don Camillo*** movies satirized the Italians' social mores and their small-minded individual entrepreneurship, more peasant than bourgeois. Chiesa also argues that Guareschi's incisive cartoons were instrumental in transforming Italian satire from a valid critique of government policies to its current version: a form of entertainment and individual introspection, whose political focus is limited (Chiesa, 2008, p. 245).

French political comedy and satire have known a different path. Their societal role in managing crises and failed governmental authority, seems obvious. Since the XVIth century, the officious "gazettes" competed with more or less famous "canards" which both informed and amused their readers (Martin, 2005, p. 52).

Le Canard Enchaîné is a Parisian weekly, founded in 1915, which quickly became an alternative to the bombastically patriotic press of the day, offering media criticism of the government's war censorship of the press, as well as support for the soldiers on the front. Since its

inception, the paper has relied only on its readers, hovering near half-a-million. When it was first published, 20 percent of its readers were soldiers and 40 percent Parisians (Martin, 2005; Douglas, 2002). The journal's mission statement said:

> Everyone knows, in fact, that the French press, without exception, has communicated to its readers, since the beginning of the war, only news that is implacably true. Well, the public has had enough. The public wants false news. It will have it.
>
> ***Chacun sait, en effet, que la presse francaise, sans exception, ne communique a ses lecteurs, depuis le debut de la guerre, que des nouvelles implacablement vraies. Eh ! bien, le public en a assez ! Le public veut des nouvelles fausses. Il en aura (10 septembre 1915)*** (Martin, 2005, p. 75).

However, despite this call for "fake", the record shows that the paper has always had and used real journalistic weapons: informing, entertaining, and denouncing (Martin, 2005, p. 72) from an anarchist pacifist position (Martin, 2005; Douglas, 2002). In its first years, during World War I, the paper mostly mocked the German sympathies of the elite and the mainstream press, and offered humorous respite to the soldiers. During World War II, the paper went on a temporary hiatus, with its staff eventually working for German-sympathizing Parisian papers (Laske & Valdiguie, 2008).

Since the end of World War II, it has concentrated on

satirizing power and the follies of the various French presidents, including the much revered De Gaulle, during his presidency, as this December 24, 1958 caricature of de Gaulle as Napoleon I, shows:



Image 5.
Le Canard Enchaîné, 1966, pp. 56-57.

In the 1970s, the paper became one of the major investigative French journals (Martin, 2005; Laske & Valdiguie, 2008), and started having an even more profound effect on French politics. Some argue that its "scoop" about the African diamonds Central African dictator Bokassa gave Valerie Giscard d'Estaing, when he was Finance Minister under Pompidou, was a major cause of d'Estaing losing his presidential bid, and of Mitterrand, the leader of French socialists, winning it (Laske & Valdiguie, 2008). Since then, the paper has been accused of being too close to those in power. Those critics assert it has since published less or even no "scoops" and has even lost its sharp satirical bite (Id.).

However, *Le Canard Enchaîné* is not the only major French satirical journal. Even more complex is *Marianne*, a weekly magazine published on Fridays.[14] *Marianne* never pretended or attempted to publish fake news. In fact, a survey of its relatively short existence shows that it has succeeded in publishing "scoops" (news not previously reported) weekly.

Moreover, when its articles rest on news commentary, *Marianne* encourages a reassessment of the readers' social, cultural, and political values which seems a goal unmet by other publications or news shows. For example, in its July 24/30, 2010 issue, one cartoon was able to satirize and discard Obama's position against the French government's decision to ban the *hijab* on three levels: (a) Obama, as an American, cannot understand the issue both culturally and politically,



(b) Obama, in light of his racial and political position, appears tc be hypocritical in his opposition to the French law on the *hijab*, and (c) Obama, for the same reasons appears to be taking

[14] at http://www.marianne2.fr/.

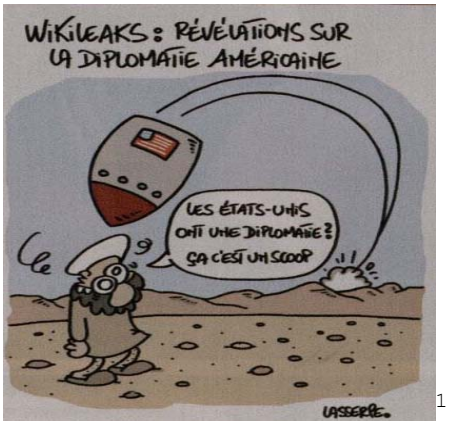
positions which would suit his "cool" public image:

Image 6: ***Marianne***, July 24/30 2010[15]

These are only disparate examples of what this project views as a vibrant politically engaged satirical community. They are mordant and entertaining, like the commentary on the value of WikiLeaks[16].

WikiLeaks: US Diplomatic Revelation

> "The United States also engage in diplomatic relations. That's a scoop!," says a man under attack from a US bomb.



[17]

Image 7: ***Marianne***, December 4/10, 2010, p. 16.

In other words, the political satire ***Le Canard Enchaîné*** and especially ***Marianne*** practices, seems to walk a very thin line between what their middle class readers find acceptable and what would cause them cognitive discomfort: whether it is sympathizing with less than honorable successful politicians or consenting to policies aimed at

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[15] July 24/30, 2010 : 11.

[16] "WikiLeaks is a whistle-blowing Web site that became the focus of a global debate over its role in the release of thousands of confidential messages about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the conduct of American diplomacy around the world." http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/w/wikileaks/index.html, accessed on April 4, 2011.

[17] December 4/10, 2010 : 16.

destroying the fiber of an entire society for the benefit of the few (which often includes their readers).

3. The Daily Show (*TDS*) Viewed through the Saturday Night Live (SNL) Lens: Still Unsure about Political Satire?

Televised political satire has recently risen to unprecedented popularity, and this process is far from being well-explained. *The Daily Show (TDS)* can be best understood if viewed in the context of political satire, and in connection with its main television forerunner, *Saturday Night Live* (formerly *NBC's Saturday Night*) (*SNL*), and the cultural revolution *SNL* brought to live television.

Both shows have been seen as having an informative role over two generations of the same social segment of the population: educated liberals. Perhaps due to the historical social, cultural, and technological changes of the moment, as well as to the type of comic discourse used, their informative roles have been hailed differently.

SNL is a weekly late-night comedy and variety show offering sketches, standup, and skits. With very rare exceptions, it airs once a week, on Saturday nights from 11:30 PM to 1:00 AM (Eastern Time). Reruns are broadcast irregularly and it currently has an online presence. This

New York City-based show started in 1975, and uses comic discourse for entertainment. The show features a regular cast of comedy actors, joined by a guest host and a musical act. Its longest running sketch is ***Weekend Update***, which comments on and parodies current events in quasi-news broadcast format. As its title suggests, this segment comments on the news of the week that ended. Its role is not to provide information scoops but instead to show the absurdity of some of the week's events. Its format owed much to previous American comedy -sketch trendsetters such as Sid Caesar's ***Your Show of Shows*** (1951-54), and ***The Ernie Kovacs Show*** (1952-53, 1956).

In the 1970s, political satire, as practiced by NBC's countercultural ***SNL*** reflected the political and cultural changes of the day, settling for irreverence, spontaneity, and egotism. As described in greater detail below, SNL has clear British satirical roots, although the values it satirized are different. The British satirical show ***That Was The Week That Was*** (***TW3***) engaged in ending the deference to serious television programs which TW3 regarded as unnecessarily submissive to pro-establishment values.

> Week in and week out the pubic breathes, and we foster, a kind of philosophy of concern, goodwill and public spiritedness on a massive scale…[TW3 is an attempt] to hang this contemporary and vague

> 'philosophy' on the hook in the hall, to relieve the pressure of earnest concern and goodwill which presses down on us for the rest of the week. There should be room in this programme for prejudice, for cynicism, for Juvenal's "sacred indignation" (Carpenter, p. 214).

TW3 satirized British political beliefs, such as that of its international grandeur, however faded. One *TW3* episode included a sketch that satirized the dwindling British international role when a cast member, David Frost, read a list of "the colonies we've still got – Fiji, Mauritius, Swaziland, the New Hebrides Condominium…" (p. 239). Unlike TW3, *SNL* did not reach prominence by satirizing the hypocrisy of "earnest concern" (Carpenter, 2000, p. 214). Instead it focused on the larger issue of how to bring the cultural revolution of the 1960s into middle-class living rooms. [18]

Satirically, *SNL* represented a point of cultural adaptation of a British product, but by going live, *SNL* re-blazed a previously developed trail of televised entertainment because, as scholars have noted, it attempted "to recapture the ramshackle, high wire-act feel of the

[18] *SNL* campaigned against the cultural deference to authority, which by then was only subversive, not revolutionary because the war had by then ended, and President Nixon had resigned in exchange for a presidential pardon. For more on other aspects of popular culture and the Nixon presidency, see e.g., Greenberg, David. 2003. Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image. New York : W.W. Norton.

Caesar and *Kovacs* shows from the early, experimental days" (Newman, 2008, p. 25). Its producer, the Canadian former stand-up comedian, Lorne Michaels, has insisted that *SNL* has always been an apolitical product of the 1970s counterculture, which hailed individualism, and spontaneous creativity as a remedy, or perhaps more accurately a balm, for mindless conformism. On the other hand, writers and cast members have acknowledged their liberal bias and caricatured politicians and presidents accordingly (Chevy Chase's parody of Gerald Ford has become a set-piece of the 70's). However, within a few years of its debut, with the departure of its original cast of writers and actors, *SNL* lost its countercultural political edge (Greenberg, 2003, p. 120). During the Reagan years, some say because of Michaels' own political sensibilities, *SNL* lost its role in the political meaning-making process when it stopped covering political issues (Jones, 2008, p. 42). With the election of the first president Bush, we witness intermittent signs of a return to its political meaning-making role (for instance, the regular parodies and satires of all the presidential debates thereafter) (Shales & Miller, 2002).

Unlike ***SNL***, ***TDS*** is a late-night talk, not variety, show, with a jester-host. Since 1999, former MTV personality and stand-up comedian Jon Stewart has played that role. Also New York City-based, ***TDS*** is a cable show, sharing owners, Viacom with CBS. It airs on the Comedy Central network from 11:00 PM to 11:30 PM (Eastern Time) Monday through Thursday. It, too, has an online presence. Reruns from the previous night are shown throughout the day. In addition to its broadcasts, each episode is available on ***TDS'*** web site,[19] and excerpts are also available on numerous blogs, such as Huffington Post.[20] All these access points are in addition to many postings on YouTube, MySpace, other social networks, and ***TDS'***s own online forum,[21] which has "topical boards" such as threads on the presidential election, and even a "forum feedback."

Its structure borrows both from traditional nightly news shows as well as entertainment talk shows (Baym, 2005). At first sight, ***TDS*** has a tripartite structure: Stewart's monologue satirizing some current event, a contributor's piece – where a comedian with no journalistic credentials

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[19] http://www.thedailyshow.com/.

[20] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/11/smackdown-the-emdaily-sho n 96185.html.

[21] http://forum.thedailyshow.com/tds/.

uses a social, political or cultural event as fodder for the show's comic meat grinder—and, finally, Stewart's interview of a real personality. However, some evenings, as shown here, the show has a more complex structure including an introduction, a brief dialogue with Steven Colbert from *The Colbert Report*, and "a moment of Zen," which airs with the closing credits.

It uses comic discourse to deliver and interpret the news, in a liberally biased manner (Schlosser, 2003). It is informing, entertaining, but also absurd. It makes fun of mainstream newsmakers – especially politicians and the media. *TDS* was nominated for a Television Critics Association award for "Outstanding Achievement in News and Information" in 2003 and in 2005, and won the award in 2004. Despite these journalistic achievements, every time I have attended the live show, its host has opened his stand-up routine by asserting that he is a comedian, not a journalist, and that his program is a comedy show, not a newscast. In other public fora, Stewart has also insisted he is only a comic, and his show, comedy (Schlosser, 2003).

TDS and *SNL* represent two different comedic products and two different cultural and political eras. While *SNL* focuses on parodying presidents and satirizing weekly

political content in its *Weekend Update* segment, with a marked individual irreverence toward the cultural values of the day, *TDS* is often viewed as more. It comments on the political news purportedly misrepresented recently by the mainstream media, and scholars have hailed it as a reinvention of political journalism, without help from professional journalists. Some note a particularly memorable episode involving a Bush statement when, by carefully abjuring any editing, *TDS* was able to portray former president Bush as an incompetent, for all substantive purposes as an illiterate and frightening president, who was in charge of the most powerful military complex in the world (Baym, 2005, p. 264). The mainstream media outlets chose to focus on the gist of Bush's statement, which for Baym, as shown above, promoted a different view of the president. The question whether the mainstream media missed a story or misinformed the public while *TDS* did not, remains unanswered convincingly.

In a perhaps more persuasive example of Baym's argument, in the March 12, 2009, interview with Jim Cramer from *Mad Money*, Stewart exposed Cramer as unethical and as a mere entertainer. However, although populist at its core, stoking anger against media and government silence about

the economic meltdown, this segment, like all *TDS* segments, did not investigate the economic reasons for the present economic crisis, and it did not expose the disparate effect the crisis has on the American lower classes, a segment surely not the show's demographic. *TDS*, however, truthfully addressed the issue of Cramer's hidden access to information and his subsequent silence. It did so in a manner that is both funny and reasonable. However, the question remains: Was it merely entertaining? How can its informative value be ascertained? Or is *TDS* the new *SNL*, which has been viewed as the epitome of the 1970s successful revolt setting new standards for what constitutes hip conversational discourse?

Chapter 3. Review of the Literature

1. The Daily Show. Scholarly Background Information.

For more than a decade, data and scholarly analyses have promoted the view that ***TDS*** functions as a vehicle of political news for the under-30 college-educated crowd because of its comedic narrative (Young, 2006). Data from the Annenberg Public Policy Center and Pew Research Center show that despite the advent of the Internet, an increasing number of people[22] who are "more educated, younger, and more liberal than the average American,"[23] and generally possess political knowledge, self-report watching ***TDS*** for its political content. [24] Perhaps to no one's surprise, a July 22, 2009, Time Inc. poll found Stewart "America's most

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[22] A more recent Annenberg study showed that while the Internet had became a popular source of information during the 2008 Presidential election, "most adults (89%) say they get information about the presidential race from broadcast or cable television. The numbers are similar regardless of age and education levels for broadcast and cable as a source of information." http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Releases/NAES%202008/NewsConsumptionMARCH_28_2008.pdf.

[23] http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Political_Communication/naes/2004_03_late-night-knowledge-2_9-21_pr.pdf.

[24] Id at p.2.

trusted newscaster," [25] despite Stewart's assertions that he is a "mere jester (Gilbert, 2004)."[26]

The generally available data do not analyze the impact *TDS'* comedic narrative has on its news selection – whether comedy dictates what constitutes the "news of the day." Similarly, it does not discuss whether comedy affects political decoding, whether, for instance, comedy functions as Mary Poppins' spoonful of sugar which "helps the medicine go down." Despite mere assertions from a few authors, who use their own data, and claim that young viewers, "alienated from the political process" are willing to watch *TDS* and implicitly hear its version of the news, because it offers "a lighter side of the news" (Cassino and Besen-Cassino, 2009, p. 143), most scholars rely on the generally available data and argue in favor of the positive role comedy has in delivering political content. Very few academic voices argue that *TDS* is and should be perceived as a "fake news" program (Baumgartner 2006; Pavlik, 2008). Most scholars insist that *TDS* is "alternative journalism," even though originally, some like Baym perceived the show

[25] http://www.timepolls.com/hppolls/archive/poll_results_417.html.
[26] On March 11, 2010, in the introductory segment, where he continues his pre-show conversation with the live audience, he refrained himself from that sweeping statement and instead, said that "perhaps, he is not a journalist."

as falling somewhere between comedy and journalism (Cassini & Besen-Casini, 2009, p. 137).

Praise for *TDS* ranges from using satire to interrogate power (Young), and parody to critique contemporary news (Baym, 2005), to adding "intelligent, complex, and provocative analyses to the political landscape" (Gray, Jones & Thompson, 2009, p. 32). At a minimum, this literature agrees that *TDS* is a forum for the discussion of substantive public affairs, and a source of political information for its multiple audiences (Baym; Warner; Peterson; Baumgarten; Fox; Dorman; Young; Jones). More notably, these scholars suggest that *TDS* has successfully engaged the public in politics and thus, for them it seems that *TDS* offers a solution to Dewey's (Dewey , 1940) and especially Lippmann's early concern about the impact of journalism on democracy.

Like Walter Lippmann, Dewey believed in the political role of the public and that both education and steady access to accurate information, truth, were necessary to inform public opinion (Dewey, 1940). Dewey also believed that people were endowed with intelligence and could develop the ability to distinguish between a "true" reality and the "distorted" one. His writings remained biased in

favor of scientific discoveries and their positive role in educating the masses. On the other hand, Walter Lippmann gave ascendancy to the role played by the news delivered by mass media: the press. In ***Liberty and the News*** (1920) he explained his belief[27] in the primordial role of the press in shaping people's knowledge. He called the newspaper "the bible of democracy, the book out of which a people determines its conduct." (Lippmann, 1920, p. 47)

> Everywhere to-day men are conscious that somehow they must deal with questions more intricate than any church or school had prepared them to understand. Increasingly they know that they cannot understand them if the facts are not quickly and steadily available. (Lippmann 1920, pp. 4-5)

To the extent that all the laudatory literature develops Jeffrey Jones' take on this new television genre, entertainment politics, I will group it under one label, the Comedic-Critical Enhanced Public Sphere school, or ***CCEPS***. When Jeffrey Jones spoke about the role of this new television genre within the world of "political sense-making on television" (Jones, 2005, p. 10), he was engaging Jurgen Habermas' concept of public sphere. The normative

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[27] Starting with the first American newspaper, ***Publick Occurrences***, journalists viewed their role as being that of forming and informing the public opinion. See. e.g., Walter Lippmann, ***Liberty and the News.*** (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 3.

concept of public sphere has been described as (a) an open forum where individuals express views; (b) in a rational manner, (c) about government policies (Verstraten, 1996). As Professor J.D. Peters concisely explains -- "the public sphere (die Offentlichkeit)" is "a site governed neither by the intimacy of the family, the authority of the state, nor the exchange of the market, but by the 'public reason of private citizens'" (Peters 1993, p. 542).

The public sphere -- the space where matters of general interest are discussed (Calhoun, 1992) -- has always been a product of the media. For Habermas it started with educated Western Europeans reading aloud newspaper articles and analyzing them in a pub. For Jones and the other ***CCEPS*** similarly situated scholars, it becomes an extension of late night talk shows. For these scholars such shows encourage both understanding of public matters and finding solutions to problems they raise.

Far from a unifying body of literature, as shown below, the positive, laudatory literature ***CCEPS*** presents has a core belief: "serious" political jokes can induce critical thinking. But, even the most committed argument that humor is conducive of political information may easily contradict the academic position that ***TDS*** encourages critical thinking

(Baym; Warner; Peterson; etc.). There is data that exposure to late night political comedy has increased (Young, 2004), and theoretically it seems possible that political information is more easily absorbed because of its jocular presentation. But, as Professor Danagal Young noticed, most late night jokes are both repetitive and easily accessible (2004), which severely limits the information exposure. A survey of jokes made during the 2004 presidential campaign pointed out that they frequently caricatured "Bush's intelligence, Gore's stiff appearance and dull personality, and Gore's tendency to exaggerate or lie (p. 8). Whether viewers learned something new about the candidates is hard to assess. Additionally, the retention process seems to have been conditioned by the viewers' political bias: the viewers, according to their own political bias embraced the jokes which mirrored their views (Young, 2004). Finally, under such circumstances it is hard to argue that the late night shows' political humor, or even *TDS*' humor, encourages its audience's skeptical inquisitiveness, especially because there is no supporting data.

The *CCEPS* scholarship takes for granted, rather than investigates, the subversive openness of *TDS*'s text (Hefflin, 2006). John Fiske's ode to the polysemy of

televised comedic text (Fiske [1987],1990) is never a point of argument. These authors all seem entranced with the rules of linguistic transgression that comedy implies (Purdie, 1993), and extrapolate from them to conclude, as shown below, that critical inquisitiveness results.

Watching the show may cause one to disagree with those statements. For example, on March 11, 2010, Correspondent Samantha Bee (SB), the *TDS* Health Care Senior Correspondent of that day, was mockingly reporting on the passing crowd outside FoxNews headquarters in NYC. For those in the know, or as Justin Lewis calls them "the knowers" (2007), she was parodying an earlier FoxNews segment on health care. Like the Fox reporters she lampooned, Bee too used her cell phone's camera to record the event and thus benefited from the choppy recording to create an atmosphere of extemporaneous dramatic immediacy. Jon Stewart (JS), the show's host, asked Bee to use the camera crew instead of using her own phone camera, which she eventually did. The result was stylistically different, and the stillness of the image conveyed a message of calm and order. Finally, the viewers could see that Bee was not marching but standing still in front of the Fox headquarters in New York. Undisturbed by the sudden end to her drama (an attitude

perhaps meant to mirror that of the Fox reporters when they are caught fudging reality), she addressed Stewart:

> SB: […] Fox has been very clear about the need to fight government power until the Republicans are back and then there is everybody's patriotic duty to defend government power. [barely audible audience laughs]
> JS: True. I am used to their opinion people with overlapping time slots so almost the entire day is covered in them [stumbles over time slots] [audience laughs], but not the news people, in the news block, Megan Kelly especially.
> SB. [interrupts JS] No, she is totally an impartial journalist, absolutely fair to both sides, if you know what I am talking about. [vocal and body clues – slurring her words and rolling her body and her eyes] [laughs]
> JS: I know "exactly" what you are talking about [says JS using his hands to gesture quotes; other eye gestures to indicate that he's in the know]
> SB: [Becomes serious] Wait. What do you mean? I was actually being ***sarcastic***. (emphasis added)
> JS. I ***was too.*** (emphasis added) [then adds] What are you going to do now?
> SB: I am probably going to hang out at the 21 Club you know […], after a hard day at work protecting real Americans. A lot of FoxNews journalists like to go there. They have a goat cheese sandwich with haricots vert salad and Pinot Grigio […] which is so good [it is said] that Sean Hannity comes here every night dips his balls in truffle oil and fucks it silly. [animated laughs]
> JS: Are you... You're being ***sarcastic*** again (emphasis added) [wagging his finger at her, as if he caught her]
> SB: [looking around as if trying to find out to whom is JS talking] ***What***? (emphasis added)
> JS. Thank you Samantha. Samantha Bee everyone [laughs and applauses] [end of the segment] [28]

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[28] http://www.thedailyshow.com/full-episodes/thu-march-11-2010-eamon-javers: (minutes 9:43 -12:11)

This excerpt is a gem of *TDS'* "fake news" content delivered for laughs. Both Samantha Bee and Jon Stewart engage in comedic discourse whose meaning they further build through various signifiers. Those signifiers are coded verbally, aurally and visually.

For example, "impartial journalist" has both a specific and a myth-making connotation in our media culture, which goes to the role of journalism. Juxtaposing the identity of Megan Kelly with the concept of "impartial journalist" opens the door toward a double reading: a literal and an ironic reading. The specificity of the identifier "Megan Kelly" makes a third truly subversive reading, one mocking the myth-making concept of an impartial journalist, less probable. The Fox juxtaposition may easily be viewed as limiting Bee and Stewart's narrative to Fox News.

The literal reading would be that Megan Kelly, the Fox News journalist, is indeed an impartial journalist, one who would conform to Herbert Gans' view of journalists as ideology-free (2003). Bee makes this literal reading improbable. Minutes later she stated that she was "being *sarcastic*."

The ironic reading builds on the opposite message: Megan Kelly is partial to a specific set of interests, and her reporting gives voice to a specific set of ideas, those thsat Fox and its viewers share, but different than the ideology *TDS* writers and presumably its viewers have in common.[29] Bee's irony is transparent because, she explained to Stewart and us, she called Kelly "impartial" sarcastically. Bee did not mean it literally. She meant the opposite: Megan Kelly is not an impartial journalist. As if we could not get the joke from the context, Bee told us how to read it. However, despite this clarity of message, or perhaps because of it, *TDS* occupies a rather significant role in our political news media environment, as the literature survey shows.

The body of *CCEPS* literature, though not monolithic, builds on the two main empirical studies mentioned here and develops a compound main claim: *TDS'* journalistic value resides in its comedic narrative and audience effect. Some authors focus on specific aspects of *TDS'* comedic narrative,

[29] In a February 4, 2010 interview on FoxNews, Stewart agreed with Bill O'Reilly's description of his show and his audience as Obama liberals (O'Reilly: It's been perceived that you are a big fan of President Obama, Stewart: Alright. <script type="text/javascript" src="http://video.foxnews.com/v/embed.js?id=4001020&w=400&h=249"></script><noscript>Watch the latest news video at video.foxnews.com</noscript>

such as Stewart's monologue (Jones) or its interviewing skills (Baym, etc.). Others go a step further and analyze its presumed impact on *TDS'* audience (Young, etc.).

Among the latter scholars, Young and Tisinger (2006) have closely analyzed the informative role of soft news programs – like talk shows, news magazines and late-night comedy programs, such as *TDS* (pp. 122, 125). For them *TDS* was a "program designed to entertain but that functions predominantly as a political program" (p. 129), despite their finding that that people who self-reported learning from late-night comedy were also more likely to report learning from traditional news outlets, including national network news (Id.). A more limited number of *CCEPS* scholars go a few steps further and claim that *TDS'* new blend of comedy and politics benefits the audience's engagement with politics. These *CCEPS* nuances are further analyzed below.

2. *TDS*'s comedic narrative promotes a form of journalism closer to its ideal of public inquiry and thus, critical thinking and political engagement

The main body of *CCEPS* literature credits *TDS*'s comedic narrative with adding "more intelligent, complex, and provocative analyses to the political landscape" (Gray, Jones & Thompson, 2009, p. 32). They promote *TDS* as an

alternative and superior form of journalism because they perceive its narrative as inquisitive and critical of the establishment. Similarly, Stewart's journalistic role is praised despite or perhaps because of the fact that he does not respect the rules of professional journalism, such as objectivity (Baym, 2010, Young 2008), which some ascribe to his outsider status (Jones).

The most modest ***CCEPS*** claim views ***TDS*** as a source of political news. For example, Roben Torosyan, Liam P. Dempsey, Kimberly A. Blessing, Joseph Marren and Andrew Sneddon have argued that ***TDS*** is a source of political news, despite ***TDS***'s use of what Harry Frankfurt calls "bullshit," or "making assertions that purport to describe the way things are, but that can be anything except bullshit." According to a recent Stewart interview of Frankfurt, Stewart seems to understand what bullshit and spin are:

> Stewart: You say that bullshit is not lying.
> Farnkfurt: No, it's not lying. Lying consists in believing that you know the truth, and saying something else.
> Stewart: It's willful.
> Frankfurt: It's willful. And the bullshitter doesn't really care whether what he says is true or false. [audience laughter] (135)
> Stewart: Do you think that the people in political spin think they're lying? Do you think they care about the truth, or do they care about the result of what their spin gets them?
> Frankfurt: yeah, it's the last I think. They don't care about producing a certain impression in the minds

> of the people to whom they're addressing their speech. And they're engaged in the enterprise of manipulating opinion, they're not engaged in the enterprise of reporting the facts. (p. 140)

Stewart's appearance on CNN's now defunct ***Crossfire***, chastising ***Crossfire***'s hosts for "partisan hackery," and personally refusing to be funny because he's "nobody's monkey" seem to support the idea that Stewart indeed disapproves of both: spin and bull. However, when Ted Koppel introduced Stewart on a ***Nightline*** telecast at the 2004 Democratic National Convention saying, "A lot of television viewers – more quite frankly, than I'm comfortable with – get their news from Comedy Channel [sic] on a program called The Daily Show," (Michels & Ventimiglia, 2007, 85), Stewart self-effacingly stated he was just a monkey (meaning, essentially, a kind of puppet, toy, or pet), who by definition cannot know the value of truth. So, what is ***TDS***'s role in the political narrative?

Sneddon (2007) defines Stewart's bullshit in a less aggressive way than Frankfurt. Sneddon calls it "a superior type," because ***TDS*** does offer both political information and political commentary not available on other channels. Stewart did urge his audience to vote both for Kerry and Obama, and he did speak truth to them: taking a stance against the Iraq war and asking for the closure of

Guantanamo. Thus, for Sneedon, ***TDS***'s "bullshit" is the necessary result of using comedic discourse: "Given the importance of bullshit to Stewart's brand of humor, and given that political utterances are interwoven with his jokes, it's reasonable to expect political bullshit from The Daily Show on occasion" (p. 156). The excuse for our tolerant attitude is that "given the much greater amount of political bullshit about which The Daily Show has warned us about, perhaps we shouldn't begrudge them the occasional ruined pair of shoes" (Id.).

Bolder, Geoffrey Baym argues that ***TDS*** is a model of journalism. Baym argued that while traditional news is monologic, and presents a closed, authoritative version of what the issues of the day are and why they are important, parodic news shows are dialogic, playing multiple voices against each other. Baym believes that political satire does not claim the straight news' "epistemological certainty," because satire is a discourse of inquiry (Baym, 2005, p. 267). Coupled with the fake news format of ***TDS***, Baym believes, satire helps ***TDS*** become "an alternative model of journalism" (p. 261).

> In contrast to The Daily Show's dialogue, conventional news is monologic, pretending to "possess a ready-made truth" […]. Satire instead represents a searching for truth through the

> process of dialogical interaction. Unlike traditional news, which claims an epistemological certainty, satire is a discourse of inquiry, a rhetoric of challenge that seeks through the asking of unanswered questions to clarify the underlying morality of a situation (p. 256).

But, those attributes can easily be viewed as ***TDS'*** flaws and limits. For example, Baym does not point out that satire has its own cognitive limits. For example, all satire's rhetoric is circumscribed to the assumed superiority of its moral standard. Logically, this standard limits any discourse of inquiry into the satirist's own moral and political positions. Here, Stewart's standards are embraced.

More recently, Geoffrey Baym argued that televised political comedy, especially ***TDS***, and its spinoff, ***The Colbert Report (TCR)***, have already revolutionized journalism, because the rhetorical tools comedy uses, despite their affective nature, are most resourceful in building a reasonable argument that both informs and encourages rational judgment (Baym, 2010). Baym points out that like mainstream political news shows, ***TDS*** explores issues of "governance and the public good" (Baym, 2010, p. 28). But, Baym argues, although ***TDS*** does not provide information previously unknown by its audience, it rehashes

it in a way that causes viewers, in addition to laughing at political issues and policymaking generally, to rethink its meaning in a critical manner. However, he fails to offer convincing evidence in this direction.

For example, he argues that because *TDS* does not follow the "unwritten rules of journalism" which define a good quote as "a coherent statement of policy or attitude, ideally containing emotion or character, and completed neatly in about eight to twelve seconds," (p. 106), *TDS* effectively offers more informative content and "achieves a critical distance" from the material, something that the mainstream media cannot achieve. The example Baym offers to support this qualification is Bush's statement following George Tenet's resignation as CIA Director in 2004.

The mainstream media showed Bush proclaiming that Tenet is strong, resolute and that he would miss him. Instead of a tightly edited statement, *TDS* broadcast the unedited pause-saturated monologue. Baym concluded that Bush's anemic talent as a public speaker was proof of his lack of sincerity. Perhaps. But is it really meaningful news to show that Bush lied about approving Tenet's job performance? Bush lied about the reasons for going to war against Saddam; it seems tendentious to complain about the

insincerity of his personal relations. *TDS* did not expose Bush's lies after Bush's televised address in March 2003. Instead, *TDS* mocked our war policy in segments entitled: "Iraq – Are We There Yet?"[30] In Baym's example, again, *TDS* seems only to be after laughs at Bush's expense.

Baym's next argument, that *TDS* has reinvented political journalism, claims that unlike mainstream journalism's insistence on dispassionate observation (neutrally relaying information), *TDS* engages in subjective interrogation. Again, his example is Bush's statement following Tenet's resignation, which Jon Stewart often interrupted to add his own comments, to the audience's great amusement. But these so-called interruptions are ersatz, mere monologues. Regarding them as anything else but rhetorical tools to interject funny comments would again ask too much from a program whose role is not and cannot be to rescue political journalism.

More interesting interruptions would be those of our own thoughts, had Stewart managed to provoke them. It is far from obvious that, as Baym contends, Stewart's "treatment of Bush's speech functions on multiple levels," (Baym, 2010, 109) nor that it encourages critical thinking.

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[30] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-march-17-2003/iraq--are-we-there-yet-?xrs=share_copy.

It may amount to no more than just another, hipper, pre-packaged opinion. Baym views these sort of edited interruptions which do not engage the speaker, but innocuously comment on the speaker's words, as a way of "holding the leadership accountable" (p. 110), and as a reason to hail *TDS* for revolutionizing journalism.

Although *TDS* contains most of "the same sound bites that filled the mainstream media's coverage" (Baym, 2010, p. 201), its redelivery of the news is achieved in a manner which is "closer to the ideal of critical publicity" (Id.), thus, reinventing journalism. It is not clear whether he reached that conclusion because he found *TDS* polysemic or whether because he found *TDS*' pre-packaged point of view revolutionary, and thus different from that exposed by mainstream media (p. 102).

Baym is not alone in his admiration of Stewart's interviewing skill, as well as the content of Stewart's monologue (Baym, 2005; 2010). Steve Vanderheiden concurs with Baym's analysis (2007). Vanderheiden supports his views by pointing out the questions Stewart poses during interviews are hard and cannot be easily answered. He implies that by posing them, *TDS* promotes a deeper understanding of the news.

Equally focused on Stewart's role is Jeffrey Jones, though his analysis derives from a different point of view. Jones focuses his argument about the role of ***TDS*** in engaging its audience politically on Stewart' so-called outside status (Jones, 2005). Jones claimed in 2005 that the jester has become a more legitimate newscaster than the expert. Jones supported his assertions by arguing that like the viewing audience itself, Stewart and most of his guests were outsiders. Moreover, the guests and Stewart used the same political meaning-making approach as the viewing audience (2005, p. 11).

> They discuss politics in a language resembling more of what would be found in a bar or basement or barbershop than what occurs at the national press club or on meet the press—a common vernacular that is accessible and familiar. (p. 11)

In his second edition of ***Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement*** (2010) Jones made a direct comparison of news reported by ***TDS*** with news reported by CNN on the same day.

> CNN began its 7:00 A.M. broadcast by reporting on Bush s campaign appearances the previous day, as well as the release of the CIA's Iraq Survey Group report investigating the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. In reporting Bush's campaign stop in Pennsylvania, CNN White House Correspondent Elaine Quijano pointed out:
> The president made no mention of a new report by the Iraq Survey Group, which found no evidence of

> stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq when the U.S. invaded last year. Still, Mr. Bush is standing by his decision, insisting that after September 11, the country had to assess every potential threat in a new light.
> [video clip of President Bush speaking in Wilkes-Barre, PA]: Our nation awakened to an even greater danger, the prospect that terrorists who killed thousands with hijacked airplanes would kill many more with weapons of mass murder. We had to take a hard look at every place where terrorists might get those weapons. One regime stood out, the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. (pp. 171-172)

This is the only live clip CNN presented that day from the president's campaign stop, Jones inform us, and *TDS* reported it, too. However, because *TDS* engaged "in a rhetorical back-and-forth with the video clip of Bush's statement, attempting to come up with the right answer for which nation it is exactly that threatens America with weapons of mass destruction" (p.172), Jones believes *TDS* did a better journalistic job. More than anything else, this is an example of Stewart guiding the viewers' own search for answers, while offering his interpretation, which though a journalistic duty, has come to be seen as essential by the entire *CCEPS* literature.

> Stewart: Finally, the president brought the mood down a little, as only he can.
>
> Bush: After September 11, America had to asses every potential threat in a new light. We had to take a hard look at every place where terrorists might get those weapons. One regime stood out.

> Stewart: Well, that's true. It would be Saudi Arabia. Fifteen of the nineteen terrorists were actually from there.
>
> Bush: … the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.
> Stewart: No, no. I don't think that's it. Um. Oh. It was Iran--proven Al•Qaeda ties, building up the nukes program. I think it was them.
> [repeating the tape of Bush]: … the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.
>
> Stewart: No, no. I'm sure ... Pakistan. Top scientists sold nuclear secrets to-
> [repeating the tape of Bush]: ... the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.
> Stewart: Could be Yemen. [A graphic of a clock face with spinning hands is super imposed over a slightly faded image of Stewart, suggesting his thinking for quite some time of the possible countries, all the while Stewart thinks out loud.] Oh
> ... Kazakhstan is actually a very dangerous ... Uzbekistan has always created
> Problems in that region ... Turkey--very dangerous. Lebanon has some…
> Qatar [The graphic removes the clock face, and the camera focus on Stewart again
> becomes clear.] Oh, oh, oh. North Korea. They have the bomb. Their leader is crazy. North Korea.
>
> [repeating the tape of Bush]: ... the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.
>
> Stewart: [Holding out his arms in front of him and speaking in a slow monotone voice with a staccato cadence, imitating a robot.]
> The_dic_ta_tor_ship_of_Sad_dam_Hus-sein. Too-tired-to-fight-it, Must-learn. Re-pe-ti-tion."
> (pp. 176-177)

Jones uses this example to support his claim that ***TDS*** provides its viewers with valuable information (Jones, 2010, p. 179), and that ***TDS*** opens "up deeper truths about politics" than "mainstream journalism" (p. 168). Jones

explains his favorable position on *TDS* when he writes that "even though The Daily Show is a fake news show, its faux journalistic style allows the show's writers and host to question, dispel, and critique the manipulative language and symbolizations coming from the presidential campaign […] showing the high levels of spin and rhetoric produced by the candidates and their campaigns" (p. 168). In fact Jones opines that *TDS*'s "particular" information is "perhaps more useful" to the viewers (Id.). Jones thus believes that *TDS* does not shortchange its viewers despite its many restrictions, e.g., time limits, or humorous content.

But his illustration may show that *TDS* manipulates its viewers to adopt its take on the politics of the day under a more sophisticated presentation. In the example above, Stewart came up with a list of possibilities to fill up Bush's abstract speculation of which terrorist regime might attack America with arms of mass destruction. At no point did Stewart question Bush's statement. At no point did Stewart provide an alternative open-ended interpretation. In fact, Stewart took Bush's statement at face value and validated Bush's game that some war is tenable: Stewart offered faux alternative war zones. Bush and not Stewart established the direction of the conversation. Furthermore,

within that conversation, Stewart did not challenge any political assumptions that could have fostered the radical idea that an American war against any nation is unwarranted. Stewart only intimated that war with Iraq was perhaps unwarranted, at this point in our history. This example does not necessarily show that *TDS* and its comedic narrative are in any way a superior form of journalism. It only shows that *TDS* is a topical comedy show which uses politics to reach an audience. In the process, Stewart did criticize the President and implied that he misled us into going to war with Iraq. The CNN correspondent did the same thing, arguably better, because we were expressly told that the President did not refer to the report exculpating Iraq. Which one did a better journalistic job? If CNN reaches a more diverse audience while *TDS* preaches to the choir, it is hard to view *TDS* as a better journalistic device.

Jamie Warner (2007) also believes that *TDS*'s journalistic role is connected to its comedic narrative: "Through their own humorous dissident interpretations of current political events, The Daily Show writers and comedians disseminate dissident interpretations of current political events" (Warner, 2007, p. 19). Warner goes a step further and claims that *TDS* is engaged in "potentially

jamming the transmission of current political events" (Warner, 2007, p. 19).

Not so long ago, Todd Gitlin described the "culture jammer" as one who "believes images are power, [and by changing images] redistribute[s] power" (Gitlin, 2002, p. 15; 153). Culture jammers interrupt business as usual, for example, by planting a political image within a conventional ritual, such as a banner unfurling at a Cambridge-Oxford boat race which read: "Oxbridge Paddles Whilst Vietnam Burns" (p. 154). Along these lines, Warner believes that *TDS* helps audience members subvert and reclaim their identity, and avoid becoming "brand trusting pawns of consumer capitalism" (Warner, 2007, p. 21).

To support his claim that *TDS* exercises cultural jamming, and promotes subversive messages and alternative journalism, Warner uses as an example the selection of Senator John Edwards by Senator John Kerry as his vice-presidential running mate on the Democratic ticket for the 2004 Presidential elections. Warner argues that Stewart "jammed" the media's "conventional wisdom" on the value of this ticket, when Stewart spoke "overtly about the political branding technique of repetition:"

> Stewart:…Let's take the addition of John Edwards to the Democratic ticket: I don't know how to feel about that. I don't know what it means. Here's how I will: Video clip if CNN reporter, standing in front of the White House: …This is 28 pages from the Republican National Committee. It says "Who is Edwards?" It starts off by saying "a disingenuous, unaccomplished liberal." We also saw from the Bush/Cheney camp that they had released talking points to their supporters… Back to Stewart: Talking points: *That*'s how we learn things. But how will I absorb a talking point, like "Edwards and Kerry are out of the mainstream," unless I get it jack hammered into my skull? That's where television lends a hand. (laughter) (pp. 27-28)

Warner argues that such an example proves *TDS*'s role of compromising the mainstream political meaning-making process, or "jamming it." Furthermore, because Stewart does not make direct comments, but usually looks pained or amused at the videos he plays, because he is usually self-effacing and because he explicitly insists that his show is only a joke, Warner argues that *TDS* manages "to stay suggestive rather than didactic, provocative rather than sermonizing or moralizing" (p. 29).

TDS did criticize the media coverage of the Edwards choice by pointing out the lack of news media diversity, and their vacuous and lazy treatment of the story. But, that is not the same as criticizing their message, which would count as a primary meaning-making concept. For all imaginable purposes, the media might in fact have uniformly believed that the 2004 Democratic ticket was too liberal.

TDS, at least in Warner's example, did not engage in promoting a different message than did its sister TV outlets. Warner, in fact, applauded *TDS*'s limited role of pointing out the absurdity of the coverage through repetition of talking points rather than rational analysis of facts backing the conclusion that the candidates were "too liberal." For Warner, this approach to journalism (albeit second hand journalism) is a breath of fresh air. Warner believes that *TDS* "jammed" the brand because it pointed out its lack of aesthetic sophistication -- the brand, which is represented by the media outlets, kept repeating itself.

TDS engages in subversivness, but it remains unclear whether it is mostly aesthetic. In this instance, *TDS*' message was that repeating an accusation is not the most persuasive way to accuse someone. Jon Stewart's center-left views are well-known (Jones, 2009), and Stewart acknowledged that he was not scared by the two candidates, ergo, the Democratic candidates could not have been "too liberal."

3. The *TDS* truth-telling function develops critical thinking and encourages political action.

Another significant body of *CCEPS* literature suggests that *TDS'* narrative has a specific effect on its audiences. It encourages critical thinking and political action.

This view is promoted, for example, by the work of Amber Day and Joanne Morreale on *TDS*. Day believes *TDS* is a "comedically critical filter through which [audiences] process the suspect real world of reportage and debate" (Day, 2009, p. 85). Taking aim at its self-imposed name of "fake news," Day explains that although *TDS* blends both elements of mimetic (news parody) and real (news investigation), its audience is able to distinguish between the two. Day explains *TDS'*s remarkable achievement through a multitude of factors: Stewart is a "news host with a penchant for the absurd" (p. 85), whose show further blurs the distinction between fake and real news (90), but because it "offers a broader satire of larger ills within the news genre, as well as hypocrisies within the day's news stories" (p. 94), *TDS'*s audience is able to discern the role of the show and its message of questioning power (pp. 90-91). Day applauds *TDS'*s effort to trans-contextualize the evening news into a "comedically

deconstructive frame" (p. 95), which helps the audience to uncover the "wealth of hidden meanings" of the original news footing (p. 102). Day seems unnerved by her own argument's contradiction: if *TDS'* comedic frame guides the audience's meaning-making effort, then it also guides what will be uncovered as "hidden meanings" and limit if not extinguish any potential inquiry for what lies outside the comedic.

Morreale states that *TDS* delivers its fake news through "satire, parody, and irony" to reveal "the contradictions, hypocrisies, and follies" of our political discourse (Morreale, 2009, p. 121). While Morreale's language may be too pedantic as she talks about *TDS* as epideictic satire (Paterson calls it by the simpler term, true satire), which belongs to the classical liberal democratic tradition of epideictic rhetoric (Habermas called it public discourse) because it encourages critical thinking, her argument is simple. Its epideictic satire enables *TDS* to be a critique of the liberal public discourse, because it "is an open-ended attempt to discover, explore, survey and clarify," which "seeks to disorient and unsettle by exploring or demolishing a foolish uncertainty" (p. 107). Due to these attributes, *TDS* combats cynicism and

produces a "community of critical viewers," whom she believes are "poised for action in the world" (p. 121). All Morreale's examples support a comedic reading of the news, within the limits of irony and satire. None support her belief in *TDS'* audience as being both idealistic (that is, not cynical) and poised for action in the world unless we view Morreale's work as describing a paradigm shift in the theoretical approach to (global) political involvement.

English Professor Lisa Colletta offers a more nuanced view of the role of political satire as a news conduit (2009). She tracks down an older segment of *TDS* called ''Ashamed to Be Fake News,'' where Rob Corddry investigates the ''real'' March 2004 news story about the White House surreptitiously producing news segments that reported favorably on a number of the administration's policy objectives, including ''regime change'' in Iraq and Medicare reform, and how the mainstream media used the fabricated news in its broadcasts. Stewart and Corddry reported on this media event this way:

> Jon: This is really a shocking story. Not only did the Whitehouse pretend that these were news packages, they went so far to hire actors to play journalists.
> Rob: I know, Jon. In my 25 years of The Daily Show Senior Media Analyst I have never seen anything like this. It's more than a little bit embarrassing.
> Jon: In your mind, you feel you're embarrassed for this Whitehouse?

> Rob: No, Jon, I'm embarrassed for US. We're the ones who are supposed to know the fake news, I saw that Medicare piece and they are kicking our ASS! They created a whole new category of fake news, a hybrid—INFOganda! Yeah, we'll never be able to keep up.
> Jon: Rob, did you find any fault with what the Whitehouse did?
> Rob: Well, there was one thing, Jon. I'm kinda picking a knit here, but calling their fake news reporter Karen Ryan? I know what they're trying to do with the name, its blue collar, but not dirt-poory. I'm sure it tested well, but the truth is, real reporters have fake, crazy names. Like ''Wolf'', and ''Gupta'', and ''Van Susterenenenn . . . .''
> Jon: That's it, Rob? That's your only objection? Karen Ryan's name?
> Rob: Would it kill them to show us what she looked like? I mean, sounds pretty hot . . .
> Jon: Rob, she's fake . . .
> Rob: HEY! Fake or real, it's all the same in the dark! BANG! For The Daily Show, this is Rob Cor—actually this is Dr. Roberto Van Corddrensesen (p. 870)

Colletta notes that the satire in this segment is so potent that "it is hard to know what to laugh at" (p. 869). However, Colletta is able to identify those targets effortlessly: (1) The White House's cynical manipulation of the news; and (2) the complacency of a news media which did not investigate the source of the fake news segments. She did not mention, however, that ***TDS***, which discovered the ''fakeness,'' ends up as a more trusted source of information because ***TDS*** does not pretend to be anything else but fake. However, she argues that while viewers are "made aware of our inability to distinguish between '''infoganda' and knowledge," all we are meant to do is

"laugh at it, and keep watching" (Id.). Thus, Colletta seems distraught at the state of our media news coverage. But her conclusion hardly promotes a view that *TDS* is an alternative form of journalism, or that *TDS'* much admired audience effect is anything more than wishful thinking.

4. Insufficient reliable data to support the claim that *TDS* encourages critical thinking.

CCEPS represents the most important body of *TDS* literature. However, there are scholars who do not agree with *CCEPS'* assumptions. These are the show's disenchanted scholars, who are simply unconvinced of its journalistic virtues. Some argued that *TDS* should be viewed simply as a "fake news" program and nothing more. (Baumgartner & Morris 2006; Pavlik, 2008). Others question both the positive cognitive effects of late night comedy and the value of the empirical data used to support *CCEPS*.

For example, Markus Prior (2003; 2007) investigated soft news -- defined as "more sensational, more personality-centered, less time-bound, more practical, and more incident-based than other news" (2003, p. 149) -- and its much praised positive audience effect. He argued that soft news had a minor cognitive effect on its audience, and

that this reduced effect was further limited by its smaller audience. Taking aim at Prior's 2003 finding, Baym argued in 2005 that soft news has positive effects, and contended that the audience for soft news outlets was quite large, even rivaling that for hard news. Contrary to Prior's findings, Baym concluded that consuming soft news induced learning about politics. However, in his recent book ***Post-broadcast Democracy***… (2007), Prior further explained his earlier conclusion. In that explanation, he used all the existing data to point out that viewers of late-night comedy, which include ***TDS***, also report frequent exposure to traditional television news programs. So, the informative role of ***TDS*** is unclear, in light of the fact that ***TDS*** is frequently not the sole source of political information (p. 278).

5. *TDS* promotes stereotyping and does not encourages critical thinking

CCEPS' literature is not the only literature on ***TDS***. It is the body of literature which innovatively argues that ***TDS'*** narrative promotes critical inquiry (Baym, 2010, pp. 106 et seq.) by raising questions about the validity of the news their viewers receive. At the other end of the

spectrum, a minority of scholars have persuasively argued the opposite. For them, *TDS* propounds a conservative position on certain political issues. For them, *TDS* does not raise polysemically a set of questions nor open up a discourse for critical discussion. For example, Canadian scholars Michael Ross and Lorraine York pointed out when *TDS'* humor is directed at subjects constructed as "foreign," despite the show's reputation for "subversiveness," such humor relies on demeaning stereotypes. Arguably, when *TDS* promotes stereotypes its potential to simultaneously promote critical inquiry is limited, if not eliminated.

Ross and York contended that when *TDS* defines non-American regions and peoples simplistically, it does so according to national stereotypes, because *TDS* wants to elicit "automatic laughter from its audience" (Ross & York, 2007, p. 355). For instance, while *TDS* is usually sympathetic to French culture, Stewart, Ross and York argued, falls for the cheap stereotypical laughs if needed:

> The Daily Show regularly makes a point of commenting archly on its complicity with vulgar stereotyping. A segment on 27 March [2006] showing French riots against proposed changes to labour legislation unleashes a volley of jocular clichés: "Police even resorted to tear gas, or as it's known in France, Chanel No. 6. It's like Chanel No. 5 with a hint of pepper-spray. 'Mmm! Said one protester. 'Sacre bleu,

> my eye!’” Looking ostentatiously abashed, Stewart self-consciously adds, “For a full transcript of those comments, pick up the Paris Stereotype Gazette. Check out their latest story: ‘Gérard Dépardieu Fights Mime for Custody of Smelly Cheese. Three Adulterers Injured.’” (p. 356)

The authors distinguished between the show and the show’s book, acknowledging that ***TDS*** is less stereotypical than Stewart’s book, ***America: The Book*** where non-American regions become known as “International House of Horrors.” Nevertheless, ***TDS*** seems to stay away from sophisticated analysis of foreign affairs and to choose the cheap laughs. For example, during an extended segment on the 2006 Palestinian elections, which was aired on January 26, 2006, Stewart summarized the political process in a funny, though one-dimensional manner:

> Against a backdrop photographic sequence of bearded Palestinian candidates, Stewart reports: “Palestinians flocked to the polls to elect … maybe this guy with a beard … or … I don’t know … maybe that guy with a beard” (p. 355).

The authors explained this simplistic approach to foreigners as the result of ***TDS’*** “patriotism” which dictates the limits of both ***TDS’*** humor and subversiveness (2007). According to them, Stewart displays the American standard of xenophobia (defined as American ethnocentrism), which endears him to his middle class audience, and which I argue further positions (and limits) the meaning of his

show. Within this context, whatever challenges *TDS* poses to the cultural status quo, they happen within the limits of *TDS'* satire which does not threaten his audience's primary beliefs (American ethnocentrism). Accordingly, its satire cannot encourage audience inquisitiveness either.

6. Summary of the *CCEPS* Literature Review: Dreams for the Future of Journalism.

The *CCEPS* literature makes the case, one may say innovatively and courageously, that *TDS* deserves serious attention despite its appearance as a lightweight cable TV entertainment show. Jones was among the first to take note of entertainment politics (he coined the term in 2005) and encouraged others to pay attention to this new television genre, which included *TDS*. To date, all scholars of entertaining journalism have tackled the complex question of recontextualizing political news as entertainment. Interestingly, their recontextualization is rather uniform: it is either centered on its textual structure or on its audience's agency.

The argument that the very comedic nature of these shows constitutes their actual journalistic strength is based on subjective analysis whose limits are rarely clarified. *TDS'* narrative is a hybrid which embraces

almost all comedic rhetorical tools, especially irony and political satire, and parodies broadcast and cable news, political talk shows, the Internet, films, and every other source of popular culture. Its comedic criticism, despite its large appeal, engenders laughs and with laughs come specific cognitive limits. For example, how forceful can a policy criticism be if it has to produce both outrage and laughs at the same time?

Additionally, this recontextualization salutes the audience's agency. But it does so in a paternalistic manner and without credible empirical support. First, entertaining politics are presented as a way of engaging audiences out of boredom, though that argument rests on a rather troublesome paternalistic assumption: traditional news is somehow philosophically unfit for postmodern times which demand more than "fact" reporting according to some official account of reality, and more judgment-based guidance (Baym 2010; Jones, 2010). The shallowness of this analysis is magnified by the fact that it ignores that the entertainment organizations which are replacing the news organizations in performing the public gate-keeping journalistic role are owned by the same corporations. For example, Viacom is the ultimate gate-keeper of both the CBS

Evening News "fact" reporting narrative, for example, and *TDS'* comedic and presumably entertaining "guiding" version of the same news. So, the entertaining judgment call so valued by the laudatory scholarship is ultimately made by the same corporation charged with the traditional news show. Additionally, when *CCEPS* praises *TDS* for adding a much needed critical inquiry to the news, the assumption is that *TDS* opens up a discourse for critical discussion, and not that it replaces the "fact" reporting with a jester's judgment call, deemed critical by *CCEPS* scholars.

Empirically, the existing research on entertainment politics rests for the most part on presumptions which are hard to test. First, audience research is hard to perform because so much of it involves self-reporting. Second, the collected data are then subjected to indefinite, uncertain, and subjective, interpretations. Additionally, when the data are not self-reported, they are usually produced by a minority of the audience, the fandom or the anti-fandom, which often has interests other than producing data to explain how it decoded the show.

Finally, even *TDS'* commercial gambit of labeling itself as "fake news" becomes impregnated by scholars with so much meaning that one may wonder whether that scholarly

reading has anything to do with the encoded text, or with what ***TDS*** hosted by, Jon Stewart (a former MTV personality) had in mind:

> The label of "fake news" also has a deeper problem. Any notion of "fake" depends upon an equal conception of "real." Fake news necessitates assumptions about some kind of authentic or legitimate set of news practices, ideals that one rarely hears articulated or necessarily sees as evident today. In the absence of any codified set of professional guidelines, a standardized entrance examination, or a supervisory guild, news instead is defined and constrained by a set of cultural practices, informal and often implicit agreements about proper conduct, style, and form that today are in flux, increasingly multiple, debatable, and open for reconsideration. Thus, in his interview with Jon Stewart, Bill Moyers asks if The Daily Show is "an old form of comedy" or a "new kind of journalism." The suspicion here is that it is both—something of the former and much of the latter. Seen against a backdrop of declining audiences, boundary contestation, and textual exploration, The Daily Show can be understood as an experiment in the journalistic [sic] [NB: in journalism] (Baym, 2005, p. 261).

If we were to use the paradigm of a court of law, which the ***CCEPS*** scholarship often uses to point out in awe how prosecutorial Stewart is in pursuit of bad television, then I would say that the state, the plaintiff in criminal cases, and its representative, ***CCEPS*** in this case, failed to persuade at least this juror of the merits of their case. For this juror, it remains unclear whether ***TDS*** is a mere "snarky satire program that pretends to examine the news of

the day" (Dagnes, 2010, p. xix), a new political news vehicle which stands for "intellectual sobriety" and denounces "shallowness, thoughtlessness, [and] oversimplification" (Id.), or why not, a little bit of both.

I translated this scholarly want of analysis and persuasive evidence in the research questions addressed in this dissertation. The first question (Q1) explores how *TDS'* comedic narrative works as a vehicle of political news. It inquires whether *TDS* empowers viewers to be critical of news coverage and *TDS* itself, or whether it offers one dominant reading which is easily deciphered and does not by any plausible reading encourage dissenting or critical viewing of *TDS'* perspective. In other words, it addresses the openness of *TDS'* comedy and its much admired critical value from a polysemic angle. The second question (Q2) explores whether *TDS'* viewers in fact are encouraged to be critical audiences of televised news including *TDS* itself. The next chapters set the stage for the theoretical frame used to answer these questions and the content analysis of both *TDS'* primary and tertiary texts, texts produced by the show and its audience.

Chapter 4. The Potential Polysemy of the Primary Text of Televised Political Comedy(Q1)

Mainstream media have been criticized for their monolithic and patriarchal approach to news production and delivery (Baym; Jones). Correspondingly, their audiences have been viewed as uncritically accepting the news (Baym; Jones). The *CCEPS* scholars view *TDS* as a response to mainstream media outlets which promote the so-called establishment view and infuse audiences with pre-packaged meaning.

To learn whether *TDS* has revolutionized opinion journalism, this dissertation adopts a dual encoded/decoded approach. This approach will focus on the role of the comedic narrative to both deliver political opinions and enable their reading in a critical manner.

The major analysis of *TDS'* comedic narrative in creating alternative journalism is focused on the role of *TDS'* humor in creating multi-meaning content which encourages audiences to think and supplement the information provided with their own judgment. In other words, I decipher *TDS'*s polysemy, and analyze its discourse features, such as ambiguity. This analysis is open to the

outcome that *TDS* proves to have a rather limited polysemy, because its comedy is highly structured and "to get the jokes" the audience has to follow the given comedic "script." In that event a supplemental analysis of *TDS* compares its unique comedic perspective to the news coverage offered by mainstream news outlets to discover whether *TDS'* value judgments are unavailable from other news reporting narratives and thus, perhaps sought by its audience.

The major part of the analysis sheds light on the mechanics of how comic texts (or at least this particular comic text) convey political news. The type of "openness" *TDS'* comedic narrative promotes is regarded here as emblematic of its manner of conveying the news, and of how it differs from how other media outlets convey the same information. Through various types of textual analyses it becomes apparent whether *TDS* enables multiple readings of its commentary of the news or whether. limited in its openness, *TDS'* commentary adds an alternative missing commentary on the news of the day. Similarly, investigating *TDS'* decoded text, through the prism of its audience, or a segment of its audience, sheds light on *TDS'* ability to evoke critical thinking in its audience: enabling them to

use the given information in a manner which goes beyond mere entertainment.

This dissertation responds to the following two questions:

Question #1: How does *TDS'* comedic narrative (primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news?

and

Question #2: How does *TDS'* audience decode its text?

1. Q1: Theoretical Framework. Fiske's Argument about Television Polysemy.

The first research question is "How does *TDS'* comedic narrative (primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news?" As a television program, *TDS'* polysemy is undisputed. However, its comedic nature affects it in ways which remained unaddressed until now.

In 1987, John Fiske argued persuasively that all television texts contain a multitude of patterns of signifiers, which are aimed at multiple social segments. As a result, the television text will bloom into a multitude of meanings, which derive from the encoded symbols. Fiske did not discuss the connection between those meanings, including whether they are cognitively related or not,

although in the context of political news this remains an important question.

However, what exactly polysemy entails is less clear. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "the fact of having multiple meanings," and it intimates that those meanings should be cognitively connected: "Polysemy is when a given string of characters has a set of different but related meanings." Fiske's horizon, his multitude of patterns, was limited. For him, the television text is not completely open. Signifiers both identify and limit the multitude of meanings (Fiske, 1990, p. 84). These layers of meaning, Fiske explains, are due to the inner characteristics of all texts, the encoded dominant philosophical beliefs, and those characteristics peculiar to the television text: the dual visual and audible coding. As further detailed below, authors and audiences use textual devices to enlarge the dominating meaning of the text (p. 85). Furthermore, TV shows rely on their audience's "television knowledge," as well as "extra-generic television meanings - -a news item about action in Nicaragua, for example" (Id.), which, in that example, might influence a reading of a show featuring Hispanic news or characters. In addition to the aforementioned meanings

created by the primary, televised, text, Fiske adds that meanings are induced by the secondary text (promos, advertisements, etc) as well as a third level of text, "the readings that people make of television, the talk and gossip they produce" (p. 85).

Here, the first and tertiary texts will be analyzed from a multiperspectival approach. ***TDS***'s comedic discourse will be deciphered from the textual analysis of its primary text--the text of the show. The audience-authored text, especially the texts the other media authored, will add depth to the reading parameters from the encoders' perspective.

2. The Comedic Discourse of *TDS*' Primary Text

The nature of comedic discourse is key because ***TDS***, through its primary televised text, engages audiences in a variety of comedic discourses. In ***Le Rire***, Bergson defined the mechanics of comedy, of what makes us laugh, as a rapport between two representations: one socially accepted, and another opposed to it (2007). In ***Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious***, Freud (1905) talks about comic pleasures and classifies them as jokes (the French term is

'mot d'esprit '), comedy, and humor (1963, pp. 181-236). Freud augmented Bergson's approach to comic discourse by emphasizing the role of the audience. Laughing requires not just the rapport existing in the discourse – between what exists and what is ideal -- but also a rapport between the encoder and the decoder. The decoder needs to be able to decode the text and laugh.

In linguistic terms the connection between encoder and decoder is translated through the following fundamental rule: "that at any given moment only one signifying element functions to represent only one signified element" (Purdie, 1993, p. 34). Thus, ordinarily, when we talk about a "cat" we mean a specific type of animal. Jokes violate this symbolic law by connecting "more than one incompatible signifieds" to one signifier (p.34). "What is black and white and [*red*] all over?" To change this question into a joke-making one, a transgression needs to happen with the signifier behind the signified red. *Red* needs to change from signifying the color *red* to signifying the past tense verb *read*. In order to elicit a laugh this transgression needs to happen with both the encoder and the decoder, so answering "a newspaper," is the unexpected funny answer. Susan Purdie explains the joking mechanism as entrapping

the decoder's "making sense" activity into a symbolic error (Purdie, 1993, p. 37). In the example above, that error was enabled by the use of color signifiers: black and white, which would erroneously guide the decoder to give a color meaning to "red." Although this is a simple example, the mechanism remains the same even for more complex jokes.

Good jokes, Purdie explains, are "heavily overdetermined." In addition, "each telling of a joking utterance […] involves a unique combination of personalities, relationships and circumstances" (p. 36). Purdie also discusses the impact of a joke: a joke acts tacitly because "it confirms what Teller and Audience already know" and is unlikely to change the audience's perspective on the issues presented as a joke (p. 147). In other words, Purdie's theory dissects jokes into two slices: the encoded heavily overdetermined text and the decoded side, where the potential joke is activated within the unique combination of relationships between Teller and Audience. Purdie seems to imply that jokes may be polysemic when, despite their overdetermined structure, their encoded text is sufficiently loose to entertain multiple decoding relationships, according to different sets of values: such as feminist and patriarchal. For example, some jokes about

gender identity can be understood as funny both by feminist supporters and feminist bashers (pp. 147-48).

At a minimum her argument supports the role of the audience in the meaning-making process that comedic discourse entails. At most, her argument supports the role of what Fiske calls generic knowledge, and of course, it underscores the role of the audience's own set of cultural and political values as well as that of the Teller.

2.1 Irony

2.1.1. Televised Irony

As mentioned before, one of the textual devices Fiske identified as a tool to open up a text to polysemic readings (1980), is comedic narrative. Fiske analyzes irony and jokes. "The classic and simple definition of irony is a statement that appears to say one thing while actually meaning another" (p. 85). It "necessarily works by simultaneously opposing meanings against each other," and it always creates a web of meanings which are hierarchically situated (p. 86). Fiske continues that the main attraction irony offers its audience is the position

of omniscience it bestows upon its audience. “It gives the reader/spectator, privileged knowledge” (Id). However, Fiske adds, the ironist is always at risk that audiences may escape this pre-established position, especially if the social discourse is pregnant with divergent meaning (p. 85).

For instance, paraphrasing one of Fiske’s examples about a TV show involving corporate misdeeds, if the goal of irony is to cause audiences to laugh at a character, who is, say, a corporate officer who refers to looted funds as his own retirement funds, the irony may or may not work. It will depend on the social-economic environment and the audiences' position within that environment. The current social-economic recession adds a historically limited layer of meaning structure which further expands or limits the text’s reading, depending on the effects of the economic recession on the show’s audience. In other words, depending on how much audiences have been affected by the recession, retirement funds and looted funds may not translate well as laughing matters.

Because the producer of irony can never control this knowledge at the time of the production of the text, Fiske believes that irony “can never be totally controlled by the structure of the text: it always leaves semiotic space for

some readers to exploit" (p. 86). From this perspective, irony is seen as interactive, demanding audience participation in the meaning-making process. But, this does not mean that audiences have unlimited liberty to construe meaning. First, as Fiske noted, audiences are limited by their general knowledge. Then, as shown here, the ironic text itself is derived from a primary narrative, whose content also limits the meaning of the irony. Finally, with political news, the social, economic, and political environment further situates audiences and their reading habits.

TDS engages in political irony. There is good reason to believe that political irony is even less open than generic irony. *TDS*' irony is about power in action, or its metamorphoses within the daily social-economic context. Political irony requires both the ironist and the audience to be fully aware of history, some recent and some remote in time, in the form of news, to make fun of it.

This historical limitation of political irony can be best framed within Richard Rorty's view of irony (1989). History, or surrounding circumstances, or as Richard Rorty calls history, "contingency," are believed to be so important to irony that it defines and thus dates it.

Ironists cannot exist, Rorty believes, unless they are deeply aware of their derivative position, "describing," not making, reality, and that both reality and their description of it "are subject to change." Ironists are "always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies and thus of their selves" (Rorty, 1989, pp. 73-74). That makes irony funny and endears the ironist to her audience.

For Rorty, a text is ironic only to the extent it translated the contingency of its creation (Frazier, 2006). Rorty's ironists are intellectuals, and his intellectuals are ironists but not philosophers, for example, because they do not make the mistake of using final vocabularies, abundant in generic multisemantic concepts. They are disciplined and use specific vocabularies, limited to their circumstances. In other words, Rorty's intellectual-ironist is deeply postmodern, disdainful of grand theories, distrusting revolutions, a light-hearted, good-humored minimalist. Although liberal, Rorty's ironist will never attempt to change the world, or even tell general truths, because this ironist does not believe in final principles of universal application. The truth is temporal and local. The joke and its meaning are local and temporal.

From this perspective, Rorty's view of irony only complements Fiske's. Fiske's view is a generic view of irony, a rhetorical tool to attract and flatter audiences' intellectual and affective prowess and encourage them to engage the television narrative. Rorty's theory explains how that engagement works. The audience/ironist bond is political, the bridge between them is liberal irony, but not politically principled. For Rorty's ironists, "what matters is not a consensus about what is desirable for the universal humanity, but a consensus about the desirability of any topic of discussion" (Rorty, 1989, p. 84). Rortyan ironists are characterized by light-mindedness. They are not philosophers, and in fact, they doubt metaphysics,and they doubt principles.

Rorty's view of irony seems best suited for analyzing televised irony. Television thrives on immediate cognitive and affective audience rewards. ***TDS***, with its 1.6-2 million viewers is a commercial success in today's cultural fragmentation, still consistent with an analysis of commercially successful irony which is relevant because it is local and current (temporal).

2.1.2. *TDS'*s Irony

Rorty's analysis applies perfectly to *TDS*' use of irony, which is, we need to remember, liberal political irony - funny, but not necessarily principled. *TDS'*s irony has been viewed first and foremost as a marker of worldliness and maturity, as a rejection of the claims of conventional news to epistemological certainty (Baym, 2005, p. 267).

This dissertation explores through textual analysis the validity of the *CCEPS'* claim that *TDS* offers a "discourse of inquiry [which] seeks through the asking of unanswered questions to clarify the underlying morality of a situation" (p. 267). The content of *TDS*, as argued here, is multi-structured. First, because it generally comments on the news delivered elsewhere and seldom, if ever, reports its own news, it is determined by what other mainstream media outlets broadcast. Then, it is defined by *TDS* viewers' knowledge of that news content. In other words, *TDS* viewers' only surprise (except for the extraordinarily rare news *TDS* reports itself) lies in Stewart's delivery of the news. In fact, the most accurate observation about *TDS*' irony might be that instead of delivering news or

encouraging critical thinking in the young, it has allowed the liberal middle class to rediscover mass-produced political irony as a chic pastime.[31]

For example, on July 22nd, ***TDS*** presented a segment about CNN's coverage of whether Obama was born in the US, the so-called "birther issue." Stewart's commentary followed a CNN clip of anchorperson Kitty Pilgrim filling in for Lou Dobbs on CNN's now defunct ***Lou Dobbs Tonight***. Pilgrim was shown saying: "The controversy [regarding the President's birth place] lives on, especially on the Internet." Back in his studio, Stewart repeated her words:

> Jon Stewart (fake falsetto of naïve viewer/anchorperson): Especially on the Internet? (laughs from the live audience). Then it must be credible. (more laughs from the live audience). Like these pictures I found that prove that the Pope is actually Jewish. (obviously "doctored" picture of a Jewish wedding with Pope Benedict XVI as the groom). That's his wedding….His Jewish wedding. (more audience laughs) And you thought he was a Nazi.[32]

The irony here is very succinct. "It's on the Internet? Then it must be credible." ***TDS'*** audiences know about the birther issue and the politics behind it. ***TDS'*** audiences have embraced a moral position on this issue. They also

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[31] The scholarly literature on the show has not raised this issue, so I will not delve into it here.

[32] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-22-2009/the-born-identity , minute 1:36 in the show.

know and certainly have personal experience with the unreliability of Internet material. However, to minimize any misunderstanding, the language and Stewart's performance-- his falsetto and facial motions – gave them the meaning-making clues.

Stewart said the opposite of what he meant.[33] His irony was not lost on the audience, which laughed copiously, and thus signaled to Stewart that they understood the message: Stewart did not believe that the Internet lent credibility to its postings. The vehicle for that irony was a joke about the Pope. Stewart introduced pictures from the Pope's supposedly Jewish wedding to prove how credible "things" posted on the Internet are. The joke's humor came from its absurdity. It is ludicrous to imagine the celibate leader of the Catholic world, and former member of Hitler Youth, getting married in a Jewish wedding. In addition to the content, the verbal, visual, and musical coding of the cognitive piece of information supported one reading: the Internet is not a credible source of information. Verbally, Stewart mockingly admonished his audience for thinking the Pope a Nazi sympathizer. "And you thought he

[33] L'ironie est l'oppositions entrée reel et l'ideal, l'opposition "de ce qui est a ce qui devrait etre." (Bergson, 97).

was a Nazi."[34] It alluded to the fact, assumedly well-known to at least much of his liberal audience, that the Pope had been a member of Hitler Youth.

Out of context, this narrative could entertain various readings. It could entail a critical, subversive reading focused on how audiences feel about the Pope's lack of moral standing (the Nazi ethics have come to represent immorality). It could entail a more limited reading focused on how audiences feel about the Pope's purported anti-Semitism (the Nazis have come to represent anti-Semitic values). Or, it could be read in a very limited manner, circumscribed to the show's message. I argue here that *TDS'* readings do not take place in the abstract. Its reading is done in the context of the segment, the doctored pictures of the Pope's Jewish wedding, the episode, and the show's text. Like Rorty's ironists, *TDS'* host and writers do not dwell on large, universally applicable, principled themes. Their irony is not about the immorality of world religious leaders. Their irony is about the unprofessionalism of a CNN reporter who uses the Internet as an excuse for pseudo-reporting. As much as we would like to believe that television texts are semantically open, it would be more

[34] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-22-2009/the-born-identity , minute 1:36 in the show.

correct to say that both the tenor of the text and the audience's knowledge and bias strictly limit their openness.

This dissertation questions the openness of *TDS'* irony. Through textual analysis of its primary texts, it questions the polysemy of derivative texts, such as *TDS'* irony, which build meaning on very specific items of news while engaging audiences and relying on those audiences' knowledge and political bias to participate in the meaning-making process and to understand the underlying joke.

2.2 Political Satire

Satire has always been difficult to define (Griffin; Jardon), but easy to identify as a tool of criticism, and is even sometimes referred to as "militant irony" (Frye, 1975). "Two things are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack. Attack without humor, or pure denunciation, forms one of the boundaries of satire" (Frye, 1975, p. 224). As a literary genre, it is focused on social or political criticism, and it often involves scenes of relative idiocy or human debasement, produced by the authors' misanthropy, physical (Pope) or

mental (Swift) illness, or prejudices. It seems as if it were invented for the purging of our minds. Along with polemics and pamphlets, satire belongs to the type of cognitive discourse that has a teleological structure. However, unlike satire, whose intent is improvement through humor and ridicule (Fry, Griffin, Jardon), the pamphlet's sole role (like that of the polemic) is to demolish the opposite view (or set of values) through any art or style or means of persuasion.[35]

2.2.1 The American Tradition of Political Satire

There is a long tradition of American liberal satire. Until very recently, political satire had a clear alternative function of relieving frustrations with perceived social and political wrongs. Throughout American history, it has offered a subversive reading of political events.

Consider, for instance, the conflation of political events of 1773 and 1774, which were satirized and narrated in a biblical structure by John Leacock, in ***The First book***

[35] Thomas Paine' famous pamphlet ***Common Sense*** was a call to arms on behalf of natural rights, inciting Americans to revolt against the British Empire. (May 1976, 173)

of the American chronicles of the times. 1774-1775, whose intent was to arouse the audience against its exploiting rulers (Mulford, 1987). During the next two centuries, American political satire would change as the cultural need for it would change. The attacks on British occupiers would be replaced with attacks on domestic political opponents. .

For example, after World War II, some political satire bravely pointed out the hypocrisy of our leaders. Stan Freberg, a new political satirist in 1954, complained that "McCarthyism and 'conformity' seriously threatened to extinguish the nation's sense of humor" (Kercher, 2006, p. 85). He found it "an alarming prospect since a healthy sense of humor was vital to both American democracy and the task of coping with the modern, 'confused world' " (Id.) In this political environment in which nonconformity was condemned, satire promoted "private opinion" and individualism. And the promotion of individualism became identified as a form of subversion.

Satirical attacks were aimed at the national mood of complacency which allowed the national hysteria and collective paranoia of a renewed "Red Scare" to dominate

the country.[36] While newspapers were more tolerant of political satire, radio relegated it to late night hours[37] (Kercher, 2006, p. 88). Television avoided political satire more or less completely.[38]

In the 1960s, political satire flourished in small spaces – satirical routines in comedy clubs, for instance – and gave its audience the pleasure of laughing because they understood where the satirist came from and what he wanted to achieve. Mort Sahl, our first modern satirist of consequence (Nachman, 2003) and in the eyes of ***The New Yorker*** "an American philosopher" (Kercher, 2006, p. 212) had no problems making his message clear. (Kercher, 2006). Once elected, President John F. Kennedy or his Administration, unhappy with Sahl's attacks on his administration as "radical middle," reportedly attempted to

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[36] In fact the country felt safe to laugh only after McCarthy died "We are not so much frightened now that McCarthy has passed away, as transfixed, struck, spiritually immobilized" (Kerchner, p. 119). But even the McCarthy era one can distinguish between his rise to power, when "no one chose to bell the cat with laugh" (Kerchner, p. 196), and his political twilight. In the latter years political satire re-found some of his best voices.

[37] However, newspapers continued to publish political cartoonists, such as Herbert Block who depicted President Eisenhower as an aloof clown far removed from the duties of a grandfatherly figure he pretended to be (Kechner, p. 45).

[38] Even when political satirists appeared on TV their characters had little or nothing to do with politics (e.i. ***3 To Get Ready with Ernie Kovacs***) (Kerchner, pp. 91-92). Even the famous duo ***Cesar and Coca*** focused on topical (social) satire on ***Your Show of Shows*** .

stifle his satire by threatening clubs with IRS auditing if they furnished a public forum to such liberal satirists as Sahl[39].

More importantly for scholars of political satire was Kennedy's successful strategy of blunting satire by embracing it though laughs (Kercher, 2006, p. 258), even though satire has never been a revolutionary road to anything. Neither Mort Sahl nor the much-famed and culturally feared Lenny Bruce, however incandescent, hip, outspoken and iconoclastic they were, did anything more than reinforce a sense of solidarity and self-proclaimed superiority among their "well-educated, middle- and upper-middle-class liberal fans" (Kercher, 2006, p. 211).

Political satire, as Freud noted about irony, makes horrible things risible, bringing them to a non-essential, non-threatening level, which thereby (and ironically) renders political action unnecessary. At least since the Kennedy era, satire has changed from "I'm not kidding, things are wrong," to "I'm only kidding, things are wrong" (Kercher, 2006, p. 259), and at most it performs a limited muckraking journalism, one which scratches the surface,

[39] The hungry i club was audited when it refused to close its doors to the same Mort Sahl, Sahl recalls in his memoirs, ***Heartland*** (1976).

relieves frustrations, and renders unnecessary any further effort.

With the war in Vietnam looming large in the popular consciousness, political satire did not flourish until both the people (Sahl called his audience, "my people") and satirists acquired "an overwhelming sense of frustration, impotence, and isolation," and also the level of political consciousness that some have called the "better spirits of our fatuous times" (Kercher, 2006, p. 142). Political satire became dormant, at least compared to its earlier level of popularity. However, during the last years of the 1960s, English political satire reached new heights, especially with the BBC satirical broadcast, ***That Was the Week that Was (TW3)***. Unexpectedly, TW3 attacked the hegemonic view from a quasi libertarian stance. TW3 considered the hegemonic view of politics the doubtful public philosophy of "earnest concern and goodwill." TW3 subversively attacked such public policy because it thought it hypocritical. Through satire, TW3 strove to replace it with a seemingly refreshing concern for the individual.[40]

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[40] TW3 engaged in ending the deference to serious television programs which were making

> people more and more earnest about the world and its doings. Week in and week out the pubic breathes, and we foster, a kind of philosophy of concern, goodwill and public spiritedness on a massive scale…[TW3 is an attempt] to hang

In the 1970s, political satire revived and the NBC weekly show, Saturday Night Live (SNL) reflected the political and cultural changes of the day, settling for irreverence, spontaneity, and egotism. ***SNL*** self-consciously but in many ways ineffectually imitated the British ***TW3*** – which had a short life as a domestic comedy show with that same title. It did so while, at the same time, co-opting the much more effective and piercing spirit of the countercultural ***National Lampoon*** humor magazine and a popular review called ***Lemmings*** (Greenberg, 2003, p.119).

Unlike the original British ***TW3***, ***SNL*** did not reach prominence by satirizing the hypocrisy of a public policy of "earnest concern" for the masses because there was no such concern. Ten years after his landmark legislation passed, Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty was still in its infancy, at best--in its stillbirth, at worst. ***SNL*** campaigned against the cultural deference to authority,

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> this contemporary and vague 'philosophy' on the hook in the hall, to relieve the pressure of earnest concern and goodwill which presses down on us for the rest of the week. There should be room in this programme for prejudice, for cynicism, for Juvenal's "sacred indignation" (Carpenter, p. 214).

TW3 satirized British political believes, such as the one in its international grandeur. A TW3 episode contained a sketch that satirized the British dwindling international role when a cat member, David Frost, read out a list of "the colonies we've still got – Fiji, Mauritius, Swaziland, the New Hebrides Condominium…" (Id. 239).

which by then was only subversive, not revolutionary because the war had by then ended, and President Nixon had resigned, reportedly in exchange for a presidential pardon.[41]

For example, when Lorne Michaels had to shoot (as in filming) President Ford saying, "Live from New York" and "I'm Gerald Ford and you're not," in a reference to *SNL*'s own Chevy Chase character on the Weekend Update segment, Michaels attempted to help Ford relax so he could do the line properly in front of the camera. After a few takes, Michaels said to Ford: "Mr. President, if this works out, who knows where it will lead?' According to later reports, the humor "was completely lost on him" (Shales & Miller, 2002, p. 76). The irreverence seems to have been a breath of fresh air but nothing more.

Since the late 1980s, *SNL* has intermittently presented edgy satires on presidential candidates. Some scholars, assuming that SNL's audience is politically ignorant, have come to believe that "for many young viewers, *SNL* became [in the late 1980s] a primary source of political information" (Shales & Miller, 2002, p. 244-45). It is

[41] For more on other aspects of popular culture and the Nixon presidency, see e.g., Greenberg, David. 2003. Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image. New York : W.W. Norton.

from exactly this same possibly mistaken perspective that *TDS* is today also believed to be a primary source of information.

2.2.2 *TDS*' Political Satire

TDS has never reached the heights of mordant satire that SNL reached in its first year. Perhaps *SNL* , at most, simply discouraged deference to (too) established values, but it did so with a lot of sarcasm.[42] One of *SNL's* most irreverent moment dates from its first season, when, on its Weekend Update segment, Chevy Chase declared: "UNICEF fell under attack this week when Syria formally protested the charity's new Christmas card, which says, in ten different languages, 'Let's kill the Arabs and take their oil'[43]" (Cader, 1994). It is mordant criticism, but it its target is ambiguous: while it refers textually to the

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[42] For example, when Lorne Michaels had to shoot (as in filming) President Ford saying, "Live from New York" and "I'm Gerald Ford and you're not," in a reference to SNL's own Chevy Chase character on the Weekend Update segment, Michaels attempted to help Ford relax so he could do the line properly in front of the camera. After a few takes, Michaels said to Ford: "Mr. President, if this works out, who knows where it will lead?' According to later reports, the humor "was completely lost on him" (Shales & Miller, 2002, p. 76). The irreverence was a breath of fresh air and since the late 1980s, scholars have viewed SNL become for some " a primary source of political information" (Shales & Miller, 2002, p. 244-45).

[43] http://snltranscripts.jt.org/75/75gupdate.phtml.

occasionally unpopular UNICEF, but its true target is what it means to be civilized within the Western world: Christmas cards and plenty of cheap oil.

Moreover, ***TDS*** has never engaged in political satire such as that which ***The New Yorker*** practiced during the 2008 Presidential campaign, when it used a cover called "The Politics of Fear," by Barry Blitt, which depicted Michelle Obama as a revolutionary in military fatigues, packing an AK-47,

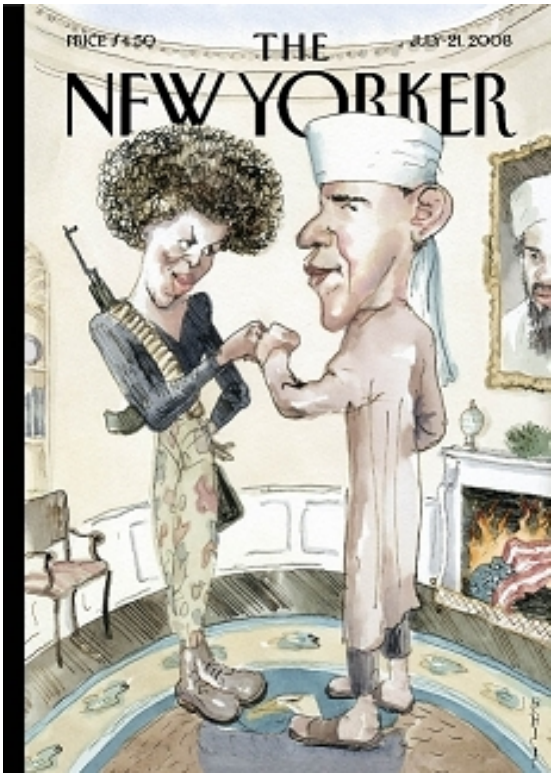


Image 8: ***The New Yorker***, July 21, 2008 – Cover Page

and her husband, one of the Democratic contenders at that time, dressed like the Muslim he was accused of being. Both of them stood in the Oval Office, with a portrait of Osama bin Laden behind them over a fireplace, in which an American flag burns. Perhaps because ***TDS*** stays away from such biting satire or perhaps because of the host's transparent political persona and his homogenously like-

minded audience, no one has ever accused ***TDS*** of being as trashy as Fox news, as ***The New Yorker*** was accused of being in that instance (Sklar, 2008). Stewart has not needed to defend his show, as David Remnick, the journal's editor, did.[44] ***TDS*** seems engaged in controversial views as an observer, rather than a participant, and to the extent it engages in political commentary, it seems commentary already held by its like-minded liberal audience. For example, as recently as May 3, 2010, ***TDS'*** writers actually co-wrote President Obama's speech for the White House Correspondents' Dinner, and included this satirical comment:

> "It's been quite a year since I've spoken here last—lots of ups, lots of downs—except for my approval ratings, which have just gone down. ..But that's politics. It doesn't bother me. Beside I happen to know that my approval ratings are still very high in the country of my birth.[45]

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[44] I can't speak for anyone else's interpretations, all I can say is that it combines a number of images that have been propagated, not by everyone on the right but by some, about Obama's supposed "lack of patriotism" or his being "soft on terrorism" or the idiotic notion that somehow Michelle Obama is the second coming of the Weathermen or most violent Black Panthers. […] The idea that we would publish a cover saying these things literally, I think, is just not in the vocabulary of what we do and who we are... We've run many many satirical political covers. Ask the Bush administration how many […].

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/07/13/david-remnick-on-emnew-yo_n_112456.html

[45] Grove, Lloyd. Obama Trounces Leno. 2010. The Daily Beast. http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-05-02/obama-trounces-leno/.

The July 22, 2009, episode contained a segment which satirized cable news production, especially by CNN. The set of values it involved were newsworthiness and fabricated salience for ratings purposes. CNN had given salience to what Stewart considered to be a non-issue, Obama's birth certificate, by enlisting its Internet presence to support its salience. Stewart implied that newsworthiness should not be fabricated for ratings and when he attacked CNN's coverage of that issue, he did so because it seemed professionally wrong if not immoral.[46]

During that episode, Stewart also satirized CNN's audience, and to the extent that ***TDS***' audiences overlap with CNN's, his own as well, for becoming Lippmann's public that functions with gossip (pseudo-information) rather than information: "Not only is Barak Obama our first black president -- he's also the first not-American president. Only in America." With a moralist's jest, Stewart dug up the dirt on us, a gossipmonger nation. He did it winking at our foibles – we, as his audience, are still the best there is -- and finished his segment by paraphrasing ***New York Post*** gossip columnist Cindy Adams, who ends all her gossip

[46] Similarly, the New York Times' Frank Rich recently deplored the claim of cable anchor Dylan Ratigan of MSNBC that that health care is bad for ratings (Rich, 2008). Likewise, former ***New Yorker*** editor William Shawn insisted that the news media should report what the (voting) public needs to know, irrespective of ratings.

columns with “Only in New York, kids, only in New York,” although older members of Stewart’s audience, or those with better memories, may have associated the phrase with a 1958 book, “Only in America,” by Leo Golden which was, somewhat ironically, a paen to the America of immigrants, its history, and its future.

It thus can be argued that Stewart's satire may not be always political, and may not be always easy to grasp, because it requires various degrees of "knowing." However, that does not mean that when one is relatively up-to-date with recent news and generally familiar with popular culture that it would be difficult to "get the joke." This dissertation argues that once audiences are able to get the joke, because they know the primary news text Stewart uses as the basis of his joke, and emotionally are ready to get the joke (are not morally or politically opposed to Stewart’s brand of comedy) they do get the joke. Stewart’s jokes do not depend upon hidden, subversive, or oppositional readings: to get the joke you only have to follow its script.

In other words, *TDS’* moral and political values circumscribe the show’s meaning-making process. The show’s moral and political values are unambiguously presented, so

all rhetorical devices are laugh- rather than thought-provoking. Such desire for value transparency is understandable, because both irony and satire can easily confuse and be lost on an ignorant audience. This situation is well explained by English Professor Lisa Colletta:

> If the irony is missed, or the better moral standard is also ironically presented as just another construction, then satire is no longer an effective social critique and may even be misunderstood as an example of the very thing it sets out to critique. Any English professor who has ever taught Jonathan Swift's A Modest Proposal to a group of horrified freshmen is familiar with this experience. A surprisingly large number of students miss the irony completely and believe that Swift is earnestly proposing that the Irish sell their babies as the newest tasty delicacy to the devouring English public, thereby alleviating starving Irish parents of another mouth to feed and providing them with a bit of income, while creating a new market niche to sate the ever increasing English appetite. On students' first reading of the Proposal, Swift is most often seen as immoral and perverse—not the English policies in Ireland (Colletta, 2009, pp. 860-861).

As Colletta said, there are numerous reasons why one may miss Swift's irony, among them, "ignorance of the historical facts as well as the perception of legitimately and acceptably differing opinions" (p. 204). As argued here, Stewart and his writers take care to avoid misperception both by telling the audience what they mean: "it is a joke" or "I am sarcastic," and by acting the part with voice and

gestures, in addition to other visual and musical clues. At times, Stewart will comment on the lack of audience participation because the live laughs remain a clue for Stewart that his meaning has been deciphered.

2.2.3 Jon Stewart as a Transparent Liberal Satirist

Whether or not we want to be aware of the choice all journalists make when they publish the news of day, news of events reaches us because someone designated it as worthy of mass attention. Aside from commercial reasons, news is selected according to a set of professional and cultural values, which Gans' calls "paraideology" and which become more or less transparently obvious to the careful reader or viewer. Opinion journalists embrace and publicize their values. Political satire goes a step further. The satirist is a cultural or moral hustler. The satirist does not use those para-ideological values to legitimize his position but to impress on his listeners or viewers the superiority of his position, and by extension, of their own views. Satire designates the significant political or social value of the satirized event. Satire issues value statements which make sense and produce laughs if embraced by the

listener. Satire does not use reason to persuade. It uses common values.

When *TDS* uses satire to convey its political commentary, it interpellates its audiences to use Jon Stewart's cultural and political view of the world. The reward for sharing his views is the laugh, the "getting-the-joke" moment, and shared political and cultural identity. The host's transparency and the audience's subsequent (and, in fact, prior) embrace of his views play an important part in this process of meaning-making, especially in the context of political satire.

TDS, as political satire, imparts political content with a dual value-system coat: the political news comes with the perspective of the organization which first distributes the news itself. This original perspective is then satirized by Stewart within a context which involves a secondary meaning, which represents the desired reading of the satire. But--and this is unique to political satire--the secondary desired meaning contains some subversive elements when compared to the satirized original meaning of the news and corrects that original meaning.

Because of this dual meaning frame, satire requires a specific type of audience participation. The listener has

to mitigate the two meanings: the original satirized meaning and the satire's disruptive, somewhat subversive, meaning (Young, 2004). This double reference and the role the audience has to play in "getting" the joke have enticed scholars to add *TDS'* political comedy to the "more intelligent, complex, and provocative analyses [within] the political landscape" (Gray, Jones & Thompson, 2009, p. 32).

TDS' subversiveness, much like SNL's, is a cultural subversiveness. In a recent opinion, "Too Funny for Words," *The New York Times* published a compelling argument on how the two frames of cultural reference work within the context of *TDS*. For example, the author of that piece, Peter Funt, noted that often Stewart will use the seven words which you cannot say on broadcast television for fear of having them bleeped, or censored as objectionable under the rules of the Federal Communications Commission (Funt, 2010). The main cultural reference is the FCC decision to censor those words and have them bleeped: "cocksucker, cunt, fuck, motherfucker, piss, shit, tits (Carlin, 1972). Significantly, Funt comments that "when Jon Stewart says the same words, knowing they'll be bleeped, it revs up the crowd while also seeming to challenge the censors" (p. A19). Stewart's monologue does not need to be censored because it

is cablecast. However, his satire requires the bleep in order to point out his criticism of the FCC's position. This union of political and especially cultural views between Stewart and his audience is essential for his political comedy to work.

All political news interpellates listeners and viewers in the Althusserian way of being subjectively transformed (1970). Satire thrives on a unity of meaning between satirist and audience. This bond is mutual, and it also indicates the extent to which the satirist wants to mirror his perceived audience's cultural views. In other words, to the extent *TDS* is a commercially successful program, *TDS'* political subversiveness is limited in scope by its own mass appeal. As mentioned above, non-U.S. scholars Ross and York noticed this aspect when they argued that *TDS* is solidly situated within the realm of American hegemonic views, which uncontroversially mirror those of most Americans (Ross & York, 2007).

For all these reasons, satire can be one of the most refined products of political semantics. However, satire employs many rhetorical tools, including irony. When it deploys irony to criticize vice and to raise popular awareness, political satire may convey multiple meanings,

in addition to its primary subversive meaning, and thus, audiences may be confused. However, even in such situations, as long as the author and the reader (or viewer) share the same set of beliefs, the same subjectivity, and the same representation of political reality, the meaning is met by the reader with a sign of approval, or even a laugh.

TDS employs a transparent satire. The host's persona is transparent to his audience. His social, political, and cultural views are freely expressed. This transparency plays a major role in the show's polysemy. In the same way the perceived accuracy of news plays a major role in the public's perception about the role of the press as a watchdog of democracy,[47] the perceived political views of the satirist play a role in getting the satire. It is common sense that if you do not tell me why you don't like the current administration, I have to guess if I want to understand the criticism.

LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam have applied the earlier-explained Purdie theory of comedy and recently demonstrated that the value-based connection between the host and the audience is crucial in the meaning-making process late-night political comedy enables (2009). Where

[47] Press Accuracy Rating Hits Two-Decade Low. (2009, September 13). Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, http://people-press.org/report/543/.

satire is ambiguous, when its encoded signals are ambiguous, then the meaning-making process and its result are ambiguous: the text enables multiple audiences to find a meaning that conforms with their values but clashes with a different meaning decoded by a different audience with a different set of values.

The possibly crucial nature of the satirist himself is illustrated by Steven Colbert, a former ***TDS*** correspondent and current host of his own show, ***The Colbert Report,*** which immediately follows ***TDS*** on Comedy Central. Colbert has been able to satirize us, his audience, and the news to unexpected levels of success, and his show's ideological bias is confusing: liberals believe his show has liberal values (Colbert cannot be insulting us, he is insulting the rednecks) and conservatives believe that it is conservative (he respects us, he must be insulting the liberals). However, nowhere does Jon Stewart chastise his audience as Colbert did in his first episode, and thus the possibility of ambiguous readings of Stewart's comedy seems less likely than in the case of Colbert (assuming that the empirical study is done in a reliable manner):

> This show is not about me. No, this program is dedicated to you, the heroes. And who are the heroes? The people who watch this show, average hard-working Americans. You're not the elites. You're not the

> country club crowd. I know for a fact my country club would never let you in. You're the folks who say something has to be done. And you're doing something. You're watching TV. (Colletta, p. 868)

That Stewart plays it straight has been the conclusion of the scholarly milieu. Baym, for example, stated long ago that while *TDS* may occasionally be ambiguous, its host Jon Stewart provided the necessary context for viewers to clarify its message (2005). Similarly, LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam echoed that position (2009): "Stewart aids viewer interpretation by offering himself as an unambiguous source and providing external cues" (p. 216). Stewart's persona becomes thus crucial for gauging *TDS'* function in developing and encouraging critical thinking and political activism, to the extent (an extent which is somewhat doubtful) it actually performs that function.

Unlike Colbert, Stewart strives to make his views clear to his audience, especially his beliefs in the role of mainstream media and its journalistic role as watchdog of democracy. In 2004, when Stewart was a guest on Crossfire, he criticized the hosts of that now defunct CNN show for "hurting America" with their over-simplified portrayal of American politics, which Stewart described as having a destructive influence on reasonable political discourse (Folkenflik, 2009). Stewart transparently

expressed the same views on March 12, 2009, during his interview with Jim Cramer, host of CNBC's entertainment-style stock market advising show. Stewart accused the host and CNBC of misleading the public regarding the 2008 economic meltdown because they shamelessly embraced the interests and views of the Wall Street corporations who caused the crash instead of the individuals that make up his audience and who ended up hurt by the crisis (Folkenflik, 2009). Stewart's belief in the banks' immoral behavior was clearly on display, replete with expletives. As mentioned earlier, he stated: "I understand that you want to make finance entertaining but it is not a fucking game and when I [applause] watch I get … I cannot tell you how angry it makes me [because] you knew what the banks were doing and yet we were touting it for months and months. The entire network was.[48]"

The live audience erupted in applause. The online fandom equally applauded Stewart's straightforward interview, although some online fans displayed unhappiness over Stewart's lack of playfulness. But no one found the cultural and political message of the show confusing or hard to decipher.

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[48] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-march-12-2009/jim-cramer-extended-interview-pt--1.

Stewart continues to make his views public, whether on his show or on other TV shows, even those on the much maligned Fox News. In interviews with Fox News' Bill O'Reilly, Stewart "accepts" accusations that he and his audience share the same positive views of the Obama Administration ("friends of President Obama"), just as they shared the same negative views of the Bush Administration.[49] Such a clarity and consensus of views is not unknown in political news shows, especially those which, like ***TDS***, use comedy, with less intensity and frequency than ***TDS*** of course, to impart their criticism, such as MSNBC's recently cancelled Countdown with Keith Olberman and The Rachel Maddow Show (Quart, 2009). Despite political satire's interplay with a hegemonic and a subversive critical meaning, when the criticism comes from a satirist whose values are well known and embraced by his audience, then laughing becomes the confirmation that the audience had not been hindered in its meaning-making process. In other words, despite the show's potential polysemy, the audience found the encoded, preferred reading, the only one which could produce the laugh.

[49] See supra, footnote 8.

To reiterate, because of this dual meaning frame, satire requires audience participation to mitigate the original satirized meaning with the disruptive, subversive one(Young, 2004). As pointed out here, this double reference requires the audience to engage in "getting" the joke. This audience activity has enticed scholars to add *TDS'* political comedy to the "more intelligent, complex, and provocative analyses [within] the political landscape" (Gray, Jones & Thompson, 2009, p. 32) However, though actively engaged in getting the joke, there is no evidence that *TDS'* audience is also actively engaged in filtering the news or that it becomes more critical of news reporting because of this show.

As argued above, *TDS'* subversiveness, much like SNL's, is a cultural subversiveness. Stewart utters the FCC forbidden words not for their intrinsic meaning, but for the relationship they establish between *TDS* and its audience. (Funt, 2010). That relationship is built on the knowledge that FCC has deemed those words culturally unsuitable, and both *TDS* and its audience oppose that governmental decision. Perhaps more interestingly, is *TDS'* decision to bleep other words which allude to the seven censored ones. It is the equivalent of a wink which unites

the Teller and the Audience in a rebellious, though unthreatening cultural event.

2.3 *TDS'* Parody and Pastiche

In a recent article on the double-coded identity of the cartoon show, *The Simpsons*, which runs on Fox, Simone Knox brought together the writings of Linda Hutcheon and those of Fredric Jameson to explore the meanings of this critically and commercially successful show (2006). Like *TDS*, *The Simpsons* uses comedic discourse, and its intertextuality relies on parodic self-references, usually through invisible quotation marks.

Generally, parody is defined as the transformation of a text with the intention to mock an existing (serious) text (Darjon, 1994). Or, as Hutcheon pointed out, parody, which comes from the Greek noun “parodia,” and its ambiguous prefix “para,” cannibalizes the text and everything “against” and “near” or "beside" it (Hutcheon, 1985). That is why Knox finds the Hutcheon view of parody as double coded, containing the critique and criticizing it, useful to her analysis of *The Simpsons*, a show which offers both a commercially successful text and its critique.

But what happens if a show is not engaged in critique, but engages in pseudo-self-parody to show awareness of its faults (such as artificiality) only to forestall the audience's potential objections (about the artificiality of the show)? Then the goal is not humor, and instead of parody, we are faced with what Jameson called pastiche, "a blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor" (Jameson, 1985, p. 114).

Extrapolating this discussion to ***TDS***, it is obvious that its host, Jon Stewart, and ***TDS'*** contributors, lampoon the style of news anchormen and contributing journalists. ***TDS*** parodies media outlets which it perceives as incompetent (CNN) or misleading (FOX). On Facebook, ***TDS*** invites potential fans to "Take a reality-based look at headlines and trends with anchorman Jon Stewart and his team of correspondents. Using real media footage and taped field pieces, it's the news from a distinctly satiric point of view."[50]

In the July 22nd segment, Stewart parodied the verbal language of the CNN anchorperson of that day, Kitty Pilgrim, and the written words of ***New York Post*** gossip columnist

[50] http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=658017013#/thedailyshow.

Cindy Adams. It is hard to know whether the parody goes as far as to change into pastiche.

Like ***The Simpsons***, ***TDS*** is both critically and commercially successful. Like ***The Simpsons***, one has to wonder whether its parody is critical or is a pseudo-parody whose self-conscious (self) references are planned to liberate (distract) its audience from any inquiries they may have. By now, after more than a decade of hosting the show, Stewart and his rotating group of correspondents often parody themselves. They report from the studio in front of green screens. They assume the title of "senior correspondent" as well as the associated roles and mannerisms. There is even the ugly but very funny, intelligent, and eternally new female correspondent, as there is an eternally new minority token correspondent. For example the current "Senior Black Correspondent," a self-referencing bit of parody in itself, is Larry Wilmore's title. Whatever counter-cultural or otherwise oppositional readings ***TDS*** may induce, they are heavily pre-determined by the text itself, in mocking self-references, and thus often referenced in the preferred reading.

In a more recent segment from March 11, 2010, Samatha Bee parodied FoxNews reporters, by lampooning their

reporting skills: unprofessional shooting (through a cell phone camera) and unprofessional reporting (gossip). Her segment was funny because she delivered the non-news with humorous aplomb and intelligence. Whatever questions the audience might have had about why she chose such a lame topic were dissipated: she was the *TDS* senior correspondent of that day. Like the other team members, she fabricates news. In this instance, her fabrication was funny because she lampooned herself and her colleagues, but also a news network, Fox. However, the line between social and political critique and pseudo-self-referential critique is an important but fine one and to understand what *TDS* does, one needs to connect the textual analysis of the primary text, with how audiences (including other media outlets) perceive it.

3. Conclusion

TDS is a comedic show which parodies the mainstream news media and satirizes politicians and other media personalities. Its narrative employs most rhetorical tools used to impart thoughts and laughs. Satire relies on a dual meaning frame: the original political news perspective which *TDS* satirizes and the judgment *TDS* makes about the

original political news coverage. However, because Stewart's liberal persona is transparent to his audience all *TDS* judgment calls reflect it. As a result, *TDS'* satire is a liberal satire which, as shown here, often mocks the openly conservative media outlets, such as Fox News and CNBC, or the openly conservative cable shows, such as CNN's Lou Dobbs Tonight. Under these circumstances, its polysemy has to be of a limited nature.

Additionally, *TDS'* satire employs liberal irony to further the sought-after bond between the show and its audience. Its irony is always limited to specific news items. It never engages grand theories or systemic social criticism. It is deeply postmodern and ready to mock its own critical legitimacy. Within these limits, its ambiguity and polysemy, if any, becomes clear and its misunderstandings manageable by the subsequent summary of the irony the host or the other correspondents provide. The next chapter contains the textual analysis of the primary text and sheds light on the type of encoded polysemy *TDS* employs.

Chapter 5. *TDS'* Encoded Polysemy – How the Study Was Done (Q1)

In order to examine the journalistic role of ***TDS***' comedic narrative my research question, Question #1, asks: "How does ***TDS'*** comedic narrative (primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news?"

I answered the question by engaging in a close analysis of two data pools: (a) ***TDS*** episodes, the primary text, (b) and mainstream media coverage of the same news as that covered by ***TDS***. The analysis relied on a close reading of the texts, which covered a multilayered textual analysis of the primary text which sought to identify all potential cognitive and comedic encoded meanings. My close reading focused on the audio-visual symbols used to encode meaning and their pre-existing cultural and political connotations, TDS' writers relied on to convey meaning (***Appendices*** C1, D1, E1, and F1). Once I mapped out all potential readings I could conceive (***Appendices*** C2, D2, E2, and F2), I interpreted the results to discover the primary text's potential polysemy, especially whether it opened a critical discussion of the news or yielded multiple readings. Finally, I compared those findings with the results of a complementary close reading of the mainstream media

coverage of the same news. This final textual analysis sought to address how *TDS'* comedic interpretation of the news compared with other opinion news shows.

1. Data collection – The Primary Text. Challenges and Results.

I monitored 171 *TDS* episodes,[51] slightly more than the number of episodes usually aired in any 12-month period of *TDS* cablecasts.[52] This nonselective monitoring started on January 21, 2009 and ended on January 20, 2010, intended to cover all 161 episodes aired during President Obama's first year in the Oval Office. For reasons explained below, I ended up adding ten additional episodes which had aired during the previous, George W. Bush, administration.

Each episode is stylistically organized in six segments. They are aired in the following order: (1) The Introduction, (2) The Monologue, (3) The Correspondents, (4) The Interview, (5) Jon Stewart Sharing Thoughts with Stephen Colbert, and (6) The Moment of Zen. These segments are sometimes separated by a commercial break. Most shows, when aired, contain all six segments but occasionally one or more are omitted. Since Fall 2009, each original, taped,

[51] 150 from 2009 and 11 during 2010.
[52] In 2007, TDS aired 138 episodes. In 2008, it aired 160 episodes and, in 2009, there were 150 episodes.

segment (not just the eventually cablecast portion of it) is uploaded in its entirety onto the show's official website." The official site contains all the episodes aired since 1999, the year when Stewart became the host of the show. [53] Thus, all original material is and has been uploaded onto the show's official site, http://www.thedailyshow.com/, where the various segments can be viewed in their entirety.

The episodes are archived in units which correspond to the segments mentioned above, with one difference. There is no introductory segment (Introduction -1) on the internet archive as there is in the cablecast show. On the other hand, on the internet archive there is a summary segment, which is made exclusively for the web, does not appear on air, and is entitled, ***The Daily Show in 60 seconds***. It is nothing but significant clips from the episode, a kind of summary overview. For example, the episode aired on Tuesday October 5, 2010 was summarized in a segment entitled "Daily Show: 10/5/10 in :60 Seconds" which was tagged

> Barack Obama apologizes to Guatemala, Lewis Black volunteers at a public school, and Jon compliments Bruce Willis on his well-sculpted skull.

[53] http://www.thedailyshow.com/videos/?term=cluster&start=0.

All archived segments are searchable by date, and tag. The tag contains the names of the personalities discussed or interviewed in that unit and the main issue covered within. This reliable archive mooted my earlier attempt to independently archive all episodes aired during the researched period of time, and eased the research process considerably.

Any loyal viewer, or fan, of the show discovers that ***TDS*** uses topical themes which epitomize the show's cultural, social, and political values to structure its cognitive and comedic content. Some of the more popular themes in the history of the show during Stewart's tenure are ***Indecision 2000***, ***Indecision 2004***, or even ***Mess O'Potamia***. Those are, respectively, a series of segments covering the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections, and ***TDS***'s coverage of the Bush administration's war in Iraq.

This very topical comedic narrative individualizes the show and brought it the well-known journalistic awards mentioned earlier. The topics signal both the liberal-populist and counter-cultural bent. The topical themes are usually covered in two segments of the show: The Monologue (2) and The Correspondents (3). They give the show its

tenor and thus those two segments contain the encoded meaning on which I decided to focus my analysis.

In view of this internal structure of the show, and how the segments are topically connected across several episodes, I decided to use a topical research sample. Perusing the *TDS'* online archive, it became apparent that the show thrives on a blend of populist, linguistically shocking identifiers. I found topical themes or headlines made up at least partially of gibberish as the result of bleeped expletives, such as *10 F#@king Years*, which aired though 2006, when Jon Stewart was celebrating his first ten years on the show. In fact, a search of the official archive showed that *TDS* used the term "*clusterf#@k*" as a topical identifier many times during its run.

Because the economy represented the most newsworthy event of late 2008 and the following two years (see *Appendix A*), I considered a group of segments discussing it. "*Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*" was the label for such a group, and I decided to find all segments under its banner. This particular *TDS Clusterf#@k* segment contained 21 segments and predated the Obama Administration, because the economic meltdown predated it. The segments were aired during the worst part (to date) of the current economic

meltdown: 2008 through 2010. Ten segments aired from September 25, 2008 through December 2008,[54] during the Bush II administration. Eleven segments aired in 2009 and ended in January 2010.[55] In addition to its newsworthiness, this topical cluster was the largest, despite the show's topical diversity. After identifying all topical groups during the time I monitored the show, I found that TDS did not allocate a larger number of segments, whether they referred to the Fox News coverage of the Tea Party movement or whether it were health care reform.

Moreover, the 21 segments entitled "***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House***" constitute a representative research sample for the primary text of the show, for at least two additional reasons. First, linguistically, the segment's identifier shares the show's counter-cultural attitude. Its obscene sounding ending, "f#@k" can be easily construed as provocative.

However, at the outset it should be noted that "***Clusterf#@k***" is not a term of art ***TDS*** made up out of whole cloth. In addition to "sexual orgy," OED defines

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[54] http://www.thedailyshow.com/videos/?term=Clusterf%23@k+to+the+Poor+House+&start=0. See also, http://dneacsu1.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/***clusterfuck***-page-p1.pdf , http://dneacsu1.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/***clusterfuck***-page-p2.pdf, and http://dneacsu1.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/***clusterfuck***-page-p3.pdf

[55] dneacsu.info/calendar.htm.

"*clusterfuck*" as a military term, meaning, "A bungled or botched undertaking; (also) a situation, state of affairs, or gathering (esp. a military operation) that is disorganized or chaotic."

It was first used in a report of the Vietnam War in 1969:

> "1969 B. E. HOLLEY Let. 12 Mar. in Vietnam 1968-9: Battalion Surgeon's Jrnl. (1993) 143 These are the screwups that the American public rarely hears about. They happen often enough over here that we have a term for them 'cluster-fuck'!"

Since then the term has evolved to cover such expressions as "It was a tabloid *clusterfuck*. Every network, newspaper, local news station, and wire service sent troops."[56] *TDS* first used it in 2006. Each time it designated a chaotic situation. *TDS*'s decision to start the *Clusterf#@k* segment about how the government mishandled the economic meltdown seemed auspicious.

Second, semantically, the segment shares the show's liberal-populist bent. The forth word, "poorhouse" in "*Clusterf#@k to the Poorhouse*" is the very concept which designated the centerpiece of American welfare in the 19th

[56] K. WALKER & M. SCHONE 2001. Son of Grifter xxxv., 351

century. The history of welfare in the United States shows the institution of the poorhouse once occupied a central place. Michael B. Katz presents this position persuasively when he states that during the

> century before the New Deal, the poorhouse dominated the structure of welfare […] relief. Although despised, dreaded, and often attacked, the poorhouse endured as the central arch of public welfare policy. Even in the twentieth century it did not disappear. Instead, through a gradual transformation it slid into a new identity: the public old-age home. Its history shows clearly how decent and compassionate care of the poor has always remained subordinate to both low taxes and the other great purposes that have guided relief. American welfare has remained within the shadow of the poorhouse. Poorhouses, which shut the old and the sick away from their friends and relatives, were supposed to deter the working class from asking for poor relief. There were, in fact, the ultimate defense against the erosion of the work ethic in early industrial America (Katz, 1986, p. 3).

Additionally, because I did not know how much audience-authored texts these topical segments produced, I included in my topical sample of 21 segments, two additional segments to use for my audience research. They were chosen from a previously discarded group of randomly selected segments, described in ***Appendix B***. From that sample I selected the episode aired on March 12, 2009, which contained the Interview segment with CNBC personality Jim Cramer, and which became the most-watched interview Stewart ever conducted as of that date. The second episode

aired on July 22, 2009 and contained the monologue when Stewart went head to head against Lou Dobbs, and CNN's coverage of Obama's birthplace, the so-called "birther" issue. Those two segments, due to their content had the most audience response and allowed a comparison of my textual interpretation of the primary text with that of the audience's reading of the text, as shown in Chapter 8.

2. Multilayered Analysis of the Primary Text

The research question Q1 dictated my research analysis. Question #1 asks: How does *TDS'* comedic narrative (primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news? The *CCEPS* contention is that *TDS* engages in critical inquiry of the news, which means that *TDS* does not propound a solution, but opens up a "guided" discussion about the news, which encourages audiences to question all news, including *TDS'*. To test this conclusion I first analyzed the openness of *TDS'* primary text, its polysemy. Then, I compared the encoded meaning of *TDS'* primary text with that of mainstream media outlets with regard to the same topic, the economic meltdown and how the Bush and Obama Administrations managed it from September 25, 2008 through January 20, 2010.

Scholars have argued that a multiperspectival analysis of news content would seem to be a more sound approach to deciphering its meaning-making. The multiple angle approach was used by Professor John Pavlik and media researcher Andras Szanto in their study of media coverage of presidential campaigns (Pavlik & Szanto, 1994). This approach seems best suited for the multiperspectival approach of this two-part project, which aims for a comprehensive textual interpretation through:

> (a) Content and discourse analyses focused on the comedic structure of the primary text and its visual and aural dual-coding, and
>
> (b) Interpretive analysis of the data.

To answer Q1 I performed both a macro and micro textual analysis, whose results were subsequently interpreted for potential polysemy. The macro analysis parceled the primary text into cognitive and comedic units. Each cognitive unit contained one idea and each comedic unit contained one joke. In the four examples published in ***Appendices*** C through F, I separated the cognitive narrative from its comedic scaffolding, by typing the latter in red ink. ***Appendices*** C through F cover four of the 21 segments of the "***Clusterf#@k***" research sample: two aired in 2008 and

two aired in 2009. When necessary, I included Stewart's language in quotes.

For example, the September 25, 2008 episode contained the first "*Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*" segment, and its primary text had a cognitive and comedic scaffolding of six cognitive units and seven comedic units (*Appendix C1*). The cognitive units were:

(1) ABC's news programming is flawed because it praises sensationalism;
(2) President Bush's economic address like his previous addresses is manipulative;
(3) President Bush's Economic Address is a scary bedtime story;
(4) President Bush abused his presidential powers;
(5) President Bush abuses his paternal position; and
(6) If we believe the President we deserve the unknown outcome.

Like all audiovisual texts, *TDS'* primary text encodes meaning through audio and visual connotative symbols, which come from animation and Stewart's acting as well. This dual symbolism was carefully noted, as the four examples covered in *Appendices* C1 through F1 show. These appendices contain all audiovisual elements that complemented Stewart's monologue in a meaning-making manner and they are printed out *in italic font*.



Image 10: Introductory visual symbol-*Cluseterf#@k to the Poorhouse*, 9/25/2008

For example, all "*Clusterf#@k*" segments start with an introductory cognitive unit, whose meaning is built both visually and aurally. Simultaneously, *TDS'* audiences experience visual and aural meaning cues: the image of an isolated shanty town shack with broken glass which falls down only to reveal the logo of the segment. As the image wanes from full screen to a square above Stewart's shoulder, we hear broken glass and Stewart reacts as if he had been showered.

In this introductory segment, the visual symbols are:

1. a shanty town shack,
2. a ruined shack under the weight of the logo: "*Clusterf#@k to the Poor House,*" and
3. a scared-looking Stewart shattered with broken glass from the shack.

The aural symbols are:

1. ominous silence followed by
2. broken glass noise.

This audio-visual analysis provides only part of the raw material used to identify the encoded meanings

according to a well-informed subjective interpretation of the text. I complemented this micro audio-visual analysis with a detailed discourse analysis.

In earlier studies of ***The Daily Show***, scholars noted the specifics of its narrative semiotics. Elliot Gaines explored how meaning is constructed through scene continuity (1998, p. 81). Though not focused on television shows, Helle M. Davidsen's more recent article on literary semiotics and cognitive semantics offers additional analytical tools. While both semiotics and semantics emphasize the role of language in meaning creation, cognitive semantics goes to a higher level of specificity, by expressly stressing the role of cultural contextualization (Davidsen, 2007, p. 337). In the four examples (***Appendices*** C through F) provided here this analysis is typed in blue.

I added this complementary level of analysis, because delving into meaning implies cultural knowledge of the language used to create meaning. Such knowledge is shared by group members and it creates a boundary of meaning. I am aware that interpreting signs, and their cultural meaning is, as Jean Paul Sartre explained, the art of controlled guesswork (1940). But my archeological approach to meaning

analysis is at best an educated guess work: it points out all measurable elements and the level of objectivity their interpretation can achieve.

The present study is based on a sample of episodes and their theme-oriented segments, united under the previously military banner, ***clusterfuck***. During its run, ***TDS*** has used "***clusterfuck***" to express its views about specific social, media, or other cultural havoc. This time ***TDS*** refers to an economic mess. Moreover, Stewart often paraphrases known expressions, or even uses little known personalities to offer not a preferred reading to a specific commentary, but the only logical reading. The full understanding of such "bonding" expressions required the use of well-known reference works, such as the Oxford English Dictionary, or less expected sources, such as MTV archives of "American Idol in 60 minutes," Wikipedia, and again, newspaper proprietary databases, such as Nexis and Proquest.

Following Jean-Paul Sartre's premise, explained in ***L'Imaginaire***, that the human mind requires only essential elements to reach the meaning of any type of discourse, because the listener supplements his understanding through what Sartre calls "apprentissage" (learning) and "quasi-observations" ([1940], 2005, pp. 15-63), I then interpreted

all these meaning-impregnated symbols. I engaged in identifying potential meanings for each cognitive and comedic unit.

When all the meaning-making units were carefully identified I grouped them into potential encoded readings. As shown in the ***Appendices*** C2 through F2, for each segment, I identified all readings which appeared to be located within the realm of possibility. I defined that interpretive space according to the social-historical context of the economic meltdown, and its widely accepted understanding within the New York-based liberal media outlets, such as ***TDS***. That understanding was provided by the work of one prominent scholar, Columbia Business Professor Joseph Stiglitz (See ***Appendix*** G). Stiglitz connected the meltdown to the decades-long lax regulatory practices of the United States banking industry, and he ascribed its persistence to inadequate government solutions (See ***Appendix*** G). Within these limits, all potential ***TDS'*** encoded meanings would have to, if not agree at least not contradict, Stiglitz's view.

From all potential readings, the preferred encoded reading(s) became the one(s) which were rationally consistent, that is made sense, according to ***TDS'*** comedic

content and delivery. Finally, to the extent that my findings indicate that *TDS'* primary text has a rather limited polysemy, because its preferred reading is the only one which makes sense and engenders laughs, then they disprove *CCEPS'* thesis that *TDS'* critical inquiry comes from its comedic narrative. However, because *TDS* delivers news as laughing matters, I supplemented my *TDS* textual analysis with that of other news shows which covered the same news. This additional analysis is meant to find out whether *CCEPS'* view of *TDS* as promoting critical inquiry came from *TDS'* unique perspective of the news, when compared to other media outlets' coverage of the same news.

3. Sample Analysis

3.1 *Clusterf#@k to the Poor House* - Dive of Death Episode #13121[57]

On September 25, 2008, *TDS* aired its first segment on the national economic meltdown. As *Appendix C1* shows, Stewart's monologue focused on the President Bush's address which was carried by all networks and many cable shows the previous day. The potentially encoded readings are

[57] http://www.thedailyshow.com/videos/?term=*clusterfuck*%20to%20the%20poor%20house

available in *Appendix* C2. Based on the contextual limits explained above, I found the following preferred encoded reading for each unit analysis:

Preferred Encoded Meaning – Unit 1:
JS views ABC's sensationalist programming as a lack of journalistic responsibility
TDS chose to name the new segment-cluster "*Clusterfuck* to the poorhouse,"
And
because it resonates with its political and cultural values: "Clusterf#@k" sounds obscene, despite its powerful "messy" meaning; "poorhouse" refers to a welfare institution and it alludes to the social segment afflicted most by this crisis: the poor – and by extension individuals.

Preferred Encoded Meaning-Unit 2
JS does not like President Bush because his propensity to use scary words such as "extraordinary means" is manipulative.

Preferred Encoded Meaning – Unit 3

JS intimates the President is abusing his powers by telling us scary stories right before we go to bed.

Preferred Encoded Meanings -Unit 4 –
JS intimates that Bush is overreaching, abusing his presidential powers

Preferred Encoded Meanings – Unit 5

JS ironically thanked the president, believing that he treats all of us as children.

Preferred Encoded Meanings – Unit 6
JS warns us that the President is yet again misrepresenting reality.

Overall, the September 25, 2008 Monologue covers arguably the most important political issue of that day. It

acts as a critique of then-President Bush's communication style, which Stewart views as condescending and less then transparent. Stewart's segue into the topic is a brief critique of media sensationalism, and ABC's programming choice: to interrupt a magic show with President Bush's economic policy announcement. Stewart's policy criticism is filled with innuendos and inside remarks: déjà vu, a French expression broadly adopted in English to mean the exact same thing as in French: it is replaced with "memory freedom," which alluded to the infamous "freedom fries" which briefly, during the Iraq invasion, replaced "French fries" in some American restaurants. Such cultural distinctions are designed to segregate *TDS'* audience from the people who did not find the linguistic replacement to be appalling. *TDS'*s live audience laughed, confirming Stewart's belief that his audience agrees with him that such linguistic shenanigans are foolish and laughable.

Stewart used linguistic and visual elements to underline the similarities between the two televised public statements President Bush made: one to announce the decision to go to war with Iraq and the other to wage a large government bailout instead of nationalization as a response to the illiquid banking industry. While President

Bush supports, however reluctantly, the capitalist system as it is and chooses loans over governmental takeover, which other capitalist systems have chosen on a temporary basis when key industries fail, Stewart does not challenge the wisdom of that choice, nor offer an alternative choice. Instead, Stewart seems to frame his narrative in terms of the children's story Bush told in 2003, implying he is doing it again now, and that we should remember Bush tells children's stories. Stewart was duped in 2003, and did not criticize the 2003 presidential broadcast. Stewart intimates that he has wised up since then and we, his audience, should do the same. The wake up call seems ambiguous, because it remains unclear whether we should disbelieve the gravity of the economic meltdown altogether or the call for quick, or this, action to remedy it. Stewart does not criticize Bush's implied solution – a bailout of the failing industries. In fact, Stewart's criticism is one of style: bedtime stories have a moral and are useful tools to mollify children going to bed. Stewart does not seem appalled at the substance of Bush's policies. He is not involved in a substantive critique of those policies, only of their style. It is interesting to note that while *TDS* engages in policy criticism, it is style and

not substance that Stewart reckons with in this somewhat cryptic discourse. But its cryptic innuendoes, the above-mentioned déjà vu and "freedom memory," function more as a wink to his audience, which, in return winks back with light laughter.

It appears that *TDS* went beyond laughs in this segment. Stewart ended his monologue focused on the president and the major political issue of the moment: the economic crisis and its management. No one can tell whether Stewart intentionally paraphrased George Santayana, a philosopher much loved by one of America's first pundits, Walter Lippmann, or whether he paraphrased the quote now referred to as a popular American saying. Santayana said "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Popular wisdom has adopted it in various related forms.

Stewart ended the monologue with the subversive version: "it is true that those who do not study the past get an exciting opportunity to repeat it." The ending is certainly unexpectedly biting and, as such, ambiguous in its potential meanings. However, at the time of the first incident, the March 17, 2003, speech on the imminence of the war in Iraq, all national media, including *TDS*, avoided critically inquiring whether weapons of mass destructions

in Iraq existed or, at least, whether there was reliable evidence.

On March 19th 2003, ***TDS*** featured a segment entitled "Iraq – Are We There Yet?" which was humorous because between the time the show was taped and the time it aired, the 48-hour deadline President Bush gave Iraq's Saddam Hussein, would have expired and we could have been there. Accordingly, it seems that unlike the scholarly view to the contrary (Baym), ***TDS*** engages in either mocking power or pretending to speak truth to power. In 2003, ***TDS*** engaged in mocking power. In 2008, ***TDS*** pretended to tell truth to power: The substance of ***TDS'*** criticism was the style not the substance of Bush's remarks.

In 2008, ***TDS*** appeared to engage in a safe monologue with power. It perhaps pleased its many audiences, at different levels, emotionally and intellectually. But the intellectual ambiguity of the paraphrase made little sense other than as a cute cultural identifier: ***TDS*** and its audience know about Santayan. Factually, the 2008 meltdown was much too real and obvious to be confused with the 2003 call to arms for intangible or even non-existent threats. Reality arguably asked for a quick political decision in 2008. Reality did not ask for such expediency in 2003. Bush

was not engaged in telling bedtime stories in 2008: journalists should be able to discern nuances not fabricate patterns. ***TDS*** chose to present Bush as a fool so the shows' formula works. In fact, at a journalistic level it can be argued that ***TDS*** engaged in misinformation: our economy was near collapse. In terms of opinion journalism, as shown below, CNN Lou Dobbs did a better job in clearly stating his biased opinion against a quick political intervention, and Dobbs did so without pretending that he based his choice on some presidential behavioral pattern.

3.2 ***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*** - G20 Summit[58] Episode #13132 Monday, November 17, 2008

Compared to the previous segment, the November 17, 2008 segment, whose multi-layered analysis is available in ***Appendix*** D1, was much less emotionally charged. Its cognitive structure was easier to follow as well. It had two well defined parts: within the economic news of the day, the first part focused on President Obama and the second part on President Bush. However, its message was delivered via the same multilayered audio-visual comedy.

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58 http://www.thedailyshow.com/videos/?term=***clusterfuck***%20to%20the%20poor%20house

While the potentially encoded meanings are available in *Appendix* D2, below are what I deemed to be the preferred encoded meaning for each unit of analysis.

Prefered Encoded Meaning – Unit 1:

JS views President Elect Obama's YouTube address as a technology-driven stunt which may have a negative impact on his future credibility as the next FDR.

Prefered Encoded Meaning – Unit 2

Stewart intimates Bush engages in empty protocol rather than substantial presidential acts.

Prefered Encoded Meaning – Unit # 3:

JS intimates that it is the people's responsibility to say when capitalism needs to be fixed and fix it, and not President Bush's role.

Prefered Encoded Meaning - Unit #4

JS does not believe that any real work can be done at international meetings, such as the G20 summit;

Prefered Encoded Meaning - Unit # 5

In JS's assessment, President Bush's qualifications are as strong as those of a showboat entertainer.

The November 17, 2008 Monologue contains media criticism of how newly elected President Obama is handling his public image: too smart for his own good. Stewart suggests Obama is trying too hard to be perceived as active, engaged, and youthful and uses so much social media and technology that this strategy may backfire, as Stewart suggests analogous behavior did with Carter. The segment

also contains a criticism of Bush's lack of substantive presidential style: Derided as if he were a cuckoo-clock wooden puppet, Bush is devalued as a fool. Again, ***TDS***'s political criticism is limited to style and even when it addresses a vacuous style it does not give other examples except stylistic ones, such as Bush's penchant for nicknames. Finally, the episode contains a rather strong rebuke of international organizations and their meetings, even those as informal as G20. However, the real story behind that meeting, as was reported in mainstream media coverage, was that the French President, unlike its UK homologue, was pushing for hard international financial rules whose violation would have brought certain repercussions to wrongdoers and thus ensured protection against future global meltdowns. Interestingly, President Bush seemed favorable to the measure. Equally interestingly, President Obama did not support the French approach for "hard international rules." ***TDS***, true to its raison-d'être seemed more interested in following a script of ***Bad Bush*** than to look for less comic nuances in Bush's Presidential performance.

3.3 ***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*** (07:49) Economic Recovery Plan Episode #14046 Thursday, February 5, 2009

At the end of the Bush presidency, the *Clusterf#@k to the Pour House* segment continued. The conditions that made it both relevant and successful in 2008 continued in 2009: despite the newly elected president Obama, the economic crisis continued and in fact worsened for many. From the next eleven episodes which aired in 2009-2010, the following two are representative for two reasons. First, they cognitively continue the previous *Clusterf#@k to the Pour House* segment. Second, they point out *TDS'* inherent bias in covering the same economic issue when a friendly administration is in charge. Their micro analysis is available in *Appendices* E1 and F1.

The first segment of the *Clusterf#@k to the Poor House* sample which aired during the Obama administration was cablecast on February 5, 2009. Its delivery is a bit sinuous, going back and forth to make the same point that the Republican legislators are not working hard to solve the economic meltdown, but its cognitive structure is again clear: a stylistic displeasure with the new President and substantial disapproval of the work of the federal Congress. Again, the encoded meaning was delivered using a multilayered, audio-visual comedy. While the potentially

encoded meanings are available in ***Appendices C2*** through ***F2***, here are what I deemed to be the preferred encoded meaning for each unit of analysis:

Preferred Encoded Meaning - Unit 1:

JS uses the Bush-Cheney Homeland Security color scheme to better communicate the depth of our economic crisis.

Preferred Encoded Meanings - <u>Unit 2:</u>

JS does not consider Obama's style, here his alliteration, the best way to ask Congress to act fast in solving the nation's economic emergency, and consequently,

and ,

JS does not believe President Obama did the right thing by asking Congress to act (or deferring the responsibility to act to Congress)

Preferred Encoded Meaning - <u>Unit 3:</u>

JS intimates Republican Representative Thune is a fool.

Preferred Encoded Meaning - <u>Unit 4:</u>

JS intimates Democratic Congresswoman McCaskill is a fool.

Preferred Encoded Meaning - <u>Unit 5:</u>

JS intimates all Republicans are foolish and unreasonable in their opposition to the economic stimulus bill.

In the February 5, 2009 Monologue, Stewart seems to mock President Obama's literal style although it does not seem clear whether the mockery is truthful or ironic, and

in fact Stewart may really admire the style of the new president. That ambiguity aside, Stewart engages in political criticism of how Congress functions. Stewart's criticism is grounded in his belief that both Republican and Democratic members of Congress engage in unprofessional behavior. However, again Stewart's criticism focuses on style. A Democratic Senator is criticized for appearing fierce when, in fact, Stewart suggests her fierce nature is limited to her words and red-colored wardrobe. Republican Senators are ridiculed for pointing out the amount of money the government wants to spend bailing out bankrupt banks and for playing politics, as if there were no difference between the two. ***TDS*** uses a very large critical brush, when nuances would seem more informative and helpful in forming a critical idea about political issues and positions. Not all political opinions are equal, and not all wrath is the same, although ***TDS*** implies they are. However morally ambiguous ***TDS'*** position is nevertheless clear; Stewart criticizes both Democrats and Republicans, much as a Rortian ironist would be expected to do.

3.4 *Clusterf#@k to the Poor House* - Global Edition; Episode # 14044; Segment3 –Thursday, April 2, 2009 [59]

While not the final segment of the ***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*** sample, I chose the April 2, 2009 segment for two main reasons. First, it represents continuity of coverage. Its content continues the ***TDS*** coverage of the G-20 summit which had been announced in Washington in November 2008. If in November, 2008, the Republican President Bush hosted that event, although Obama was the newly elected president, in April 2009, the Democratic President Obama played center stage. The April 2009 follow-up event took place in London and all mainstream media outlets reported it. Second, it is the only segment in the group of ***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*** segments which contains both Stewart's monologue (Segment #2) and Stewart's interview with one of his fake correspondents (Segment #3). I analyzed those segments in ***Appendix*** F1 and the potentially encoded meanings in ***Appendix F2***. Below are what I deemed to be the preferred encoded meaning for each unit of analysis of this segment:

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[59] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-april-2-2009/clusterf--k-to-the-poor-house---global-edition (The episode is tagged Thursday April 2, 2009, Clusterf#@k to the Poor House - Global Edition Now that that last d*ck is out of office, why is Wyatt Cenac still under attacked at the G20 Summit protests?)

Preferred Encoded Meaning - Unit 1:

JS points out that Michelle Obama upstaged the President in the media coverage of the G-20 summit.

Preferred Encoded Meaning - Unit 2:

JS intimates that the individual protesters were ineffective: "grunters against windows" with sweaters tied around their waists

and

the EU representatives are equally ineffective when expressing their disdain for the American recovery path.

Preferred Encoded Meaning - Unit 3:

Contrary to JS, Cenac is irritated by British servility and the ineffective lack of subservience shown by other foreign head of states

and

Cenac suggests that President Obama's popularity should quiet the foreign opposition.

The April 4, 2009 Correspondents' segment is a follow-up to its November 17th coverage of the first post-economic meltdown G20 summit. Stewart lightly satirizes President Obama for being upstaged by his wife. Then he takes on the popular demonstrations and ridicules them by picking on the wardrobe of a participant. However, instead of commenting on the fact that the man with the sweater around his waist seemed more middle class than hooligan (which could have

raised interesting comments about the reasons for engaging in the type of symbolic speech in which that demonstrator engaged), Stewart labeled him a whimpering anarchist who dressed up for a chilly morning and then, getting hot, put his sweater around his waist. *TDS'* live audience found the comment funny.

Unexpectedly, Whyatt Cenac brought the *TDS'* political criticism to a new level of dissent, which went beyond the straightforward comments in which *TDS* usually engages. Cenac pretended to comment on the President Obama's style to attack the lack of substantive difference between him and his predecessor. At that summit, though not mentioned on the show, Obama's rhetoric had been more conservative than his predecessor's, even reactionary. Obama had opposed the tougher European demands for international financial regulations.

On the show, Cenac appeared confused by the fact that, once elected, Obama must put on a more substantial performance than merely being the face of America. The subversive nature of Cenac's comment made it ambiguous. It also potentially opened the discussion to further comments on whether Obama is anything more than a gracious Bush, whom America voted as its "Idol," not long ago.

In each segment analyzed here, *TDS* parodied the news media. In each segment Stewart satirized the president of the day as ineffective at some professional and personal level. Each time the comedic narrative built meaning, Stewart or the Correspondents punctuated it by unambiguously summarizing its critical judgment. "It's not only the protesters," claims Cenac explaining the international hostility facing the United States at the G-20 summit held in London in 2009. "It is everybody. The only person kissing our ass is the Prime Minister of Britain," Cenac parodies the news shows using forbidden but very clear and direct language. The punch line follows the clarification in this instance. Cenac adds: "How is that different than before?" The live audience laughed at the joke.

Like all *TDS* jokes, this one also works only for those who follow international relations and who share the views about our foreign allies: Britain had been our lonely staunch ally through the Bush administration and continued in that position under Obama. Assuming that the similarity of knowledge and views between Cenac and his audience existed, the comedic and cognitive meaning *TDS* built in

that brief example is both critical and clear. However, the reason for the criticism remains obscure: it is unaddressed.

4 Findings: The Limited Polysemy of the Encoded Meanings.

The four segments of "*Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*" analyzed in detail in *Appendices* C1 through F1 are representative of the research sample and of the show in its entirety. Like every *TDS* episode, these segments covered the news of the day, according to Stewart and his writers. They aired during a week when the financial crisis and economic meltdown received priority in the media coverage. In addition, they exemplify *TDS'* style and substance. They contain the linguistic profanities and visual trademarks of the show: loud, clownish, visual and aural elements which punctuate the preferred, encoded meaning. They also contain Stewart's moderate and at times stilted liberal views of the news covered (e.i., we failed the free market system).

Like all "Clusterf#@k" segments, these also contained *TDS'* response to a significant recent political event. The September 25, 2008 segment aired in response to President Bush's announcement of the national economic crisis and to

its mainstream media coverage.[60] The November 17, 2008 segment aired in response to the first G20 summit dealing with the global economic crisis.[61] The February 5, 2009 segment aired in response to the Obama Administration's decision to take his recovery plan to Congress. Finally, the April 2, 2009 was *TDS'* response to the second G20 summit intended to deal with the global economic crisis.[62]

In order to decipher *TDS'* polysemy I engaged in a macro and micro textual analysis of the primary text as detailed as I could imagine. However, despite its exhaustive nature, it has clear limits. Irrespective of its depth, it is a subjective enterprise and mirrors my own cultural and political biases as is any process of textual analysis and interpretation.

Furthermore, the breadth of my research data was rather narrow: it followed *TDS'* treatment of one issue, albeit one of national importance, the impact of the economic meltdown on the "poor house." In that respect, my final interpretation of *TDS'* polysemy is open to criticism as inconclusive with respect to the journalistic value of

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[60] http://www.journalism.org/node/13007.

[61] http://www.journalism.org/index_report/pej_news_coverage_index_november_16_22_2009

[62] http://dneacsu1.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/mostfollowedstories2009.doc

TDS; many more such analyses need to be undertaken. However, it is conclusive in one aspect: it points out the flaws in the work of the *CCEPS* scholars when they attempt to make large generalizations about *TDS*. Reminiscent of *TDS*' own sweeping judgment calls, *CCEPS* scholars seem to have reached their judgment on visibly limited and biased data interpretations, which rely on assumptions and unconvincing evidence.

However, within the timeframe I studied, and understanding that *TDS* is a work in progress, the first question of this dissertation did remedy the *CCEPS* research gaps. My first question (Q1) asked: How does *TDS'* comedic narrative (primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news? The answer engaged in a process of archeological scaffolding of the primary text.

My textual analysis of the primary text suggested that *TDS* retells the political news of the day or the recent past and in the process encourages laughs. Through a multilayered textual analysis I addressed all potential cognitive and comedic meanings as well as their cultural and political connotations. It became apparent that most of the time the comedic retelling is straightforward and obvious. There is no indication that the encoded meaning

was polysemic, or that Stewart desired or encouraged polysemy. There is no indication that the audience is encouraged to read into the text meanings not laid out by the primary text. There is no indication that the audience can build "alternative" meanings into the text.

Thus, because *TDS'* polysemy appeared to be limited I engaged in a secondary, supplemental textual analysis. I compared what I deemed to be *TDS'* preferred reading with that of the other news shows of the day. *CCEPS'* claim about *TDS'* critical inquiry could still be explained, though on a lower level, by its different interpretation of the news. If polysemy is not what makes *TDS'* presence alternative journalism, perhaps its very laugh-provoking reading of the news, though a much more limited claim, is what distinguishes *TDS* among the existing news media outlets.

5 Comparative Textual Analysis: *TDS* v. Mainstream Media

At the outset, it should be noted that although the *CCEPS* literature does not broach it, the following textual comparison while undertaken by some *CCEPS* scholars (Jones) raises the question whether *TDS'* audience is as passive as the audience of mainstream news shows. The unexplored

assumption is whether *TDS'* audience thus potentially accepts *TDS'* comedic bits as a substitute for its critical thinking, in the same manner CCEPS describes the other news shows' audience. However, this research gap aside, I compared all the news *TDS* cannibalized for its "*Clusterf#@k*" segment with its *TDS* coverage, because the only other rational argument or suggestion to support CCEPS' position and believe that *TDS* engages in alternative, critical journalism, which is CCEPS' main claim, was to analyze the textual difference between *TDS* and the other news shows with respect to the same news.

Thus, I collected all the economic news coverage offered by specific media outlets during the week when the specific segment was aired. I exhaustively accessed all the newswire services and newspapers in ProQuest and television news shows in Factiva. Both are proprietary databases which, when used in a complementary manner, offer the most comprehensive access to news.

The research query was very simple and transparent: the research terms were "economy" and the president of that moment. The results confirmed the expectation: when *TDS* focused on the economy, all media segments focused it. The September 24-25, 2008 news shows focused on President Bush's first national

address of the year of which the most important substantive message was that the economy was in crisis. The November 16-17, 2009 and April 2, 2009 news shows focused on the G20 Summit and global economic recovery, and the first week of February, 2009, the news show focused on the economic recovery bill.

More exactly, for example, during September 24-26, 2008, the ProQuest search brought up 24 articles on President Bush's speech on the economy; 8 mentioned it as a headline or title (Table 1).

	September 24-26, 2008 = ProQuest query for "Bush speech economy" (8 out of 24 results had these elements in the headline/title), as follows:
1	Bush calls bailout vital to economy that is 'in danger' Speech marks growing sense of urgency Sheryl Gay Stolberg, David M. Herszenhorn. International Herald Tribune. Paris: Sep 26, 2008. p. 1
2	Our entire economy is in danger' Julie. Hirschfeld Davis. Greensboro News Record. Greensboro, N.C.: Sep 25, 2008. p. A.1
3	Excerpts From President Bush's Speech to the Nation on the Economy; [Text] New York Times (Late Edition (East Coast)). New York, N.Y.: Sep 25, 2008. p. A.26
4	Entire Economy at Risk, president tells America. Bush paints ominous picture if Congress fails to approve bailout plan. Jennifer Loven. South Florida Sun - Sentinel. Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Sep 25, 2008. p. A.3
5	President Puts His Powers of Persuasion to the Test. Michael Abramowitz - Washington Post Staff Writer. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C.: Sep 25, 2008. p. A.12
6	Bush vows 'bold steps' to revive U.S. economy Anonymous. McClatchy - Tribune Business News. Washington: Sep 24, 2008.
7	In prime-time speech, Bush calls for bipartisan solution. David Lightman. McClatchy - Tribune News Service. Washington: Sep 24, 2008.
8	Bush vows 'bold steps' to revive U.S. economy; Stresses usual themes to world leaders Jon Ward, Betsy Pisik. Washington Times. Washington, D.C.: Sep 24, 2008. pg. A.1

Table 1. ProQuest Search Results

No journal within the ProQuest content contained anything connecting “Bush" "economy” and the ABC choice of broadcasting the speech, which made the approach *TDS* used to comment on the event culturally unique. *TDS’* singular coverage of the event it deemed worth spoofing remains unique within the world of television, as the Factiva search demonstrated. The query contained the show’s identifier, and either the name of the president (Bush or Obama) or the word “economy,” for the day or the week preceding the *TDS* episode, if the latter aired on a Monday.

I reviewed the transcripts of some evening broadcast and cable news shows which preceded *TDS* episodes by hours. I chose three Fox News shows, including *the Factor*, which by April 2009, was the most popular cable show for the previous 100 months. In addition to the obviously watched Fox News shows, I included all mainstream evening news shows, *ABC News: Nightline, CBS Evening News,* and *NBC Nightly News*, which still attract about 20 million viewers a night, and a few cable news shows. Besides *CNN’s Lou Dobbs Tonight*, I chose the relatively uncontroversial *Anderson Cooper 360*. As Table 2 below shows, the sample also contained an opinion news show which, like *TDS*, is

perceived to incorporate liberal irony and satire to present the news, *MSNBC's Rachel Maddow Show*.

Name of the Show	**Date**	**Date**	**Date**	**Date**	**Date**	**Date**
	9/24/08	**11/11/08**	**11/14/08**	**11/15/08**	**2/4/09**	**4/1/09**
Fox News: The O'Reilly Factor	x		x		x	x
Fox News: Glenn Beck						x
Fox News: Bret Baier and Stars						x
Fox News: Special Report with Bret Baier						x
CNN – Anderson Cooper 360	x	x			x	x
CNN- Lou Dobbs Tonight	x			x	x	x
ABC News: Nightline	x				x	x
CBS Evening News	x				x	x
NBC Nightly News	x				x	x
MSNBC The Rachel Maddow Show	x				x	x

Table 2. Factiva Search Results

While each news show covered the economy and the president's effort to deal with the economic disaster, none pointed out *TDS'* "dive to death" metaphor approach.

But is this type of visual or linguistic derivative originality likely to revolutionize journalism? No, and this answer does not imply that *TDS* is just a bit of forgettable comedy just because it cannot be everything *CCEPS* literature has longed for in its writings. For example, on Wednesday, September 24, 2008, then President Bush addressed the nation for the first time during that year, his 35th during his presidency, and for the first time during primetime, 9 PM. All mainstream print and

television media noted the significance of the speech: after he had addressed the United Nations a day earlier, letting world leaders know that we did not acknowledge responsibility for the global economic crisis, but that we intended to save capitalism through government spending, Bush decided, or felt compelled, to address the voters and taxpayers.

Even the well-known biased ***Washington Times*** reported on September 24, 2008 that President Bush assured world leaders he was taking "bold steps" to solve the economic crisis, but "spent most of his speech dwelling on his familiar themes of combating terrorism and promoting democracy." However, two of the 32 paragraphs of his speech focused on the need to "quickly pass legislation" which dealt with the meltdown. The brevity of his reference to the state of the economy was emphasized by the paper and compared with the contrasting remarks of other world leaders attending the United Nations General Assembly. On the same day, ***The McClatchy Tribune News Service*** reported that the President had "warm words for oversight of government bailouts and potential limits on executive pay at troubled firms."

On September 25, 2008, the ***South Florida Sun-Sentinel*** reported on the President's 12-minute prime-time address to the nation carried live by the four networks and PBS. It described the speech as his attempt to "rescue his tough-sell bailout package." On September 25, 2008, ***The New York Times*** printed excerpts of the speech and placed the entire transcript online. All newspapers which carried excerpts of the speech printed the following passage about the economic rescue bailout package:

> This entire [bailout] proposal is about benefiting the American people because today's fragile financial system puts their economic well-being at risk, [Henry Paulson Jr.] said. Without action, he added, Americans' personal savings and the ability of consumers and business to finance spending, investment and job creation are threatened. (Herald Tribune, Sep. 26, 2008, p. 1)

NBC's ***Nightly News*** focused on the role of the President's address in rather clear words: 60% of the population either did not approve of the bailout or did not know anything about it. The president, said NBC, would need both to sell it to the public and put pressure on Congress to act. In addition to broadcasting President Bush's address to the nation, both ***CBS Evening News*** and ***ABC News: Nightline*** reported that, earlier in the evening, President Bush had invited both presidential candidates, Senator Obama (D) and Senator McCain (R), to join him in

Washington and work on the $700 billion bailout plan. ***ABC Nightline*** described the $700 billion as "4 million Bentleys or 16,000 mansions," as a sign of the "economic times." ***MSNBC: The Rachel Maddow Show*** also reported that the two presidential candidates issued a joint statement calling for congressional unity to pass a bailout and to avoid "economic catastrophe." ***CNN 360 Anderson Cooper*** reported that Senator McCain had just announced that he was suspending his campaign. He called for a postponement of the first presidential debate with his opponent, scheduled for that Friday, September 26.

CNN's Lou Dobbs differed from the other shows by engaging in opinion journalism. He questioned the need for urgency and the employment of what he called the

> politics of fear, whether it be in foreign policy or whether it be in domestic policy. And to apply what has worked at the margin I guess over recent years, certainly it was more successful in earlier years. I think that should be rejected by American people outright (September, 24, 2008).

On the same show, Dobbs further inquired whether our leaders were treating the American people with "condescending nonsense," instead of intelligent explanations.

The following day, on September 25, 2008, ***TDS*** addressed the economic issues on its newly introduced "***Clusterf@#k to the Poor House***" segment. That ***TDS*** segment had two cognitive components: media criticism (the ABC's choice to carry the broadcast of the speech) and Bush-bashing. With regards to media criticism, the style and linguistic associations, a magician's dive to the death and the economy's dive to death, seemed wittier than the content of the criticism. Network programming is often open to ridicule. In this particular instance of the presidential speech, it seems to have been more of an easy laugh than revolutionary journalism that might have put the mainstream media to shame.

The Bush-bashing component was built in the popular prosecutorial style of accusation and proof. But where admiring scholars see speaking truth to power in this and similar episodes, one can just as easily find an ersatz debate: juxtaposing edited versions of two different speeches to make an indirect point that seems to have lost its way and, perhaps, interest as well. Stewart engaged in parody, irony and satire to point out Bush's politics of fear and condescending speech. The bedtime story metaphor did not work as biting criticism because this time the

President was not telling a “story.” The crisis was clearly real. The solution had to be equally real and arguably speedy.

If all news media covered the speech in an equally informative manner: either by covering segments of the speech or the entire speech, and then by analyzing it, then *TDS* had to distinguish itself through its “alternative” analysis of the event or of how the other news media covered the event. Based on this example, which is representative of *TDS*' "journalistic style," it is difficult to argue the “alternative” value of *TDS’* opinion journalism. For example, Lou Dobbs’s advocacy journalism succeeded in being informative and critical, while palpably different from all other coverage. It told of the meltdown and its bailout solution, and Dobb’s opinion that the bailout was not an appropriate or desirable solution. *TDS*' engaged in misinformation (Bush was telling bedtime stories) for the sake of its comedic narrative.

TDS’ take on the speech was two-fold: the economy is in tatters, but President Bush is not the leader to get us out of it because of his habit of “telling us bedtime stories.” Whether presenting the economic plunge as a metaphorical dive to the death and Presidential

incompetence as bedtime storytelling constitutes alternative journalism is certainly very debatable. For these reasons, *TDS* seems weak in message as opinion journalism, but worth noting as a serious program of media criticism (see ABC's sensationalism).

This complementary textual analysis of the primary text through the prism of mainstream media sheds further light on the process of understanding the journalistic role of *TDS*. As seen here, *TDS* does not report the news. *TDS* does report the flaws in media news which have a comedic value *TDS* writers can exploit. *TDS* appears to choose those flaws in reporting which are perceived to be potentially the most risible on issues the show's writers deem important to them (Love, 2003). Its highly subjective criticism is undeniably valuable, because its perspective may be more valid than that of other news shows.

This comparative textual analysis thus sheds light on further flaws in the work of at least some of the scholars describing *TDS* as revolutionizing journalism (Jones and Baym). *TDS'* main role seems to be its media criticism rather than its news analysis. Furthermore, the only empirical data *CCEPS* used support the inference that *TDS*, with few exceptions, will always choose the criticism which

engenders safe[63] laughs, and that criticism is about how the news media report the news, rather than what constitutes the news.

6. Limits and Future Research

The findings described in the preceding sections suggest that *TDS'* comedic narrative encourages cultural subversiveness at a symbolic level: either linguistically, visually, or both. The comedic narrative streamlines the encoded meaning because the punch line always relies on some pre-existent knowledge of the news, popular culture, or the show itself. For example, *TDS* relishes calling certain political behavior "dickish" or certain people "douche." While hearing these words may provoke laughs because of their irreverence, usually their role is to connect the appellation to a person or behavior which in the past has fit the bill without argument. President Bush comes to mind as a wooden puppet in light of the fact that his Vice-President, Dick Cheney has established himself as a puppeteer in the imagination of the general public, or at least of a certain segment of the public.

[63] The existing data indicate that *TDS* seems to avoid criticizing news shows produced by its corporate headquarters. No *CCEPS* scholars seem concerned that TDS rarely, if ever, covers CBS Evening News.

My research focused on the encoded meaning of each segment. More needs to be done to decipher meaning within the context of an entire episode, or even the show in general, though as noted here, each segment has its own continuity within the thematic cluster run through multiple episodes.

Furthermore, even if critical polysemy is not part of *TDS*' raison-d'être, or even if it becomes obvious that TDS' "alternative" or "revolutionary" value does not reside in its opinion journalism or its unique point of view of the encoded text, *TDS* remains a media phenomenon which has successfully brought an emerging genre of political satire and media criticism to a new level of sophistication. CCEPS did not seem satisfied with such a label for TDS, and perhaps erroneously thought to view it more or something different than it is. As shown here, *TDS* engages in political criticism and embraces a clear position or perspective to make its case: often an interestingly different position than the other news media. On September 25, 2008, Stewart's position was that Bush engages in bedtime story telling in order to manipulate us and put our critical selves to sleep, metaphorically speaking. The 2008 episode on the G20 summit presented Bush

as a wooden cuckoo puppet, and its follow-up on Obama regarded the new president as our *American Idol* and its take on the G20 summit in Britain was colored by that conclusion. Such presentations or angles are alternative and informative, but hardly revolutionary. The symbolic value of *TDS'* uniqueness is nevertheless undeniable, but perhaps of a different type than the one CCEPS has promoted. The instant analysis questioned the scholarly admiration for *TDS* as something important and radical, as well as the apparent desire to promote it as something more than what the show's host admits to be only the talk of "a comedian pundit talker guy" (Dory and Hayley, 11/1/2010, p 2). Despite Stewart's assertions, his show has achieved a level of media criticism which is hard to deny or ignore.

Chapter 6. Theoretical Framework. Audiences and Decoded Polysemy (Q2)

The previous chapters addressed the first question of the dissertation and explained why Fiske's semiotic democracy cannot exist in the context of political satire, especially that of *TDS*, whose political, social and cultural targets are presented through the lens of liberal satire. Comprehension and appreciation of *TDS'* political comedy requires audiences to follow the encoded meaning, or preferred reading, of its jokes. The following three chapters focus on the second research question:

Question #2: How does *TDS'* audience decode its text? The next three chapters set the stage for analyzing the audience's role in decoding the primary text's meaning, and for exploring the extent to which *TDS'* audiences negotiate their reading according to their own background and depart from the preferred reading.

Scholars (Morley, 1992; 1993) have shown that not only is the text a site of closure, but the audience, too, is unlikely to engage in uncharted readings. As further detailed below, the audience, the site of decoding, is not an open space. It is a space limited in flux and diversity, by its members' very own ability or inability to access the

various cultural or political codes encoded in the text (Morley, 1992, p. 339).

Audiences engage in the process of meaning-decoding through the lens of existing knowledge which, in the case of comedy, activates its humor. For example, when a cartoon character, teenager Lisa Simpson, was granted her wish for world peace in episode 7, season 3 (1991/1992), of the animated Fox series, ***The Simpsons,*** her wish is fulfilled by a hug between representatives from Great Britain and Argentina. Some audience members must have known that ten years earlier there was a war between those two countries, and for them the following dialogue activates the humor in Lisa Simpson's wish:

> Great Britain's Rep: Sorry about the Falklands, old boy.
> Argentina's Rep: We kind of knew they were yours anyway.

Some scholars regard such encoded political references as "obscure political humor" (Guehlstorf, Hallstrom and Morris, 2008, pp. 224-225). Far from "obscure," I argue that only by "getting" it does ***The Simpsons*** function as political satire: Decoding the meaning of the text required understanding, or "getting," the encoded meaning. From a decoding point of view, the audience became a closure space delineated by "a select group of viewers" who experienced

the satirical reward: making *The Simpsons* work as political satire, when it can easily work as a TV sitcom parody. However, here I argue that, in either situation, the audience must negotiate the preferred reading in order to laugh. Whether the audience laughs at the political satire or the parody will always depend upon on the audience's political and cultural background.

1. Audiences as Decoding Sites

Audiences, as Richard Butsch reminds us (2008), have been around since the first person addressed someone else in a public environment – such as the Acropolis or, in the United States, a church. But as a relatively recent object of study, a product of late capitalism, and the "cultural industry," American audience studies were precipitated by Hitler's state propaganda, and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's scholarship (1972) about the popular culture/audience dichotomy and the idea of a powerful media viewed as an agent of audience-appeasement. This critical paradigm did not remain stagnant nor, however, has it faded away.

Parallel with it, other paradigms have developed. Some were influenced by literary scholarship (Mukerji & Schudson,

1991), by French linguists (Barthes), or even anthropology (Geertz, 1973). By the late 20th century, it had become obvious that the two powerful, even polar, audience paradigms were the "critical," abstract, hermeneutic model, and the ethnographic model. The ethnographic model viewed audience members as free agents ready to satisfy their own desires and it might well be replaced by a different ontological paradigm altogether (Bratich 2005; 2008). Although Professor Jack Bratich is primarily interested in audiences for their multitudinal potential, my study benefited from his approach because it forced a reconsideration of audiences as sites of power, in this case meaning-making decoding sites.

Scholars have identified a variety of factors that define audiences as decoding sites. The foundation was first laid by The Birmingham School, and especially by Stuart Hall's essay on encoding/decoding, which introduced the idea that all texts have an encoded preferred reading, open to multiple decoded readings (1981). As Hall explained, every text is created in such a manner that it can reach an audience. That audience is able to engage the text and read a meaning into it, because the text incorporates symbols available to it, shared by both creator and audience,

symbols of the dominant cultural and political structure. Thus, Hall argued that the encoded text only suggested a preferred reading, but the audience's class and correspondingly, its (popular) cultural identity, would equally control the meaning-making process, by influencing how audiences read and understand a text.

David Morley tested Hall's thesis (1980), and believed Hall's thesis was empirically tenable: the meaning-making process is connected to the audience's class and cultural background. Though Fiske and others attacked this analysis as simplistic and deterministic (1987a), and insisted on a semiotic democracy, recent academic work suggests that both authors are correct, that sometimes the text may be more open to meanings and other times more strictly and less democratically structured.

Sujeong Kim went back to the roots of cultural studies and refined Morley's finding of audience readings (2004). Kim reinterpreted Morley's findings and illuminated two elements of the reading:

a) the role of the content of the text and

b) the role of the audience's economic background (2004).

Kim re-analyzed the reading patterns for each type of text: non-economic (television programming), economic (family budget) and political (a report of an American activist and Presidential candidate, Ralph Nader). Kim's findings support the role of the audience's social class, income, education and occupation (2004, p. 105), in creating reading patterns when reading non-economic texts. The reading uniformity within a socio-economic group was especially obvious among middle class audience members (there were no upper class members in the audience sample). Kim also found that racial, gender, and cultural taste produced no differences (Id).

Although Fiske never equated content with meaning nor meaning with reading, he did emphasize the active role of the reader (the audience) in meaning-making, while never denying the power of external factors, such as economic and cultural background. As shown above, these factors may create communal decoding patterns: affluent or college-educated people would have similar knowledge and interests, especially within generational limits. Such groupings have been ever more evident with the advent of the internet which can make fandom both visible and influential in

meaning-making (Jenkins, 1992; Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007).

The interaction between text and its consumer, of course, is easy to simplify but hard to grasp. Here, in an effort to address this potential problem I embrace Morley's concern about unrepentant valorization of audience pleasure (1992) and romantic scholarly belief in popular resistance to the preferred reading (or meaning). I argue that Morley's position remains valid because, especially in today's fragmented world of "narrowcasting," when televised texts are aimed to satisfy fragmented audiences whose identification with the host or show's characters is so total, that an oppositional or even a negotiated reading of the next is reasonably impossible. Faced with a myriad of nuanced textual differences, audiences are encouraged to search "a perfect fit" of views rather than come up with a negotiated reading, and switch the channel and make a different choice at their slightest intellectual or affective discomfort.

In addition to such external social and economic factors, technology has influenced the process of decoding in multiple ways. In the last few decades, the American public has been confronted with wholly new kinds of images

and sounds. This is an extension of what Todd Gitlin called "the burgeoning consumption of goods" where consumption of "fleeting and changeable elements of life" (2001, p. 45) becomes the only permanence we have. But to multiply, consumption needs to activate new or dormant needs. One of those needs may be the need to become one's own self, to self-actualize as an individual. In an attempt to profit from this desire for individuality through the consumption of more goods, media organizations have come up with a variety of programs which are meant to treat the masses piecemeal in the form of smaller, even elite, niches. Technology, through cable TV, made this option a viable trend. For example, Viacom, through CBS, broadcasts evening news to the millions who still watch it. As a complement to that, MTV and Comedy Central "narrowcast" news, using Sandvoss' term, to millions whose needs demand "sophisticated" entertainment (Dagnes, 2010, p. 71).

For over a decade, Henry Jenkins has written about the various aspects of the interplay among technology, governmental regulations of media (or the lack of it), and how the cultural habits of media consumers give them the perception of becoming something more significant than mere consumers. Jenkins believes that they have become more

powerful, because sometimes, as fandom, audience members engage in some sort of media production (2006).

This type of activity is possible because, as Jenkins noted, consumers' access and ability to archive media has expanded and, as a result, consumers are in a better position to overcome at least some effects of corporate concentration of media ownership (2004). However, the interaction with the text has become so complex and so multi-layered, that it is difficult to use those tertiary, derivative, texts in a meaningful way to interpret the primary text.

2. Fandom as IKEA Production Sites

Fandom is often described as the audience which activates its desire to insert itself in the process of media production or at least in a process of meaning-making (Jenkins). Sometimes they are successful and awarded some role in the media production process. This is what ***Survivor***'s fans, the so-called spoilers, do when they post threads with information about future episodes (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 25 et seq.) or ***American Idol***'s voters, who decide the fate of contestants (pp. 59 et seq.) or even the ***Matrix***

fandom who accepted the producers' game of assigning its fandom a "homework assignment" of playing computer games and acquiring additional knowledge about the plot of the last installment of the trilogy to better enjoy the movie's next installment, ***The Matrix Revolutions***. "What the audiences make of ***Revolutions*** will depend on the amount of energy they put into it" (p. 95).

Those loyal audiences have become more vociferous due to technological advancements, and in some instances, such as Wikipedia, it is hard to separate producers from consumer audiences. Perhaps, as Jenkins believes, some audiences do not merely assemble cognitive content the way we connect pieces of IKEA furniture: following the assembly plan provided by the producer. Perhaps the IKEA chairs of entertainment (Jenkins does not research political news) are not everywhere the same. Furthermore, Jenkins is certain that this assembly is not a mere illusion of creative accomplishment. Jenkins believes that audiences do create meaning each time they engage in media consumption, because they create their own media menu.

Jenkins' position is certainly understandable within the examples shown above. However, from a meaning-making perspective, his position is hard to generalize. The text

authored by people who identify themselves with a primary text happens to be the result of an activity which has less to do with decoding the primary text's meaning and more to do with the affective impact the primary text's political or cultural tenor or the primary text's producer and presenter had on those impromptu authors. Implicitly, Jenkins seems aware of this ambivalent situation when he encourages fandom to abandon a cultural-jamming mode, defined as an outsiders' attempt to control media content by disrupting the flow of information (2004, p. 36). Jenkins supports fandom-authored texts, but despite its conceptual theoretical appeal, he understands that fandom blogging can become meaningful only when commercial media sites, such as *Salon*, incorporate them (p. 36). Furthermore, Jenkins' examples belong to the peripheral, to the circus which many a society tolerates.

Far from answering the question about the role of such fandom participation, and the extent their activities influence the message or the meaning-making process involved in political knowledge, Jenkins' work highlights the need for more study. Jenkins argues that fandom produces exceptional readings. In light of their limited cognitive connection to the primary text, perhaps it is

more deft to view them as a totally different text, as Cornell Sandvoss explains.

Cornell Sandvoss recently argued that perhaps both the text and the readers are dead to each other when he expounds on his theory about neutrosemy, where a multitude of meanings work to neutralize each other (2005). Technology proved essential in empowering people who want to associate themselves under a creative banner and interact with each other. Sometimes, they engage the primary text and add to it: Jenkins' examples, as well as Wikipedia, illustrate this phenomenon. Other times, as detailed here, some engage the text as a spring board into various communicative activities which have a very loose connection with the primary text. In that instance, those paratexts (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 827) play little role in illuminating the process of decoding a primary text's polysemy.

3. Political Satire and Its Decoding Sites

The entire body of literature which lauds *TDS'* journalistic role rests on the assumption that satire is a superior form of audience engagement in the meaning-making process (Jones). Such an assumption is very tempting within the world of political news, because, as U.K media scholar Justin Lewis recently noted, political news represents an authoritative point of view about political events, and offers an epistemological, untouchable, position. "[N]ews represents who are the authorized knowers and what are their authoritative versions of reality" (2007, p. 99). However, this so-called participation needs to be explained and that can best be done using Mark Andrejevic's penchant for deflating linguistic euphoria (2007).

All political satire is double-talk to the neophyte's ear. The satirist's message is not what you hear, it is what you decode. Satire is only meant for those who can decode it. It means what it implies. But what it implies is always clear to its intended audience because of the ideological and cultural bond that exists between the satirist and the audience. The satirist gives the premise of the joke and the audience is required to add the punch line. In a reversal of fortunes, with *TDS* and fake news, the satirist's double talk has become the straight-forward

talk. Unlike other types of televised conversation, *TDS* thrives on moral criticism of the media which incorporates certain political and cultural values. To get *TDS'* jokes, one needs to embrace those values and consequently, reject or at least minimize any resistance to their message.

TDS is acclaimed as the political news show especially appropriate for college-educated youth and for the way it engages its audience (Young). The way its audience engages with the show brings to mind fandom, which some may view as, at least, somewhat inconsistent with hailing *TDS* as a new and valuable form of journalism. It seems at minimum to question whether journalism should engage in rational discourse and argument or whether it should just diffuse information in a form which makes one laugh.

Media critic Todd Gitlin observed decades ago that spectators enjoy shows which promote "savviness." Savviness flatters spectators (Gitlin, 1990) and spectators reciprocate with loyalty. Other scholars have noticed the same phenomenon in connection with televised satire. Guehlstorf, Hallstrom and Morris argue (2008) that *The Simpsons'* primary text is filled with "political references," which,

> while rarely relevant in the context of an episode, contribute to the political humor [of the show] by

> giving a small group of viewers yet another level of comprehension and implied intent. Viewers who note or understand these references are literally able to say […] that the show is funny on many different levels (p. 224).

What these authors are saying is that the potential meaning of the show is fully activated only when the viewers decode the text according to the producers' encoded message. For example, when schoolboy Bart Simpson, who personifies mediocrity, justifies stealing public resources for his far more intelligent teenage sister, Lisa, with the phrase, "Welcome to Dick Cheney's America," we laugh because the egocentric and ignorant Bart seems to incarnate the Bush administration. By laughing at that satirical bit we don't discover some hidden meaning. Only then we get the meaning encoded in the text. In other words, *The Simpsons'* primary text can function with an audience of different cultural sensibilities and degrees of political knowledge. Each audience will get the reading that matches their cultural sensibilities and knowledge. The authors are partially correct that Bart's excuse (this is Dick Cheney's America) is not necessary to depict his persona. However, that statement becomes necessary if the text wants to become political satire, and if the audience wants to be and feel savvy. A savvy audience is a loyal audience which

activates the text's single reading, the one encoded in the text.

Mark Andrejevic, continuing in Gitlin's theoretical steps, offered a quite different view of fandom than Jenkins. Rather than controlling meaning-making, Andrejevic posited audiences, in need of a perception of savviness to assert themselves as "not being taken in by the machinations of the culture industry," will accept any pre-packaged meaning which comes with the sought after pedigree of savviness (2007, p. 155). Viacom seems to have understood Andrejevic's position and has produced shows which cater to such self-styled sophisticated fandom. Perhaps because watching *TDS* brings with it a badge of "savviness," both scholars and media have embraced it with a fan-like eagerness and described *TDS* as a journalistic phenomenon.

Being a comedic show that relies on political irony and political satire, *TDS* engages its audience in a specific power structure. Like all such shows, Stewart builds a joke which has a pre-established reading, and presents it in a culturally savvy way which allows the viewers to get it only if they understand the "brand" of *TDS* humor (Ross & York, p. 2007).

A pre-established reading, however, is not always the decoded reading in satire, as Lisa Gring-Pemble and Martha Solomon Watson recently pointed out in their analysis of James Finn Garner's ***Politically Correct Bedtimes Stories*** (2010). Their conclusion was that the use of ironic satire as a rhetorical strategy bequeathed the text its polyvalent nature, and facilitated multiple audience readings, including those oppositional to the very ideas "the satirist intends to disparage" (p. 132). In other words, they argued that the "use of ironic satire to debunk a position is unpredictable" (p. 133). Like here, these authors adhered to a definition of satire as criticism of various societal follies which is lubricated with humor or other comedic forms, such as irony (p. 137). Similarly, they emphasize the close connection between audience and satirist, whose self-appointment as guardian of standards, ideals and truths, and of moral and esthetic values must be acknowledged (Id.)

> Satire in effect asks – demands—that its audience engage in a dialogue of a special kind. In addition to making associations, the audience is expected to assimilate the special mixture of aggression, play, laughter and judgment that is set before it. […] By its nature satire usually causes troubles, not merely because it is an attack and a judgment, but also because satire, at its most complex, demands its audience be sophisticated, sensitive, and sympathetic

> in sharing the aggression and the judgment (p. 138, citing George A. Test)

But Garner's satire is similar to Swift's ***A Modest Proposal***, where criticism goes to the very structure of our society, pointing out its follies. For example, in Garner's ***Cinderella***, the godmother tries to dissuade her from attending the ball:

> So you want to go to the ball, eh? And bind yourself into the male concept of beauty? Squeeze into some tight-fitting dress that will cut off your circulation? Jam your feet into high-heeled shoes that will ruin your bone structure? Paint your face with chemicals and make-up that have been tested on nonhuman animals? Oh yes, definitely, [Cinderella] said in an instant (p. 138).

When she finally reaches the ball, she causes the prince to think that she is:

> [a] wommon(sic) that I could make my princess and impregnate with the progeny of our perfect genes, and thus make myself the envy of every other prince for miles around. And she's blond, too (p. 141 citing Garner's ***Cinderella***).

Gring-Pemble and Watson believe that Garner's ironical satire targets feminism and other isms of our cultural age, including political correctness, especially through humor (jokes) which reaches absurd consequences. Then, they note that the popularity of his book, which reached almost 2 million copies sold, is largely explained by the text's polyvalent, multiple readings including those favoring the

very values, or some of them, that Garner targets. If their finding is correct, that may be because their premise is wrong. Garner's criticism is not unidirectional: it attacks both patriarchy and feminism, producing laughable caricatures of both Cinderella and the prince, for example. Furthermore, even Gring-Pemble and Watson agree that Garner's suddenly strong women are no improvement over their male counterparts: they are both determined to take advantage of the other side (p. 145).

However, if satire comprehension may be difficult to gauge, despite widespread understanding that satire requires an active participatory audience, studies have shown that audience laughter is a good measure for both its appreciation and comprehension. That is the conclusion of Aaron Kozbelt and Kana Nishioka's study of New Yorkers' appreciation of *New Yorker* cartoons (2010).

TDS' political satire, like many other political comedy shows, thrives on the audience's bond with Stewart. Dennis Miller's audience relished the tag of hipness that came with his show in the 1990s (Dunne, 2000). Letterman's audience answered that the irreverent witticism he displayed in the early 1990s was the reason for watching the show (Schaefer & Avery, 1993).

The *CCEPS* literature is the result of a similar awe and bond the scholarly audience has developed for Stewart. Such a compliant bond may moot any discussion about negotiating or resisting decoded readings especially in light of Stewart's transparent public persona, which is packaged to represent his personal, true persona.

Satire uses two frames of reference, one which is criticized and the other containing the critique and the point of view of the satirist, and this is why the *CCEPS* literature argues that *TDS* empowers its audience in engaging the show in an active way (Jones; Baym; Young). There are situations, as in the example of The Colbert Report analyzed by Ohio University media scholars and presented here earlier, when the satire is ambiguous and polysemic because the satirist's point of view is ambiguous, and the audience has the freedom to choose from two encoded meanings. On his own show, Stephen Colbert's satire is bifurcated into the satirist's personal point of view, which is transparent to few – his current live audience and his fandom who has watched him since his *TDS* days -- and the satirist's point of view as a public person, as the host of *The Colbert Report*, which is transparent to all viewers of his show, and used by them as the intended

criticism. *The Colbert Report* is a classic example of jokes with a double entendre. Before *The Colbert Report* other TV shows attracted a diverse audience who was able to read two opposite meanings into it, for the same reason: the ambiguity of the character delivering the criticism. As Professors Neal Vidmar and Milton Rokeach persuasively showed, Archie Bunker was a narrow-minded, xenophobic character with a love for racist and sexist slurs character, in the CBS 1970s television show *All in the Family* (1974). To the show's liberal audience his political outlook was horrifying. To the show's conservative audience, Archie Bunker was a hero. Though Vidmar and Rokeach did not reach my conclusion, they provided an empirical study of the audience split. I believe that this perception split was possible because of the show's encoded ambiguity, which *TDS* does not exhibit. Norman Lear, the producer of *All in the Family*, believed that the very fact of bringing up bigotry would have a cathartic effect on viewers, forcing them to reconsider their own bigotry (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974, p. 36). Lear intended to make Archie Bunker look like a goat, but perhaps unwillingly, Lear allowed Archie's character to function as a hero of sorts, too. Apparently, Archie's lines made sense as jokes which satirized bigotry and as a

serious discourse which reinforced bigotry. Archie never said I am a "foolish bigoted old person." That is why some cringed and laughed at Archie Bunker, while others enjoyed the show and laughed with Archie Bunker.

TDS is a different type of show. Stewart's persona is clear. His satire is clear. His liberal moral stance is clear. ***TDS'*** jokes work only if the audience agrees with Stewart's position, or at least, is able to see Stewart's position, which is politically moderate. Interviewing him, Bill O'Reilly of FoxNews, whom ***TDS*** often mocks[64], finds Stewart likeable![65]

As recently as August 10, 2010, Stewart publicly stated during his show that he is a "New York liberal Jew." Stewart further defined that label by prefacing it with "out-of-touch." To minimize any ambivalence, Stewart also gave an example of another "out of touch" New York liberal Jew, the Woody Allen of 1976.[66] The decoded meaning of his

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[64] http://video.foxnews.com/v/4003531/entire-jon-stewart-interview/ at 11'41" and 24'44" during the February 4, 2010 interview.

[65] February 4, 2010, Interview with Jon Stewart, http://video.foxnews.com/v/4003531/entire-jon-stewart-interview/ at 40'04" and 41'05".
JS to BO: You like me
BO to JS: I tell people that (41'05".)

[66] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/tue-august-10-2010/municipal-land-use-hearing-update?xrs=eml_tds.
For those in the know, this statement might have raised some questions abut Stewart's self-assessment, because that is the year Allen released his most political movie to date, ***The Front***, "a dark send-up of

show is thus further refined: its satire works if viewed through the lens of a jester who believes he is representative of New York liberal irony at the beginning of the 21st century.

TDS has no laugh tracks and no cues or lights encouraging the audience to laugh. *TDS'* live audience laughs when Stewart tells a joke. That segment of *TDS'* audience seems to decode the primary text according to its preferred reading. The decoding process, in which *TDS'* silent audience, its cable audience, engages, is hard to gauge, and it remains a basis of speculation dependent on data collected through audience self-reporting. The show has an online fandom which voluntarily acts as a meaning-making site though often with little connection to the show itself. However, there is a segment of *TDS'* audience which engages in transparent meaning-making by painstainkingly interpreting the meaning of the show, according to its own cultural and political values. That segment is, simply put, the rest of the media, media which *TDS* often satirizes and lampoons. However, their meaning-making process is recorded in their own media product, and to that extent it is very useful in order to gauge *TDS'* decoded polysemy.

Hollywood McCarthyism" where Allen's title character takes public credit for the work of a group of blacklisted writers in the 1950s.

4. Settling on the Meaning of Decoded Polysemy

Textual polysemy is often regarded as existing in the eye of the beholder. Developing older arguments, Cornel Sandvoss argues textual polysemy is established by audiences and not producers. At least in a theoretical sense, all texts are polysemic because a text acquires its meaning in the process of reading, which exists only as individualized multiple readings defined by each reader's abilities. For Sandvoss, audiences, and not the producer, establish the boundaries of any text's meaning, (Sandvoss, 2007, pp. 19-32). But what Sandvoss seems to be saying is that audiences have the liberty to activate the text's full meaning according to their knowledge and abilities. To the extent this is Sandvoss' thesis, this is the theoretical frame used here.

Indeed, audiences activate meaning and all boundaries of textual meaning when they engage in decoded textual meaning. However, that activation may not fully embrace the text's potential for decoded polysemy, unless polysemy is redefined to cover all potential meanings readers may find in a text irrespective of any meaning-based connection with the text.

The *English Oxford Dictionary* defines polysemy as "the possession of multiple meanings." The definition notes that, in 1975, the *Times Literary Supplement* used the noun in the following sentence: "Matters are complicated by the polysemy of the noun *linguist*, both 'polyglot' and 'scientific student of language'." It seems clear that the word "linguist" in its entirety has multiple but related meanings: linguist is a person who possesses knowledge of multiple languages or studies them. The OED refers to meanings as fully developed cognitive signifiers covered by the word "linguist." Those signifiers identify the word "linguist" in its entirety, not half or three quarters of it.

Similarly, if a reader relates to half of the word *linguist* and comes up with a meaning for *lingua*, that reading cannot be proof of the polysemy of the word, "linguist." That would be proof that the word has a root which can work independently, or that the reader's view is obscured somehow. *Mutatis mutandis*, if a viewer of *The Simpsons* laughs at Bart because his cartoon character looks and talks in a funny way, but misses the political reference, which compares his insensitive, hedonistic behavior with that of ex-Vice-President Cheney (2000-2008),

then that viewer has decoded some layers of its meaning, not one of the meanings. That indicates that the show can function when understood partially, but it does not establish its decoded polysemy.

Decoded polysemy for the purpose of this dissertation represents multiple signifiers activated by an audience which has cognitive and comedic access to all the encoded signs and activates different meanings for those signs. The joke "What is black and white and read/red all over?" is polysemic because its potential multiple readings are a product of all the encoded signs. If some audiences activates "what is black and white" into a joke, that partial joke is not indicative of the polysemy of "what is black and white and read/red all over?". That is indicative of the multiple layers of meaning of "what is black and white and read/red all over." In this respect, television shows have layers of meaning which come from the multiple cognitive signals they use: language, sound, gestures, moving and still images, music, and the like. But this very coding is not a sign of their polysemy.

Dennis Miller's comedy is a good example of the audience's role in activating meaning. Like ***The Simpsons***, Miller's comedy is filled with layers of symbols which

audiences can activate. For decades, Miller has written jokes for a hypermediated audience. His cultural metaphors have always been visually incisive (Dunne, 2000).

For example, Dennis Miller, a former SNL member and former host of the HBO ***Dennis Miller Live***, can be viewed as as one of the first post modern comics (Dunne, 2000). Miller's jokes were built on his belief that his audience was able and willing to decode all the cultural references he used. One of Miller's 1996 jokes ridiculed Dan Quayle: "this Chuzzlewit [who] aspires to the presidency outside the walls of a mental institution and people don't tie him down and scrape his frontal lobes with a trowel like some demented Clockwork Orange Droogies who's due to be rewired" (Dunne, 2000, p. 81). This example shows that Miller invited his audience to participate actively in making its own image of Quayle, according to its cultural knowledge.

Some audience members might have visualized Quayle as Charles Dickens' Martin Chuzzlewit. Others might have viewed him as a character from either Anthony Burgess' 1962 dystopian novel, ***A Clockwork Orange*** or from Stanley Kubrick's equally dystopian movie version of the same novel. Each reading mentioned above is somewhat different. One is partial (only one reference debunked) but those who

incorporate both characters, though from different sources, remain different: one has Burgess' words to define Droogies while the other incorporates Kubrick's imagination. However, those readings are not polysemic either for the purpose of this dissertation. They are not meaningfully different. It is one signifier: demented Clockwork Orange Droogies. Returning to the ***OED***, polysemy assumes multiple meanings which are cognitively related:

> Polysemy is when a given string of characters has a set of different but related meanings.

For the purpose of this dissertation, decoded polysemy represents cognitively different but related meanings audiences activate from all cognitive signifiers encoded in the primary text. Rather than finding polysemy in the eye of the beholder, more often layers of negotiated readings are found in the eye of the beholder.

Furthermore, unlike news shows which strive to offer objective facts and reporting on current events and appear to hail their audiences as "intelligent, cerebral individuals in search of rational debate and thought" (Gray, 2007, p. 76), although they strive for ratings and thus incorporate many elements of affect, entertaining news shows promote a different audience relationship. When the news is coated in elements of lighter pleasure, such as

laughter, the audience needs to understand the joke in order to understand the news analysis. The entertaining element is crucial to "getting" the meaning; it is not a mere bonus. Moreover, the joke is often based on a piece of news, the knowledge of which is necessary to be able to value its meaning in the newly entertaining context. In this context it seems highly plausible that *TDS'* audiences will strive to follow the preferred reading or negotiate it to the best of their political and cultural abilities within the structure of the *TDS'* comedy.

Chapter 7. The Daily Show and Its Multiple (Audiences) Decoding Sites (Q2)

All television shows empower their audiences to negotiate their own level of decoding through arguably active meaning-making. This chapter explores whether *TDS*, a late-night political comedy show, encourages something similar to "thick" polysemy, such as uncovering hidden meanings in mocked or ridiculed news of the day.

Previous chapters explored how *TDS* textually encoded meaning is organized, and whether it is indicative of alternative journalism. This chapter explores the flip side of the alternative journalism claim. It examines whether *TDS'* audiences find meaning outside the encoded joke.

TDS is a live show, whose audible laughs are those of the live audience. *TDS* airs on cable twice a day, four days a week. *TDS* is available on the Internet, and its episodes are available through iTunes. Its fandom can also purchase books referencing the jokes of the show, *America the Book: A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction* (2006, 2008), and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart Presents Earth (The Book): A Visitor's Guide to the Human Race* (2010), both heavily promoted by Stewart and the show's writers. *TDS* is the

subject of media and scholarly writings, and in fact recently (Fall 2010) has started its own rallies, organizing a massive public, and arguably political, demonstration in Washington D.C..

In other words we can talk about *TDS'* multiple audiences. Whether despite or because of its numbers and diversity, *TDS'* audiences prove difficult to survey and its meaning-making process, or decoded polysemy, is often elusive. When some segments of this audience engage in public readings of the show, they deliberately refuse to clarify how they read the primary text. To the extent the primary text becomes a badge of social identity, the tertiary texts produced by these audiences add little to the primary text's meaning-making process. Below I explain the various audience segments and the reasons for selecting the media-authored tertiary texts as the basis of my research data.

1. *TDS'* Live Audience an Elusive Product of Ethnographic Observations

Conceptually, scholars have argued that live audiences have a creative role. For example, in 1995, in the context of TV talk shows ("audience discussion programmes"), Sonia

Livingstone discussed the perceived creative role of live audiences and argued that by the mere virtue of being placed directly in the television studio during the live televised debate, that audience became "joint author of the text in order to debate social, moral, and political topics as part of a mixed studio audience of experts and the lay public" (p. 36). But, no matter how little originality authorship demands, it must certainly require more than the type of controlled and limited contribution live audiences add, which usually amounts to little more than unconditional emotional support for the host through laughs, cheers and applauses, if at all, to conclude that such audiences author text.

The ethnographic observations used here did not focus on creative participation issues. They focused on the audience decoding process. Media ethnography, like any ethnographic enterprise, is a complex enterprise which starts with the researcher's immersion into the group studied (Geertz, 1973). Because the observations used here did not reach the in-depth level Geertz advocated, their research value is rather limited.

1.1 Becoming a Potential Member of the Live Audience – Be a Ticket Holder

TDS offers free tickets. One can consult the site's ticketing information at requesttickets@thedailyshow.com or sign up for email alerts about available tickets. Unlike its spin-off, *The Colbert Report*, *TDS* does not limit how often one can obtain free tickets.

From the ticket confirmation, the potential live audience member learns the address of the show, The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, 733 11th Avenue, between 51st and 52nd Street, New York, NY 10019. That is the address behind the cablecast introduction "from its New York headquarters."

The ticket holder has to conform to the following two sets of rules:

> (1) Everyone must be 18 years and older. Please make sure you and your guests have City/State ID. If person(s) looks under age they will be carded if the person(s) in question does not have valid ID they will be asked off the general line and be denied entry. Our suggestion on arrival time is between 3:30pm and 4:00pm. Your guests may meet you on line until 4:30pm. Past 4:31pm they will not be allowed to meet you on line. Please understand other people have been waiting outside just like you and courtesy is a must. If your guest shows up past 4:31pm they will be asked to get on the back of our General line. We over book all shows to ensure that all seats in the studio are full. Therefore, entry into the studio is on a first come first serve basis. You reserved your tickets with us but you will not be confirmed until we start giving out our studio tickets. Our doors open at 5:15pm. Show ends around 7:15pm. You may not

obtain tickets for auctions, fundraisers, raffles or any kind of benefits through this method. Groups larger than four will be turned away at the door, even if they are separate reservations.

(2) IT IS A LEGALLY BINDING AGREEMENT. By accepting this document as a ticket and serving as a member of the audience of "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart", the Audience member ("Participant") using this ticket grants permission to the producer ("Producer") of "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" and the distributors and sponsors thereof to use Participant name, voice, likeness, and/ or biographical material in "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" and in connection with advertising, recording and in all derivative works thereof publicizing, exhibiting and exploiting "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart;" The Daily Show with Jon Stewart; Trustees of Comedy Central (in whole or in part) in any and all media in perpetuity throughout the universe. Participant hereby releases Producer; Central Productions LLC; Hello Doggie Inc.; Comedy Partners; The Daily Show with Jon Stewart; Trustees of Comedy Central and each of their respective trustees, directors, officers, employees, agents, successors, affiliates, assignees and licensees from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with Participant's participation as a member of the audience and/or the foregoing use, including, without limitation any and all claims for invasion of privacy, infringement of Participant's right of publicity, defamation and any other personal and/or property rights. Participant understands that Producer is permitting Participant to serve as a member of the audience in reliance upon the foregoing permission and release.

Even if one has a ticket and conforms and consents to all these rules, admission is not guaranteed, because “ticket distribution may be in excess of studio capacity.” Thus, despite the suggested hour, “between 3:30 and 4:00,” ticket holders show up even before 2 PM, whether it is coldest winter or the hottest summer.

The live audience wannabe waits outside the "headquarters" building according to a well-established set of rules which mirrors the ticket holder's status: VIP, then early-comers, and finally late-comers. VIP status can be obtained by "friends of the guests" or by any ticket holder who previously waited on line for an earlier show but failed to receive a ticket to that earlier taping. Such a person receives a VIP ticket which enables her to attend another taping if she shows up before 4:30pm.

I observed the live audience in excess of 30 times. I went to *TDS'* headquarters every month from September 2008 through August 2010. Twenty-four times, I lined up although I did not always hold a ticket. The other times I variously passed by in a taxi, stood across the avenue facing the entrance, or walked around the block. I observed the surroundings, the neighbors, the businesses, menial employees, how guests are admitted to the building, how security people treat the potential live audience, and finally how the live audience leaves the building.

I regularly noticed about three hundred people lining up in an orderly manner on 11th Avenue between 51st and 52nd streets, on the west side of the avenue, and on 52nd street, from 11th toward 12th Avenues. In addition to the 250

audience members who would enter the studio, or "headquarters," between 30 and 50 people would fail to be admitted and would wait outside an additional half an hour to be placed on another list and receive a VIP opportunity for a future show. Later, they would have to email and request a ticket, but it would arrive as a VIP ticket.

The age range of those waiting in line varied from that of young college students to grandparents. There was no obvious gender distribution. Groups of three or four included either family members or friends, many on double dates. While Rutgers and Columbia students seemed at first to predominate, once in the studio it became obvious that many more colleges were represented.

Most exhibited heterosexual behavior, holding hands, kissing, or embracing apparent dates or spouses in a non-parental manner. I noticed one apparently comfortably open gay couple. I also noticed inter-racial couples. The racial composition of the lined-up group was predominantly white with 1-3 % African American, and slightly larger Asian (6-8%). Once I observed a couple who turned out to be Jordanian (based on overheard conversation), here on a graduate student visa, but ethnic observations are hard to make unless the members display easily identifiable

features, which of course are few. Canadians and Germans were the most notable foreign element of the audience, as they eagerly engage in discussions where they reveal their geographical origin.

When the lined-up adults did not talk among themselves they usually read, either a newspaper or a hard cover book. The younger adults did not hold any reading materials, but they used their hand-held devices, phones or Blackberries, for long enough intervals to indicate that they were consulting, perhaps even reading, something more complex than phone numbers. During one of my many hours of waiting on line in order to observe that population I overheard a few discussions about Google RSS feeds. It appears that there might be some significant Google influence to youth news consumption although I was unable to pursue or incorporate that possibility into this research.

Most of those waiting were attired in garb which seemed to me to come from medium and low end stores (no brand names). In 2009, the percentage of people who looked haggard or were even drinking while on line increased from none to between 1-3 %. While somewhat reticent and not gregarious, the members of this audience were eager to be helpful. If someone needed to get out of line to buy

something to drink or eat from a nearby deli or go to the bathroom inside the studio building, those left behind willingly agreed to keep their place in the line. Everybody also enjoyed sharing information about the rules concerning, for instance, the latest time when friends are allowed to join in line or anecdotes about how the waiting and taping take place.

1.2 The Live Audience

After hours of staying on line while engaged in conversations, socializing, reading, or simply being idle, the lucky ones are allowed inside the building between 5 and 5:30 PM. There, more waiting, around 30 minutes, occurs. This cable ***Purgatorio*** is located directly outside, one door of separation from, the space where the taping takes place.

Each member of the live audience goes through a metal detector, has their pockets emptied of the standard coins and keys, their bags checked, and eventually may be asked to leave them behind if the bags are deemed unacceptable by the security team. That happened rarely, however, because very few audience members carry large purses, bags, or backpacks to the show.

Around 6 PM the doors to the studio open. Two security staff members and up to four interns make sure that the same, somewhat submissive, behavior continues as the audience takes their assigned seats. There are three seating sections and the seats from all three have equally good visibility, so there is little reason to engage in a discussion with the security people about changing seats, especially after being warned that such discussion would be futile.

Once inside the studio, the audience is welcomed by what could be described as a varied mixed tape of rock 'n' roll. Seemingly all members showed signs of enjoying it, seemed relaxed, continuing conversations with family or friends, or even tapping with their fingers or feet to the musical rhythm. Within minutes, a warm-up, self-effacing, comedian enters and spends between 30 to 60 minutes interacting with the audience, soliciting personal information about their age, profession, reason for being there, and even marital or family status. There were no obvious signs of audience animosity: everybody is there to be entertained. Even when a white, out-of-state, group acknowledged drinking before coming to the theatre, and expressed some sort of guilt or unhappiness about being

unemployed, no one in the audience nor the warm-up comedian showed any signs of discomfort. Their almost Christian confession received an easy absolution as the comedian made some inconsequential joke about it.

The picture of the live audience becomes clear: they are there because they are fans of the show or related in some way to fans of the show. They are almost invariably in college or college-educated, and, with rare exceptions, employed in some professional manner. They attended the show because they found it an intelligent way to relax, or take a "vacation of the mind" from their work. They are there to lend support to their hero through their hard laughs and applauses, which are important because the show does not have laugh tracks. They are told that Stewart needs them and that his performance improves with their overt participation in laughs and applauses.

For example, before the taping, a staff member reminded the audience that they needed to clap and laugh loudly because the microphones were not very powerful ("We are cable"). Each time I attended the show, the audience interacted with the "text" in this limited and "un-creative" manner by docilely following the given instructions.

For about 5 minutes before each taping, Stewart takes questions from the audience. He seems divorced from any of his previous subversive standup comedy routines, such as when, during the first Iraq War, he would encourage his audience to "adopt" the bombs we dropped in Iraq to show humanitarian support for the children of Iraq. Asked, during this 5 minute question-and-answer period, about duplicating such performances, Stewart feigned ignorance about the topic: he denied ever watching his old acts, and implied that he has forgotten his act from twenty years ago. Stewart displayed no or limited knowledge of foreign, non-English, press. A question about whether he reads regular European journalistic fare, such as the Italian ***Espresso*** or the French ***Nouvelle Observateur*** triggered no recognition and difficulties pronouncing those foreign titles. He seems, as he has repeatedly insisted, simply an entertainer and putting on a good show is what he obviously strives to achieve. Conversely, everybody in the audience seemed to understand their role and the amount and volume of laughter and applause indicated that they performed to their best ability.

On March 16th, 2009, I verified the role of the live sound track. That day I attended the taping and in a moment

of silence I alone cheered and applauded the use of the word "infrastructure" by the Secretary of Transportation. From home I was able to gauge my role as a live audience member. Singlehandedly I made those words into "a meaningful moment:" the TV audience heard my cheering and my clapping that evening, and wondered, perhaps, why someone found that word worth cheering.

The March 16, 2010, taping followed the now famous March 12, 2009 episode, when Stewart interviewed MSNBC's Jim Cramer in one of the most highly viewed episodes ever. Surprisingly, Stewart was visibly unhappy and affected by the bad notices his interview produced from then[67] -- NBC president Jeff Zucker. An audience member thanked him for the wonderful job he did with the March 12 interview. This act of fandom seemed to help Stewart recover his smile and poise.

Stewart engages his live audience when they reward him with too much or too little laughter. He seems surprised, sometimes, that they really enjoy themselves, in a manner indicative of some encoded uncertainty as whether the cues would be decoded by the audience, but nothing in the exchange between the jester and his followers or in the

[67] http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/24/zucker-announces-departure-from-nbc/.

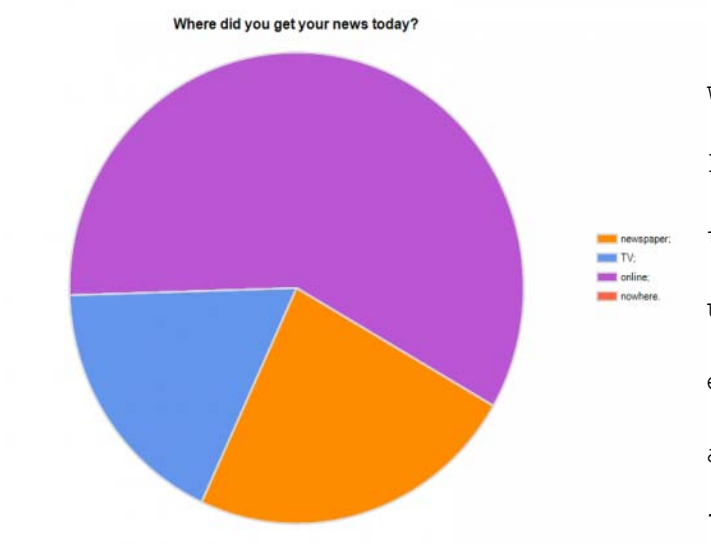
behavior of the live audience suggests anything but either a decoded reading conforming with the preferred reading or perhaps a potential problem in getting the preferred reading. There is no question or suggestion of the audience going for a negotiated or opposed resisting reading: they are there to get the jokes and show that they get them. To the extent that the show is polysemic, its polysemy works at the level of multilevel coding: that is, some of the encoded meaning is offered visually, and some audibly some through gestures and music. In its entirety, there seems to be a singularly clear encoded meaning for the audience.

1.3 The Live Audience as Representative of the *TDS'* Cablecast Audience

In addition to the preceding ethnographic observations, three dozen members of the live audience responded to my questionnaire[68] on how they receive their news[69] and their reasons for

[68]

[69] Id.



Pie Chart. *TDS* Live Audience

watching the show.[70] Interestingly, all seem to "love the news," using Jonathan Gray's expression, and have access to it outside *TDS*: in the pie chart shown here, the lack of pink ("nowhere" in the legend) stands for a lack of politically uncurious people.

This self-selected sample supports my ethnographic observations (*Appendices* H1 & H2) that the *TDS* audience is well-educated, and politically informed. The sample also acknowledges that *TDS'* audience watches the show because *TDS* is "an enjoyable way of staying abreast of political information." One of the questions inquired whether the respondents thought that the similarity of political views between theirs and that of the host was among the reasons for watching the show. All responded positively. In light of their regular exposure to news, their high level of education, and the live audience behavior I noticed during

[70] Id.

the waiting and the taping of the show, it seems reasonable to infer that at least *TDS*' live audience decoded the text according to its preferred reading: they laughed, enjoying and letting others notice their joy at "getting" the humor of *TDS*' political satire. For them, *TDS*' polysemy is limited to the partially different but related readings each coding of the text (audio and visual) entails.

2. *TDS*' Cablecast (Silent) Audience

As explained earlier, all texts take into consideration invisible audiences and *TDS* too is structured to include and respond to its invisible cablecast audience's cultural and political make-up and expectations. When Jeffrey Jones (2005) talks about the role of political entertainment (or "entertainment politics," in Jones' words) in the general political meaning-making process, he also discusses the role of TV's "invisible" audience in the meaning-making process of political satire shows. Producers mediate meaning to specific audiences, and this is the audience whose taste, values, and participation is sought and encoded. It is the largest and the most meaningful one for commercial advertisers. It is the audience whose

political knowledge and cultural hipness Stewart and his writers take into account.

Jones advances six main arguments to claim that all entertainment politics are essential to the current political meaning-making process. He includes ***TDS*** as one of those essential elements.. His arguments are: (a) it allows people to evaluate political life on television; (b) it allows that process to take place in terms more familiar to the television audience, terms that use humor and common-sense thinking; (c) the evaluation involves comedy narratives that can be brutally honest and damningly forthright; (d) the combination of information and entertainment that occurs in entertainment politics offers the same complex mix of interests and competencies that citizens maintain in their daily lives, yet which television has tended to segregate in the past; and (f) it "provides pluralist forums of social conversation that invites engagement and interactivity with the texts, offering linkages between and across the public and private aspects of citizens' lives" (Jones, 2005, p. 125).

He concludes that the role he assigns to entertaining politics is a direct consequence of the fact that those shows are "cultural site[s] where new issues, languages,

approaches, and audience relationship to politics on television are occurring" (Id.). The audience Jones describes is, statistically speaking, the invisible audience. He views them engaging the text and each other. His analysis, though he does not explicitly state so, is based on discourse analysis of the text. He infers that the text uses symbols within the cognitive and emotional reach of its silent audience.

Like Jones, most authors simply infer why and how the silent audience consumes the show, without any data. My interest rests, however, within the latter part of the question, how the consumption takes place. However, it is limited to the show's decoding. From the existing data mentioned here and based on Stewart's own statements which acknowledge the existence of ***TDS'*** own market studies (Schlosser, 2003), ***TDS*** audience is perceived by the show as monolithically young, male, college-educated and liberally oriented. Assuming that they strive to identify with Stewart and his views, it seems highly probable that to the best of their abilities this demographic engages ***TDS*** only according to its preferred reading.

My own rather small survey results (***Appendices*** H1 &H2) support a liberal, well-educated audience, whose gender and

age results mirror my own ethnographic observations. Those indicate a more balanced audience makeup, both in terms of gender and age, than the more general data suggested. The difference could be explained by the time that passed between the previous more general collection of data, when the show had a more generational fringe appeal and my current data collection which coincides with a mainstreaming (as evidence of that, note for instance that the U.S. President used ***TDS'*** writers for his jokes at the 2010 White House Correspondents Dinner. [71]) of the show: ***TDS*** is aware of its audience and, in a 2003 interview with ***Rolling Stone's*** Robert Love, Stewart acknowledged that his marketing department sends him demographic breakdowns, such as "The Wall Street Journal said 'more eighteen to forty-nine-- year-olds get their news from The Daily Show'" (Love, 2003). Stewart explained that ***TDS*** takes into consideration the audience information so that it writes a show which is educative, but also easy to decode along the encoded signs. Stewart's words may be read to mean that ***TDS*** aims for one reading and does everything it can to get it.

> STEWART: Occasionally they do send you demographic breakdowns, but for the most part it's kind of a

[71] http://tunedin.blogs.time.com/2010/05/03/do-you-care-if-daily-show-staffers-wrote-jokes-for-obama/.

> meaningless exercise. Our show runs on an internal barometer. Last night we did a five-minute bit on Henry Kissinger. I don't imagine that's an eighteen-to-thirty-four interest point.
> LOVE: But you assume the audience knows Kissinger, right?
> STEWART: ***We didn't assume total knowledge of Kissinger. So it did have more of a didactic tone in that we had to explain Kissinger more explicitly.***
> LOVE: Butcher of Cambodia, et cetera?
> STEWART: I don't believe we used the word "butcher" but ... […] (emphasis added) (Schlosser, 2003, p. 28)

Furthermore, Stewart understands that "Television is a passive medium. People like to sit. People work all day. People don't necessarily want to work to get their information and entertainment" (p. 28). Such wisdom rewards the show twice: it gains a like-minded audience but also a more age heterogeneous one because it doesn't make "sense for anybody to tailor something specifically for a younger audience" (p. 28).

Stewart further explains that "we don't think on the show like, 'You know, the kids love the pot references.' We're definitely gonna throw those in." Nevertheless, while Stewart acknowledges that ***TDS'*** producers understandably want high ratings, their writing will not enable everybody to enjoy the show.

> STEWART: The main goal here is to do the funniest show we can do. Yet it's more fulfilling for us to do a show about things we care about, so that's why we infuse some news and issues in there. It's our internal barometer that creates that. Now if we put

> naked women on the show and such things, more people would watch it. But that's not what we're doing. (p.28)

Finally, Stewart seems to understand Hall's encoded/decoded reading binary. The audience activates the decoded reading according to their own cultural and political sensibilities and knowledge. Stewart's marketing data showed that his audience is not culturally unsophisticated (they can appreciate entertainment without naked women), and although their age and gender might have diversified, *TDS'* audiences remain as educated, culturally, and politically homogenous as ever, and thus inclined to decode the show according to its scripted meaning.

> STEWART: For some reason, people think that solid, good, in-depth all equals dull, low ratings, low profitability. I don't know that, you know? I don't think that's the case. I think you can make really exciting, interesting television news that could become the medium of record for reasonable, moderate people. And I think it hasn't even been tried, quite frankly (p. 28).

Whether the cable audience of 2 million represent a niche, almost a fandom, is worth investigation. When compared to the small fraction which leaves anonymity behind and actively engages the primary *TDS* text online and, even then, usually via assumed identities, it looks rather impressive and discouraging. There is very little a

researcher can do to gather the process they use to reconstruct meaning from the decoded reading of any political news text.

3. The Online Audience – The Vocal Fandom

Today's cablecast, or using Cornell Sandvoss' term, "narrowcast," as opposed to the less and less dominant broadcast shows, aims for clear audience niches, audiences who are able to engage with the text beyond mere consumption. These audiences are relatively small, in the single digits millions, and are bound by common cultural sensibilities, or by what Cornell Sandvoss characterized as localized esthetic values (2007, p. 31). If fans are the site where the text produces a special relationship among narcissism, spectacle, performance, and imagination, in the flow of everyday life (Longhurst, Bagnall & Savage, 2007), then such narrowcast audience-niches can easily be viewed as fandom. The case for fandom is even easier to make for audiences who use the web to engage the primary text and produce their own tertiary texts. Here, audiences engage and use the primary text for community, "sociality," and

self-identification purposes (Harrington & Bileby, 2007, p. 186).

TDS has a very well-organized online space which attracts a rather significant and active audience. This audience has many opportunities to surface and express itself in ways that may be interpreted as creative. Members of this audience can sign up and become members of the show's online forum (Forum, http://forums.thedailyshow.com/,). Their identity is hidden behind their chosen aliases, which are either coined or real names (e.g., "*rxaa*" or "*ovidiuoprea*"). In the *Forum*'s lingo, they become "interns." The *Forum* is a hierarchical place. Status is revealed by their registration dates, number of postings, and of course, the content of their postings.[72]

In addition to the *Forum*, the online audience has other potential platforms for expression: *Facebook*, Twitter and impromptu blogs. As of September 7, 2010, the *Forum* had 26,185 threads, 196,786 posts, and 43,527 members, or member accounts.

The *Forum* also has online affiliates with the show. They have different roles and different identifiers given

[72] http://forums.thedailyshow.com/

to them by the *Forum*'s administration, whose rules are not transparent to the ordinary lurker. For example, "researchers," such as "*BobbyDonnell*," alert the community about published news items. "Sr.Producers," such as "*CryptKicker5*," "*ghostrider*," or "*thatmoodychic*," monitor the postings at any given moment. "Production Assistants," and "Headline Producers" further streamline the members' online activity. For example, a Production Assistant named *spktyr* helped a forum member who had been unable to view episodes of *The Daily Show* online from Romania. *Spktyr* told the member to download a program called Hotspot Shield, to improve Web surfing. Within that online discussion about foreign access to *The Daily Show*, Sr.Producer *thatmoodychic* explained that the decision to make *The Daily Show* unavailable to certain parts of the world "has zero to do with Jon, this is a Comedy Central decision and Jon should not in any way be held accountable" (*American Idiocy* thread).

All discussion threads are initiated by members of the community (another word for the "Forum"), although non-members can read all the postings. All discussions need to comply with the *Forum*'s "constitution" -COMEDYCENTRAL.COM TERMS

OF USE AGREEMENT, which is available on line.[73] As part of the rules of posting, participants are required to abide by the following rule:

> Any Postings made by you shall be at your own risk and you should not disclose or make available your personal information in any Posting.[74]

In addition to the *Forum*, the online audience has other potential platforms of expression, such as impromptu blogs associated with the *Forum*.

4. TDS' Academic and Media Audiences

Matt Hills recently argued that media academics constitute a fandom of the show they study (2007, pp. 33 et seq.). Building on Hill's argument on media academics generally I argue that both the other media and media academics are part of *TDS'* audience. The general academic literature on *TDS* suggests a homogenous reading: *TDS* has a clear encoded message, which audiences relish and more or less dutifully decode. Nowhere in that literature is there a hint that the *TDS'* primary text is decoded in any but the preferred encoded meaning. It seems only reasonable – because in the eyes of the laudatory literature the primary

[73] http://forums.thedailyshow.com/
[74] Id.

meaning is so special and unique--that resistance to the mainstream media means embracing the encoded *TDS* meaning.

The other professional audience *TDS* has created is the other media. Interestingly, this audience has embraced *TDS*: the so-called liberal media, such as *The New York Times* and *NBC's Nightly News*, go so far as to use Stewart as a legitimate source of news commentary. As recently as August 29, 2010, in, "The Billionaires Bankrolling the Tea Party," Frank Rich incorporated a *TDS* segment as transparent news commentary:

> But as ''The Daily Show'' keeps pointing out, these Fox bloviators never acknowledge that the evil prince they're bashing, Walid bin Talal, is not only the biggest non-Murdoch shareholder in Fox News's parent company (he owns 7 percent of News Corporation) and the recipient of Murdoch mammoth investments in Saudi Arabia but also the subject of lionization elsewhere on Fox (2010, p. 8).

That Frank Rich could only engage the *TDS* encoded, preferred meaning is evidenced by his regard for Stewart and his journalistic interviews which, according to Rich, are often more thorough than those of "any representative of non-fake television news" (Rich, p. 8). If Stewart functions, or at least performs, as an objective, thorough journalist, then his audience, in this case, the liberal media, reads *TDS* texts as they have been encoded by *TDS*.

There are at least 35 instances when Frank Rich referenced *TDS* and in none did he indicate confusion over the meaning, or use them in any way other than in the encoded way.

NBC's Nightly News often incorporates *TDS'* references as direct quotes which speak for themselves, and thus do not need any further interpretation. However, unlike *The New York Times'* Frank Rich, NBC sees them, or at least overtly labels them, as comedy, not news commentary. For example, a week after his own appearance on *TDS*, on August 24, 2010, to promote his MSNBC special, Williams used footage from that very *TDS* show on his own NBC broadcast, where he discussed a new municipal ordinance on bed bugs.

> BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor: Apologies up front here for all of you who consider this time of night the dinner hour and thus may be eating right now, but this next story, while disgusting, is growing in urgency and importance. Today's New York Times all but put out a special section on bedbugs. The city passed a new bedbug disclosure law today; but make no mistake, they are now a national health issue. From the East Coast through hard-hit Ohio to the West, bedbugs are at epidemic proportions. We have an update on the fight tonight from NBC's Mike Taibbi.
>
> […]
>
> MIKE TAIBBI: It's all fodder for psychiatric consultations... ...and for late night comics.
>
> Mr. DAVID LETTERMAN: (From CBS' "The Late Show with David Letterman") You folks applauding or trying to kill bedbugs?
>
> Mr. JON STEWART: (From Comedy Central's "The Daily Show") By the way, the scariest thing about bedbugs, no place is safe.

> NBC News: Nightly News, ***Newscast: Bedbug infestation***, 31 August 2010 (form Factiva)

In addition to using ***TDS*** as comic relief, ***NBC's Nightly News*** also uses ***TDS*** quotes as a barometer of cultural hipness. For example, in 2006, political ignorance was accepted if ***TDS*** acknowledged it, as it did with respect to a presidential hopeful and otherwise unknown, Tom Vilsack. NBC confessed relative public ignorance of Vilsack's identity, and also its excuse when it broadcast the following:

> NBC's Chip Reid: His name is Tom Vilsack, and if you've never heard of him, you're not alone. Just ask Comedy Central's Jon Stewart. (Clip from "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," November 30, 2006)

The conservative television outlets, such as Fox News, also seem to follow ***TDS*** closely, although for a different purpose. They use ***TDS*** as a barometer of liberalism. For example, on September 8, 2010, Fox News ***The O'Reilly Factor*** featured a segment called ***Late-Night Laughs at Obama's Expense*** where Bill O'Reilly discussed the meaning of late night comedy jokes about Obama. Noteworthy is the fact that O'Reilly did not find the ***TDS*** joke unclear. To the contrary, O'Reilly decoded Stewart's joke according to its encoded meaning: Obama's efforts are a bit too little (comparable

to Oprahs' gifts) and a bit superfluous (Obama promises what has been done).

> O'REILLY: "Personal Story" segment tonight, you may remember that both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were shocked and awed by the late-night media. Those jokes still persist today. President Obama was largely given a pass from the nocturnal mockings until now. (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)
>
> DAVID LETTERMAN, HOST, CBS'S "THE LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN": President Obama -- listen to this -- proposed a $50 billion job bailout, that he wants to rebuild roads? Fifty billion dollars to rebuild roads, going to rebuild runways, going to be rebuilding railway lines, going to be rebuilding his presidency. It's a big, big deal.
>
> BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: I want America to have the best infrastructure in the world!
>
> JON **STEWART**, HOST, COMEDY CENTRAL'S "THE **DAILY SHOW**": Oh, (EXPLETIVE DELETED), no, he didn't! No! He went $50 billion infrastructure Oprah Angel Network on their ass. You get a hydroelectric dam! You get a hydroelectric dam! You get some type of sewage treatment plant! You get an interchange that had three lanes but were widened to four, yet somehow, remain just as crowded. Yes. Wait a minute. Billion-dollar infrastructure? Didn't we do this already?(END VIDEO CLIP)
>
> O'REILLY: All right, now I'm glad Letterman and Stewart corrected me. I said $500 billion. It's $50 billion when we talked about Hillary Clinton. I'm sorry. I made that mistake. The question is, will that satire have any effect on the voters? Joining us […] FOX News analyst Mary Katharine Ham, and […] Juan Williams […].
> JUAN WILLIAMS: Well, I think this is a moment because, you know, those two, Letterman and Stewart...
> O'REILLY: Big libs.
> WILLIAMS: ... are big court jesters.
> O'REILLY: Big libs.
> WILLIAMS: They are the court jesters for this king,

> for this administration. So they have previously been the liberals who were mocking President Bush and, you know, don't forget the Clinton sex scandal, but that was exceptional.[…]
> WILLIAMS: It wasn't cool to make fun of Barack Obama.
> O'REILLY: Because he was just too big.
> WILLIAMS: It was also...
> O'REILLY: It was almost like making fun, Juan...
> WILLIAMS: ... of the black -- everything was...
> O'REILLY: It was almost like making fun of the baby Jesus. Can't make fun of him.[…]
> MARY KATHARINE HAM: No, I mean, he had a long way to fall. There was this comedic crisis, if you remember, in 2008 and 2009 about how are we going to make fun of the new president? He's so cool. […]But you know, comedians couldn't, unlike Barack, say that they just inherited a bunch of bad jokes from the Bush administration and then not move on. They had to move on. […] And I would draw a distinction, actually, between Letterman and Stewart. Stewart actually made a turn earlier. Actually, in the very early part of the Obama administration realizing he had to tell good jokes and sort of poking fun at him in a fairly consistent way. He made me laugh. So I was proud of him. I think Letterman is a -- sort of a standard liberal grump who is willing to give up laughs in order to fit in with the liberal orthodoxy. The fact that he's turning […]. He's been making fun of Obama's vacation. So certainly, I think that Letterman is probably a lagging indicator of how much regular Americans are making fun of Barack Obama.

TDS is a media phenomenon in, of, and to itself. Other media outlets use its primary text to produce their own derivative texts. That usage evidences that some other media outlets accept ***TDS*** as a form of journalism. It is interesting to note that both ends of the political spectrum, including conservative news analysts, decode ***TDS*** seemingly uniformly, as they all find humor in ***TDS'*** jokes.

The next chapter will use the tertiary text produced by the media as indicative of the show's decoded polysemy in an effort to empirically address the second question of the dissertation (Q2).

Chapter 8. The Decoded Polysemy of The Daily Show. The Case of Media-Authored Tertiary Texts (Q2)

The previous two chapters explained the theoretical framework used to explore the second research question of this dissertation:

Question #2: How does *TDS'* audience decode its text?

Audience members hold the key to the depth of any decoding process. However, that depth is often hard to gauge and even illusory. The discussion below examines how *TDS'* audiences engage the primary, *TDS*, text and whether they understand it as a mere joke, political commentary, or a hybrid. It also examines whether audiences decode the meaning of the primary text by following the encoded signs, by negotiating their signifiers, by resisting their meaning, or by simply ignoring them.

1. Data Collection. Tertiary Texts. Challenges and Results.

The original research plan called for the collection of tertiary texts authored by as many segments of the *TDS* multiple audiences as possible to collect. I "lurked" and monitored all online postings recorded by members of the official *Forum* and *TDS'* Facebook community during the 15 ½ months the chosen *TDS* episodes aired -- from September 25, 2008 through January 12, 2010. Then I proceeded to read all the mainstream media responses to anything related to *TDS* during that time. However, this dissertation is not about audience agency but about how the primary text enables that agency.

In order to analyze audience empowerment, I needed to collect data which revealed how the audience perceived the primary text once they decoded its meaning. Ideally I needed tertiary texts which evidenced the decoding process itself. Thus, the original plan was not conducive to useful analysis. It became apparent that I needed an improved, more precisely targeted, plan.

The basis for answering Question #2 is using tertiary texts. But tertiary texts are fluid, especially when both their content and authorship are hard to define: What

differentiates a tertiary text from a paratext? What qualifies someone as an audience member? Conceptualizing what data will best incorporate the reading quality of the primary text, and which will reflect how viewers describe, use or incorporate the primary text, required a methodological decision. It became obvious that the method used to identify tertiary texts which most reliably reflected how the viewer decoded the primary text was the way to delineate a research sample.

Research surveys of cross-audience segments usually provide the data used to analyze audience effect. Aside from the fact that those surveys usually rely on audience members' self-evaluation, all my attempts to reach a large number of audience members, or even to identify a useful source of such subjects, proved unsuccessful. I handed out hundreds of flyers during a year of personal observations of the live audience and the taping of the show (October 2008 –November 2009). I received only thirty-six fully completed surveys of the show's live audience shows (*Appendices* H1 & H2). Though certainly meager, this information will nevertheless be analyzed in the course of answering the second research question (Q2), and its

interpretation will be added to supplement the findings provided by the other methods.

In the end, I settled on tertiary texts produced by other ***TDS*** audience segments. Scholars have used quantitative methods to analyze the impact of one media's coverage of specific political events upon other media. For example, in 2008, Ben Voth analyzed how the two televised final debates between the Republican Presidential candidate, George W. Bush and the Democratic candidate, Al Gore, impacted the subsequently mediated 2000 presidential campaigns (2008). However, scholars have rarely if ever used methods which usually support quantitative research to decipher the meaning-making encoding/decoding of specific media texts.

In my methodological search I discovered that bibliometrics, the quantitative analysis used in librarianship to trace relationships amongst academic journal citations (Lee, 2010, 717-734) can help me decide what texts have engaged ***TDS*** in a decoding manner. The stepping stone in bibliometrics, which arguably opened its usefulness to interpretive studies, is Henry Small's development of the cognitive function of bibliographic citations (1978). Small argued that each citation and

reference incorporated an idea which the citer decided to invoke in a specific context (Id). "The idea may or may not coincide with that of the citer, but, to the extent that it does, as is often the case in scientific papers, the reference itself can be regarded as a simple and relatively stable symbol of that idea, a concept symbol" (de Bellis, 2009, p. 59).

For Small, a bibliographic reference, de Bellis explains, is also a "symbol" of the connection which exists between a concept articulated in the cited (primary) document and the particular point in the text, where the citation is used in the derivative text. If citations and references can be viewed as building blocks of symbolic language (de Bellis, p. 245), then the references to a specific show become building blocks for deciphering the meaning of that show through the eyes of the viewer. Using the context of the tertiary text makes decoding the reading of the primary text a more rigorous exercise. It avoids a mere interpretation of the text: it provides an objective basis for that interpretation in the way a quote or reference is being used in the tertiary text.

Bibliometrics assumes that citations represent a transfer of knowledge which can give the reader a sense of

the transferred idea from the context of the work citing it. Thus, to the extent that a subsequent text engages *TDS'* primary text to convey some commentary on *TDS*, I considered that text a *TDS* tertiary text. I discounted texts which appeared to be created by online audiences which did not make any references to *TDS'* primary text, despite the fact that they were published in connection with the show.

1.1. Texts Produced by Online Fandom Are Outside the Scope of This Dissertation's Tertiary Texts

As a commercially and critically successful television show, *TDS* has produced many derivative texts, though not all can be viewed within the purview of what Fiske labeled as audience-authored, tertiary texts. Most of these texts are authored by vocal segments of online populations, which represent what can be characterized as *TDS'* fandom or anti-fandom. Frequently those are produced within an online space associated with the show. But their content either ignores the show or a specific episode, or it loosely connects to the *TDS'* signifiers. Those texts reveal more about their social role for their authors than about *TDS'* decoding process, and as shown below, offered little perspective on the role of *TDS* in empowering its audiences to think outside the joke, for example.

For instance, the social network Facebook is a less policed online space than ***TDS' Forum***. Perhaps for that reason, ***Facebook*** members seem to freely engage in posting activities associated with "flamers[75]," and "trolls,"[76] those who engage in accidental or non-accidental ***ad hominem*** insults. Despite obvious signs of active involvement, those texts satisfy Sandvoss' definition of "paratexts," texts whose meaning sheds no light on the primary texts. They do not satisfy Fiske's definition of tertiary texts, texts audiences produce in response to the primary text, and thus are not collected here.

For example, on July 22, 2009, Stewart dedicated 1:51 minutes from his 8:09 minute-monologue to CNN's coverage of whether Obama had a US birth certificate, the so-called "birther issue," whose summary is available in ***Appendix I***. Stewart's monologue followed a CNN clip of anchorperson Kitty Pilgrim filling in for Lou Dobbs on CNN's now defunct ***Lou Dobbs Tonight***. Pilgrim was shown saying: "The controversy [regarding the President's birth place] lives on, especially on the Internet." Back in his studio, Stewart repeated her words:

[75] http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/
[76] http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/

> Jon Stewart: (fake falsetto of naïve viewer/anchorperson): Especially on the Internet? (laughter from the live audience). Then it must be credible. (more laughter from the live audience). Like these pictures I found that prove that the Pope is actually Jewish. (obviously "doctored" picture of a Jewish wedding with Pope Benedict XVI as the groom). That's his wedding….His Jewish wedding. (more audience laughter) And you thought he was a Nazi.[77]



Image 11: Internet Image of the Pope's Jewish Wedding, ***TDS*** July 22, 2009

The monologue has a comedic structure whose irony is very succinct. "It's on the Internet? Then it must be credible." Stewart explicitly said the opposite of what he meant.[78] The vehicle for that irony was a joke about the Pope. Stewart introduced pictures from the Pope's supposedly Jewish wedding to prove how credible "things" posted on the Internet are.

As explained earlier, the joke's humor came from its absurdity and the public frustration with a lot of unreliable information available on the Internet. It is

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[77] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-22-2009/the-born-identity , minute 1:36 in the show.

[78] L'ironie est l'oppositions entrée reel et l'ideal, l'opposition "de ce qui est a ce qui devrait etre." (Bergson, 97).

ludicrous to imagine the celibate leader of the Catholic world (and in actual fact, a former member of Hitler Youth), getting married in a Jewish wedding.

Finally, Stewart mockingly admonished his audience for thinking the Pope was a Nazi sympathizer. "And you thought he was a Nazi." It alluded to the fact that the Pope had been a member of Hitler Youth.

In light of these encoded signs, the 1:51 minutes of primary text could entertain various readings. However, they had to be subsumed into one main idea: *TDS'* media criticism. This critique could take different shapes: It could encompass all news media which use unverified sources, or it could point to CNN for relying on Internet gossip. Within that targeted media criticism, the argument could be more or less biting. It could contain a subversive reading focused on how audiences feel about the Pope's lack of moral standing (the Nazi "ideology" has come to represent immorality). Or, it could entail a more limited reading focused on how audiences feel about the Pope's alleged anti-Semitism (the Nazis surely represent anti-Semitic values, if anything).

I argue here that the meaning of the birther-Pope segment does not take place in the abstract, but in the

context of the segment, the doctored pictures of the Pope's Jewish wedding, the episode, and the show's text. Furthermore, derivative texts, such as political satire, which build meaning on very specific items of news while engaging audiences and relying on their knowledge and political bent to participate in the meaning-making process (and to understand the joke) enjoy a much more limited polysemy. In other words, in light of the show's tenor, the preferred meaning of Stewart's July 22, 2009 monologue seems rather pointed but limited: (1) CNN should not encourage hoaxes, because, (2) in the same way the Pope's Jewish wedding must be a hoax despite the absence of any pictures on the Internet disproving it, Obama's birther issue must similarly be a hoax, much like the movie ***The Bourne Identity*** (2002), after which the segment was named, and which also concerned a false identity plot.

The ***Forum*** fandom did not produce any responses to Stewart's July 22, 2009 monologue. In fact there was no posted online reaction at all to the entire July 22, 2009 episode , on which actor Kevin Nealon, from the cable show Weeds, about illegal dealings with marijuana, appeared as the guest. A member associated with the show opened the

regular thread which encourages *Forum* members to discuss each episode, with the introductory posting:

> "Weeds," a gardening show ☺ "The Born Identity" - It's a trap.[79]

This cultural connection between *Weeds*, described as a fake gardening show in the above introduction to the ultimately empty thread, and a segment of Stewart's monologue about a much-debated identity issue – Obama's background compared with that of the fictional Bourne -- showcases the cultural sophistication of *TDS'* audiences. But, surprisingly, no one took the bait.

Unlike the paucity, in fact absence, of *Forum* comments, *TDS'* Facebook space hosted 44 postings connected with the July 22, 2009 episode.[80] Their content varied from laudatory remarks about Stewart's general performance as a host, to legal analysis of cases and constitutional provisions about what constitutes U.S. citizenship and what the requirements for a U.S. presidential candidate are. Many contributors added elements of their own private and public lives. It seems that this online ad-hoc community engaged in a conversation with each other while ignoring the primary

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[79] http://forum.thedailyshow.com/tds/board/message?board.id=1118&message.id=2922&query.id=21745#M2922

[80] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-22-2009/the-born-identity.

text. Some veered into other birther issues, such as Senator's McCain birth on a United States military base in Panama, illustrated by this posting by Ashley:

> Being born on a United States military base abroad does not automatically make one a citizen. Bases are considered US territory, but according to the US State Department: "Despite widespread popular belief, U.S. military installations abroad and U.S. diplomatic or consular facilities are not part of the United States within the meaning of the 14th Amendment. A child born on the premises of such a facility is not subject to the jurisdiction of the United States and does not acquire U.S. citizenship by reason of birth.' For example, John McCain was born on a military base in Panama. He is a natural born citizen because both of his parents were citizens, not because of where he was born. And being born to one American citizen on foreign soil does not automatically make one a citizen either, there are a number of qualifications, which can differ depending on the circumstances, one has to meet before one can transfer citizenship. For example, the law differs depending on whether or not the child's parents were married at the time of his/her birth. So, if a child was born in Canada to an American mother and a Canadian father (who were married), the mother would have to have lived in the US for at least 5 years prior, 2 of those years after the age of 14, in order to transfer citizenship to her child. If, on the other hand, the child was born out of wedlock, the mother would have to have lived in the US for only 1 continuous year to transfer citizenship. (This would differ in a situation where the American is the father). (Ashley commented | 7 months ago as of November 22, 2010)[81]

No posting commented on Stewart's criticism of CNN or Stewart's position on the Republican-fueled "birther issue." Most posts disregarded the ***TDS*** intermediary role as

[81] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-22-2009/the-born-identity.

a potential news conduit. This tight ad-hoc community seemed to enjoy politically-charged sparring under the guise of discussing rational issues: the Federal Constitution, the United States Code and even Supreme Court cases. A rather large number of postings came from either flamers or trolls, such as this posting: "Love this!!!!! one of your best these people make the entire usa look so dumb been laughing at them for weeks how dumb they sound! when the proof is everywhere! Lol more more more bravo!!!!!! (ljr commented | 16 months ago as of November 22, 2010).[82]"

Or this comment:

> It's nice to see that the retarded right is well represented here as well. No one cares about your idiotic conspiracy theories. As stated in the piece this crap has been thoroughly debunked. MarieDivine, it's great to see that you assume that we all are aware of the garbage that you read on right wing sites every day. The fact is Obama is a US citizen and is our elected president. You can bang your head against the wall until pigs start to fly and it's still not going to change. (ranndino commented | 16 months ago as of November 22, 2010) [83]

The texts posted on the online spaces associated with the show are thus too fluid to be incorporated in a research sample of tertiary texts. They are sometimes neither tertiary texts nor do they reflect the primary

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[82] Id.
[83] Id.

text's polysemy because their goal is not to engage the text but to engage each other within the limits of the online spaces described above. Thus, the only data which could be described as audience-produced and whose purpose was to reflect the audience's understanding of the primary text (the audience's decoding) proved to be other media texts. Those tertiary texts denote an effort to state an opinion about the primary text. They represent a recoded interpretation, or reading of *TDS*, and this is why they represent the focus of my data collection of *TDS* tertiary texts.

For similar reasons I did not include the texts produced by the *TDS' Forum* fandom in the data pool of tertiary texts.

As mentioned here, the *TDS* March 12, 2009 cablecast contained a shortened version of Stewart's interview with CNBC personality Jim Cramer. Unlike regular episodes, the March 12, 2009, episode was dominated by that interview, which usually represents a segment, Segment #3, of each episode's structure. Briefly, Stewart caustically criticized how CNBC covered the economic downturn and then the crash and how that coverage (or lack of it) was further advanced by Jim Cramer in his *Mad Money* program. Both

Cramer and Stewart insisted that they were mere entertainers, but Stewart accused Cramer of going beyond that and duping his viewers with false advice. Cramer did not forcefully dispute that accusation.

Stewart conducted his interview in his much applauded, so-called speak-truth-to-power manner. He accompanied his criticism with visual and audio excerpts of Cramer's past unsound financial advice. In the live taping of the interview, available on *TDS*' website, Stewart summarizes Cramer's behavior in the following exchange:

> Jon Stewart: I understand that you want to make finance entertaining but it is not a fucking game and when I (applause) watch I get … I cannot tell you how angry it makes me because what it says to me is me is you all know …
> Jim Cramer: But …
> Jon Stewart: …. You all know what's going on. You can draw a straight line from those shenanigans to the stock that was being pulled at Bear and at AIG, all this derivative market stuff that is this weird Wall Street side back …
> Jim Cramer: Jon, don't you want guys like me who have been in it to show the shenanigans? What else can I do? Last night I showed …
> Jon Stewart: No, no, no, no, no. I want desperately for that but I feel like it's not what we're getting. What we're getting ... Listen, you knew what the banks were doing and yet we were touting it for months and months. The entire network was. And now to pretend that this was some crazy once-in-a-lifetime tsunami that nobody could see coming is disingenuous at best and criminal at worst.

Overall, Stewart's interview remained reasonably civil. To the extent it was somewhat populist, he never engaged in the extreme form of populist rhetoric in which Fox's TV personality Glenn Beck engages.

The entire, unedited, interview was posted online a few hours later, and viewers were invited to watch it.[84] When it was posted, on March 13 at 2:35am, an associate with *The Daily Show*, Eric March, who posts on *The Daily Show*'s "Indecision Blog," prefaced it with the following *caveat*: "Jim Cramer and Jon Stewart went toe-to-toe last night. It was just like Ali–Foreman, only with more head trauma. But you didn't see everything. Much of the interview had to be cut for time. But this is the Internet, where all we have is time. So, here now, is the exclusive, uncensored, complete three-part interview."[85]

His invitation elicited 3,561 comments. The last comment was posted on May 1, 2009. Online, the three-part interview was viewed over four million times (as of May 29, 2009 the first two parts had been viewed more than three million times, and the third part almost one million times). This placed the episode among the most popular segments on the official site, and made it an obvious candidate for

[84] http://blog.indecisionforever.com/2009/03/13/jon-stewart-and-jim-cramer-the-extended-daily-show-interview/.
[85] Id.

inspiring tertiary texts. However, whether because this episode distanced itself from the regular jocular tenor of the show or because its content was politically biased (scolding corporate America and hailing the virtues of the regular folk America), the texts authored by the online population exhibited all the research problems identified above.

On the ***Forum***, the March 12 episode was the springboard for 11 online discussion threads. All the threads contained texts authored by members of the online audience, mostly fans. ***Appendices*** J through L contain the detail analysis of the cognitive reasons for not having them included in the data pool for this dissertation. The sample of online discussion threads were entitled "NBC Boss Slams Jon Stewart for Criticism," whose textual production is analyzed in ***Appendix J***, "Jim Cramer Comes to Call," analyzed in ***Appendix K***, and "In Jon We Trust," analyzed in ***Appendix L***.

Some of those threads were created before the episode aired. Others contained the posters' personal beliefs which were at best tenuously related to interview itself. However, despite the fact that the March 12, 2009 Interview segment was an anomaly, a sharp break from the habitual mode of

operation at ***TDS***, as the postings show, the viewers did not complain about having problems deciphering the primary text. They did not engage the primary text at the cognitive level of debating it, but their discussion was never impeded by expressions of incomprehension or confusion caused by the interview itself.

1.2. Mainstream Media Authored Texts As Tertiary Texts

According to the definition of tertiary texts used here -- texts produced by an audience in the process of decoding the primary text (Fiske) -- and according to the process of establishing what constitutes decoding – referring to or incorporating parts of the primary text, as used in bibliometrics -- I limited my data pool to media-authored texts.

The data collected here has two components: records of the print and blog media available on the proprietary LexisNexis database and news show transcripts available on the proprietary Factiva database. The research sample covered a somewhat different sample than did the primary text sample, because the episodes aired under the topic "***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House***" produced little reaction in other media. For example, a media search for "Clusterf#@k

to the Poor House," on LexisNexis within its "All English News" files, produced only three blog references harvested from the blog re-distributor, "Blogs on Demand." They contained *TDS* quotes from two "*Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*" episodes: one from September 25, 2008 and the other from February 5, 2009. Those quotes were not accompanied by any contextual comment by the blogger which could provide understanding of how the bloggers interpreted the *TDS* segment they quoted. An identical Factiva search of NBC's Nightly News, CBS's Evening News, ABC News, and The O'Reilly Factor, from FoxNews, produced the same paucity of results.

Thus, data collection focused on media responses to *TDS* and its take on the economy during the time period of my primary text collection: September 25, 2008 through January 12, 2010. A search for *"daily show" or "jon stewart" /s econom!* in the LexisNexis data file, "All English News," produced 210 references, although many of them were unrelated to *TDS'* assessment of the economy, because the truncated word econom! brought up unrelated results (such as interviews with economists about their potential senatorial runs rather than discussions about politics, e.g., an interview with economist Peter Schiff).

An identical Factiva search for news show transcripts produced a smaller number of results. In fact, only 18 results from both LexisNexis and Factiva searches contained a reflexive reference to the primary text within a context which allowed interpretation of the reason for that reference. Those results came from print and digital sources, and they included news wires, blogs, and television news shows. Those references are all analyzed below. [86] When blogs just repeated other blogs' alerts, they were not included here.

2. Research Sample Analysis and Findings

The LexisNexis data collected represent a diverse pool of news items. The data were organized in categories identifying specific types of media: television show transcripts, journals and newspapers, blogs, and news services.

They are deemed representative of *TDS'* tertiary texts because they contain reflexive references to the primary text, *TDS*.

[86] http://dneacsu1.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/lexis-tds-stewart-economy.pdf.

For space reasons, with few exceptions, the edited excerpts are reproduced in ***Appendix M***. Those excerpts go beyond the ***TDS*** reference or quote, and include a large portion of the tertiary text itself. That body of text contains the explanation for the specific ***TDS*** reference. That explanation offers the clues about how the tertiary text views ***TDS***: either as an ambiguous polysemic text or not. As suggested by the answer to my first research question (Q1), they support my expectations that, as a primary text, ***TDS*** proves to be easily accessible to its audiences, because its meaning does not open to critical interpretations, but propounds a specific interpretation of the news.

Below I exemplify how two media news shows decode ***TDS***. These examples come from a cable news show, ***CNN's Anderson Cooper 360°*** (two excerpts), and a broadcast one, ***CBS Evening News with Katie Curic*** (three excerpts). I used yellow to highlight the ***TDS*** primary text, whether it was a reference or a quote. I used green to highlight my conclusion about how the tertiary text decoded ***TDS*** primary text.

CNN- Anderson Cooper 360 degrees

a. On March 31, 2009, on his show about "Obama's New Auto Plan; the New North Dakota Storm and Madonna's Adoption Controversy," Anderson Cooper discussed a ***TDS*** segment from last year. Interviewing CNN's Gary Tuchman on the storm's coverage, Cooper stated:

> I seem to remember you being made fun of by Jon Stewart
> [video clip: Stewart: The water was up to reporters' ankles. The water was up to reporters; knees. The water was up to reporters' thighs. No. The mind-boggling waist shot. I remember in 2008 the water got up so high it went right up to Gary Tuchman's nipples.]

Reference or Quote interpretation: Cooper interpreted the ***TDS*** clip as "making fun" of CNN's correspondent, which seems to be what Stewart was indeed doing, mocking, in his satire of CNN news coverage.

Reading: CNN news coverage decoded the text according to its **Preferred Reading.**

Decoded Polysemy. There is no question raised about the potential decoded polysemy of the text. The joke is clear. To keep it a joke, Cooper has to read it as it is.

b. On January 8, 2009, in a segment of his show called, "Gaza Battle Rages amid Peace Efforts, Senate Seat Scandal and Travolta Family Tragedy," Cooper announced:

> And later something that could help the Obamas make a very important decision, the first ever presidential puppy debate, moderated by me on the ***Daily Show*** ahead.

> […]
> Up next, the shot of the day: serious stuff, a doggy debate to help the Obamas search for a new puppy. And yes, I was asked to moderate the doggy debate by the "Daily Show" and yes I did it sure I was – I had nothing else to do that day.

After the commercial break, CNN aired the ***TDS*** segment on that debate, which ended with Stewart announcing:

> Video clip: Stewart: I'm sorry, I'm being told that the Obamas have already made a decision. And I think we can all agree they've clearly chosen the most adorable of last night's participants, Anderson Cooper.



Image 12: The Presidential Puppy (***TDS*** Episode #14001, aired on 1/5/2009)

Reference or Quote interpretation: Cooper, self-referentially, participated in a mock CNN debate of canine candidates for the Obamas' pet. ***TDS*** believed that Cooper, the journalist, proved to be as adorable as a pet. Cooper presented the ***TDS*** clip on his show, including the clip as "an exact quote," without any other preface, than its mildly subversive, encoded meaning: journalists as presidential pets.

Reading: Reading: CNN news coverage decoded the text according to its **Preferred Reading.**

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text was clear despite the fact that Cooper was part of the joke. He represented the primary text as an innocuous joke about what constitutes news. However, within the tenor of the primary text, it is possible that the joke was on CNN, since the joke suggested that CNN is unprofessional, and Cooper, a CNN news anchor, though a participant in the primary text, did not want to negotiate such a critical reading.

CBS –Evening News

a. On January 19, 2010, Katie Couric reported on the political debate no one expected: Massachusetts Democrats trying to hold on to the late Ted Kennedy's Senate seat by fielding a relative unknown, Martha Coakley, for that position. A ***TDS*** clip is introduced as "kidding" but illustrative of Coakley's gaffes:

> [clip: Stewart: She said what now?
> Ah, apparently when the "Boston Globe" asked her if she was being too passive in campaigning she replied "As opposed to standing outside Fenway Park? In the cold? Shaking hands?]

Reference or Quote interpretation: CBS used the TBS quote as yet another media argument that the Democrats were in trouble. Late night comedy shows were making fun of the

Democratic candidate. CBS incorporated the encoded meaning of the clip.

Reading: CBS news coverage decoded the text according to its **Preferred Reading.**

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text was hard to gauge because Couric incorporated the ***TDS*** clip, satirizing Coakley for being aloof, in support of her show's thesis that the Democrats are not running good candidates. It is unclear whether the clip could be used as emphatic proof of how bad the Massachusetts Democratic candidate was, because of Stewart's openly liberal views.

b. On August 19, 2009, Couric reported on the health care debate, and CBS correspondent Bill Plante reported on the President's wavering position on the public option:

> Plante: And the heat is definitely on now in the health care debate, as even the comics lampoon the president's various statements about a public plan.
> Barack Obama: The public option, whether we have it or we don't have it…
> [***TDS*** clip: Stewart: No public option? We still get to kill old people, though right? (laughter). Did you just drop public option?]
> Plante: All kidding aside, the president remains confident that he'll get a bill, and as he told reporters today, he hopes it will be bipartisan…

Reference or Quote interpretation: CBS incorporated the quote for what it was: laughing at the president's indecision. Apparently, CBS did not incorporate the entire

encoded meaning, as Stewart's mordant criticism of the right's disregard for what the public option effectively addressed was ignored.

Reading: CBS news coverage decoded the text according to its **Preferred Reading.**

Decoded Polysemy: The decoded polysemy of the primary text was hard to gauge in this instance because Plante commented that "the comedians lampoon the president's various statements."

c. On March 13, 2009, Couric reported on Wall Street's best week in four months, and Justice Ginsburg's 76th birthday, before she introduced a segment devoted to the *TDS* episode where Stewart interviewed Cramer:

> Couric: Cramer versus Stewart as the financial commentator takes a serious hammering from the comedian. (commercial break)
> Couric: Financial reporters and commentators are taking a lot of heat these days for not foreseeing the meltdown and sounding an alarm. Well, one of them came face to face with his toughest critic. Jeff Greenfield reports on Stewart versus Cramer.
> (begin videotape)
> Gibbs[The Presidential Press Secretary]: The President and I talked earlier in the day yesterday about watching it. I enjoyed it thoroughly.
> Greenfield: What was it? A major speech, a legislative breakthrough?
> Stewart: How the hell did we end up here, Mr. Cramer?
> Greenfield: No, it was Thursday night's Daily Show, where host Jon Stewart skewered CNBC financial pundit Jim Cramer.

Stewart: I can't reconcile the brilliance and knowledge that you have of the intricacies of the market with the crazy (expletive deleted) I see you do every night.

Cramer: There is a market for it, and you give it to them and I think.

Stewart: There is a market for cocaine and hookers! You knew what the banks were doing, and yet you were touting it for months and months. The entire network was. And so now to pretend that this is some sort of crazy, once-in-a-lifetime tsunami that nobody could have seen coming is disingenuous at best and criminal at worse.

Greenfield. Like a prosecutor bearing down on a decidedly uncomfortable witness, Stewart argued that the financial network, and by extension much of the business press, had given the public a false sense of financial security.[…]

Greenfield: But as Stewart himself said, Jim Cramer was not the real target of his anger. […]

Greenfield: And CNBC is a root symptom of what has happened over the last year and a half. It's a network with a very small audience – about 300,000 – but a very affluent one, with a relentless, at times hyper caffeinated intensity that's focused on the day-to-day movement of the market.[…]

Stewart: And you guys knew that was going on.

Greenfield: the core of Stewart's anger is his belief in its coverage, and in its lack of skepticism, much of the press was painting one picture to the public while knowing full well that the reality was very different.

Stewart: That it is a game that you know, that you know is going on, but that you go on television as a financial network and pretend isn't happening.

Greenfield: Actually, says New Yorker financial writer Jim Surowiecki, much of Wall Street's problem was that it fooled itself. [end of videotape]

Greenfield: But the real issue is this, how do we get the hard questions asked before things go wrong? That is the very serious question the late night comedian was raising, Katie.

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Greenfield, a CBS journalist, reported on the ***TDS*** show as it if were major political news: he compared it with a "major speech, a legislative breakthrough." Greenfield saw the now famous interview as a metaphor for the popular belief that much of the press was misleading the public on financial matters. Greenfield read the interview as what it was: a fit of anger at a financial journalist. Greenfield read more than someone without contextual information (on CNBC demographics, for example) could have done. Greenfield's reading seems more complex than an average viewer's decoding, but it does not mean it is not the encoded one.

Reading: CBS news coverage decoded the text according to its **Preferred Reading.**

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text was limited. Greenfield does not seem to have had problems with decoding the meaning of ***TDS*** in this instance. In order to obtain a broader negotiated reading for it, Greenfield had to introduce his commentary with the following: "But as Stewart himself said, Jim Cramer was not the real target of his anger. […]". In this instance, the primary text did seem to entail the larger more complex decoding, in addition to smaller more focused readings.

3. Research Limits and Future Research

All these examples show that *TDS* is a media phenomenon that other media relate to frequently. It is not clear whether they do it because of *TDS'* light content (it is comedy), political content (it is moderately liberal) or its cognitive content (criticism of specific corporate or political entities). Nevertheless, O'Reilly believes *TDS* is an influential political comedy show. CNN's anchor Anderson Cooper accepts invitations to moderate dog debates on *TDS*, and claims "Brian Williams must have been busy" as a way perhaps of excusing himself. *CBS'* Greenfield on its *Evening News* decodes *TDS'* segments as if they were political news.

The rather limited data used here also indicated a trend in *TDS'* decoding: (1) when *TDS* did not have a comedic structure the media interpreted its narrative more diversely, and negotiated its meaning according to their own background of external knowledge. As the Cramer interview shows, most newscasters and other audience members engaged the text in a reading which reflected the encoded signs as much as their own show's perceived politics. The interview with Cramer was decoded to mean

different things for different media outlets. For Bill O'Reilly it meant a personal turf limited to Cramer and Stewart. For Greenfield it meant an attack on *CNBC*. Some bloggers decoded it as an attack on all journalistic coverage of the financial meltdown.

(2) Comedic content, however was interpreted differently and more narrowly, diametrically so. *TDS'* jokes have been consistently interpreted according to their preferred reading, as expected here. Members of the left-leaning and right-leaning media were able to get *TDS'* jokes. Stewart mocked Al Gore and O'Reilly laughed because he got the joke. Stewart mocked Obama and O'Reilly laughed again. However, the data covered here is limited and the jokes are about liberal political figures, which suggests that more research needs to be done to see if the conservative media also laughs when Stewart pokes fun at conservative political figures. The fact that O'Reilly keeps stating publicly that he respects Stewart indicates that he finds Stewart's jokes as, at least, inoffensive (*Appendix M*).

TDS' decoded polysemy proved harder to gauge with respect to its online presence. In-depth interviews with live audiences may be suggested but ethnographic observations of their unrestrained laughing and clapping

during the taping of the show is probably sufficient support for their decoding of the show according to its preferred reading. Data collection of the silent audience's reading could be possible through mass emailing of follow-up questionnaires. The limited data collected here, however, supports a finding of limited decoded polysemy, because they all found the show funny. As explained here, to find the show funny the audience has to accept the joke--its premise and the punch line--in other words, the irony and satire used to encode it with meaning.

Finally, the polysemy of the primary text seems minimal in the *CCEPS* writings and only slightly more substantial in other media-authored texts, as shown above. Though more research may be done to question these findings, especially to learn whether indeed there is a significant difference between how *TDS'* comedic and non-comedic narratives are decoded, I remain skeptical that more reliable research can be done to suggest that *TDS* encourages intellectual curiosity or even skepticism in its many audiences.

However, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the *TDS'* audience is the cacophony of its online population. To the extent that they are part of the *Forum* online space

they tend to be either fans who engage each other on issues related to the show but independent of specific narrative segments, in a rather polite and positive manner, or they tend to be flamers[87] and trolls[88] who deface the text for political reasons. These trends seem more exacerbated on the *Facebook* space where there is no policing. The *Facebook* population is subject to rules that are different from those that govern the *Forum* population.

Irrespective of their behavior these online members engage each other and talk to each other about issues of public relevance (see *Appendices* J through L). Thus, despite the fact that a claim about TDS' encouraging a critical attitude in its audiences, a more tenable claim is that TDS encourages talk, or encourages talk as a form of participation. Certainly, more research would be needed to decipher the gauge the meaning of this remarkable social and cultural effect.

[87] http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/

[88] Id.

Conclusion

For the last decade, a cable comedy show, Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart (TDS)* has been increasingly perceived as an informative, new, even revolutionary, form of journalism. In the preceding eight chapters, I have explored this claim and analyzed whether *TDS'* comedic discourse educates and informs its audience in a manner which encourages independent or critical reading of the news.

The first chapter introduced the phenomenon of political comedy within the context of scholarly and public skepticism about how journalism is practiced today. Within this legitimacy vacuum, some brave members of the academe claimed *TDS* was superior to the other, more serious, or at least mainstream, news shows because, they claimed, *TDS* successfully engaged social segments previously unconcerned with the news.

The second chapter placed *TDS* within a larger context of foreign and domestic political satire, as practiced in print, online, and on television. In each instance, differences and similarities were noted. Some of the reasons for *TDS'* popularity rest in its genre that of

political satire combined with irony and parody, while others rest in its tenor: culturally transgressive comedy which makes use of linguistic profanity to promote a moderately liberal agenda.

The third chapter reviewed the significant academic literature *TDS* has engendered within the first decade of this century. Most of this literature, despite its diversity, springs from the belief that political comedy, especially *TDS*, creates a bona fide public sphere where issues of public interest are discussed and solutions advanced. This literature was labeled here the Critical-Comedic Enhanced Public Sphere school of thought (*CCEPS*). It rests on self-reported data which show that, despite the advent of the Internet, an increasing number of people who are "more educated, younger, and more liberal than the average American," and who generally possess political knowledge, watch *TDS* for its political content. From this data, the *CCEPS* literature extrapolates that *TDS* engages in critical inquiry and empowers its audience to actively participate in political meaning-making. For all these reasons, *CCEPS* purports *TDS* is an alternative, even revolutionary form of journalism. In apparent agreement

with this data, on July 22, 2009, ***Time Magazine*** trumpeted Stewart as "America's most trusted newscaster."

The ***CCEPS*** literature makes the case, one may say innovatively and courageously, that ***TDS*** deserves serious attention despite its appearance as a lightweight cable TV entertainment show. These scholars recontextualize political news as entertainment. Despite the rather wide diversity of these scholars with respect to basic philosophy, theoretical approach, background, and prior work, their recontextualization is rather uniform: it is either centered on textual structure or on audience agency.

The argument that the very comedic nature of these shows constitutes its fundamental journalistic strength is based on subjective analysis whose limits are rarely clarified. ***TDS'*** narrative is a hybrid which embraces almost all comedic rhetorical tools, especially irony and political satire, and parodies broadcast and cable news, political talk shows, the Internet, films, and seemingly every other source of popular culture. Its comedic criticism thus has broad appeal. But it engenders laughter and, as explained here, with laughter comes specific cognitive limits. For example, how forceful can a policy criticism be if it has to produce both outrage and laughter

at the same time? Moreover, even the most committed argument that humor is conducive to political information because it reduces the audience's scrutiny and makes it possible for the audience to absorb more political content, contradicts the academic position that *TDS* encourages critical thinking, which assumes that *TDS* encourages its audience's skeptical inquisitiveness.

The entertainment recontextualization *CCEPS* promotes extols the audience's agency. But it does so in an arguably paternalistic manner and without empirical support. First, entertaining politics are presented as a way of engaging audiences out of boredom, though that argument rests on a rather troublesome paternalistic assumption: that traditional news is somehow philosophically unfit for postmodern times. Under this view, postmodern times demand more than "fact" reporting according to some official account of reality, and require more judgment-based guidance, though, interestingly, *CCEPS* does not seem concerned that the guidance comes from a comedian. The shallowness of this analysis is magnified by the fact that it ignores that the entertainment organizations which are replacing the news organizations as journalistic gate-keepers are owned by the same corporations. For example,

Viacom is the ultimate gate-keeper of both the CBS Evening News "fact" reporting narrative, for example, and *TDS'* comedic and presumably entertaining and "guiding" version of the same news. Thus, in addition to its lack of expertise, the entertaining judgment call so valued by the laudatory scholarship is ultimately made, or at least ratified, by the same corporation charged with the traditional news show.

Empirically, the existing research on entertainment politics rests entirely on presumptions which are hard to test. The generally available data do not analyze the impact *TDS'* comedic narrative has on its news selection – whether, for instance, comedy dictates the "news of the day." Similarly, it does not discuss whether comedy affects political decoding and whether, for instance, comedy functions as Mary Poppins' spoonful of sugar which simply "helps the medicine go down."

Additionally, audience research is hard to perform because so much of it is self-reporting data and its subjective interpretation. Second, when the data is not self-reported, it is usually produced by a minority of the audience, the fandom or the anti-fandom, which often has

other interests in producing the data and little interest, if any, in explaining how it decoded the show.

The fourth chapter focused on ways to remedy the research deficiencies identified by the previous chapter. It presented the research questions, data and the methodology used to satisfy those deficiencies within the limits of the data. Indirect evidence of the validity of my thesis derives from the *CCEPS* scholarship. Its core argument is that the show's primary text functions as a new and even better form of journalism. However, this literature left unexamined the limits comedy imposes on the choice of news and on their presentation, on how their encoded meaning is built. Similarly unclear is the journalistic emancipation comedy provides its audience. This dissertation helped remedy (although of course not fully cure) these omissions, focusing on two research questions:

> Question #1: How does *TDS'* comedic narrative (primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news?
>
> Question #2: How does *TDS'* audience decode its text?

To discover whether *TDS* has radicalized opinion journalism, this dissertation adopted a dual encoded/decoded approach. This approach focused on the role

of the comedic narrative to both deliver political opinions and to enable their reading in a critical manner. *TDS'* creation of an alternative form of journalism through comedic narrative was analyzed from two perspectives and with two goals: (a) to decipher its potentially multi-meaning content, and (b) to decide whether its unique comedic perspective uncovers hidden meanings unavailable to other types of news reporting narratives.

Examining the primary text sheds light on the mechanics of how comic texts (or at least this particular comic text) convey political news. The type of "openness" *TDS'* comedic narrative promoted was deemed problematic because its comedy was found to act more like a cognitive straight-jacket than a Spandex suit. The data used covered (a) *TDS* episodes (the primary text), (b) mainstream media coverage of the news of the day, and (c) mainstream media replies to *TDS* news coverage (tertiary texts).

The multiperspectival aspect of my research demanded a multi-method approach. Unlike a single methodological approach which is limited by the assumptions and biases underlying that approach, the multiple-method approach, which borrowed from both quantitative and qualitative

studies, promoted a more comprehensive analysis of the researched object, *TDS*.

For this project, the methods used were:

(a) Content and discourse analyses focused on the comedic structure of the primary text and its dual-coding, visual and aural; and

(b) Interpretive analysis of the data.

This chapter also established the theoretical framework for the first question: "How does *TDS'* comedic narrative (the primary text) work as a vehicle of televised political news?" As a television program, *TDS'* polysemy is undisputed. However, the study of comedic rhetorical tools showed that despite the general belief that comedy is a vehicle for multiple meanings, comedy frequently and paradoxically imposes a rigid reading on its meaning-making structures. *TDS'* complex comedic structure made the preferred meaning the only possible meaning which engendered both thought and laughter.

The fifth chapter analyzed the specific comedic narrative of the show within the limits of a hybrid research sample composed of 21 topically selected segments of primary text. The sample contained segments which showcased the strength of the show: its topical themes

framed in provocative profane language promoting a liberal agenda. The primary text research sample contained all the ***TDS*** segments discussing the theme of "***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House***" which aired from September 25, 2008 through January 20, 2010.

Four segments of "***Clusterf#@k to the Poor House***" provided the primary text whose analysis was reproduced in this dissertation. Like the rest of the research sample, those segments covered the presidential management of the economic crisis under President Bush (two segments), and two more under President Obama. Each segment was ***TDS'*** response to a significant political event related to the main political issue of that time frame.

The first segment aired on September 25, 2008, in response to President Bush's announcement of the national economic crisis and to the mainstream media coverage of the crisis.[89] The second one aired on November 17, 2008, in response to the first G20 summit dealing with the global economic crisis.[90] The third segment aired on February 5, 2009, in response to the Obama Administration's decision to take his recovery plan to Congress. Finally, the fourth

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[89] http://www.journalism.org/node/13007.

[90] http://www.journalism.org/index_report/pej_news_coverage_index_november_16_22_2009

segment aired on April 2, 2009, in response to the second G20 summit intended to deal with the global economic crisis.[91]

The multilayered analysis of the primary text took into account the multi-layered structure of the show which uses linguistic, cultural, cognitive, comedic, visual, and aural cues to create its encoded meaning. First, I analyzed the *TDS* text from its audio-visual and linguistic perspectives. Then I analyzed its linguistic layer from a comedic, politico-cognitive, and cultural angle. I summarized all potential readings and decided on the one that made sense within the socio-historical context of the episode, the genre of the show, and the openly liberal views of the host, Jon Stewart. Then I analyzed its encoded meaning to see if it was ambiguous or clear, and whether it encouraged multiple interpretations or not. Then, I compared what I concluded to be the preferred encoded reading with my readings of other news shows which covered the same news.

To ensure accuracy, each unit of analysis separates the cognitive critical narrative from its comedic scaffolding: there is no argument that Stewart engages in

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[91] http://dneacsu1.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/mostfollowedstories2009.doc

making people laugh using political news as the butt of his jokes. The gist of the argument is whether and to what extent people are made to think outside the limits of the joke.

All segments parodied the news reported by specific news outlets and contrasted President Bush with President Obama. Neither president emerged well from *TDS'* critical presentation. They both appeared unimpressive, but they did so because of traits of character. Bush seemed to be a serial liar with a deaf ear for international diplomacy. Obama seemed much too eager to please, too interested in his youthful appearance, unable to make any real decisions and then, like an American Idol, anticipated applause more for his eye-candy public persona rather than for his job performance.

Each time the comedic narrative built meaning, Stewart or the Correspondents punctuated it by clearly summarizing its critical substance. "It's not only the protesters," claimed Cenac, explaining the international hostility facing the United States at the G-20 summit held in London in 2009. "It is everybody. The only person kissing our ass is the Prime Minister of Britain." Cenac parodied the news shows using forbidden but very clear and direct language

("kissing our ass"). The punch line followed the clarifying narrative in this instance, when Cenac added, "How is that different than before?" The live audience laughed at the joke. The jokes worked for those who follow international relations and who understood the conventional and mainstream views about our foreign allies: Britain had been our sole staunch ally throughout the Bush administration and continued in that position under Obama. Assuming that the shared knowledge and views between Cenac and his audience existed, the comedic and cognitive meaning *TDS* built in that brief example was clearly critical and jocular. Obama was our popular president because he was popularly elected. However, the reason for the criticism remains obscure. Cenac did not address his disillusionment with the President's job performance. Cenac articulated a judgment call which was funny. Its subversive meaning was left dangling as an unimportant modifier of the judgment call. No online audience member posted any analysis of it either, as if taking the cue that the joke did not need it.

This textual analysis of the primary text, while exhaustive, had clear limits. It remains inconclusive with respect to the alternative journalistic value of *TDS*, and more such analyses are required. However, it was conclusive

in one aspect: though in-depth, such subjective textual analysis cannot be the basis of any conclusion about the alternative journalistic role of *TDS*. Such textual analysis mirrors the researcher's cognitive, cultural, and political bias. Its conclusions are significant but can be generalized only in respect to exposing its limits. In the process, it pointed out the flaws in the work of the *CCEPS* scholars describing *TDS* as revolutionizing journalism. Reminiscent of *TDS*' own judgment calls which are based on obscure or even unavailable reasoning, these scholars reached their judgment on observably biased data interpretation.

This empirical analysis was rather limited with respect to the journalistic value of comedic discourse in itself. However, it was telling when used to compare the journalistic function of *TDS* and of mainstream journalism. The findings described in the preceding sections suggest that *TDS'* comedic narrative encourages cultural subversiveness at a symbolic level, whether linguistically or visually. The comedic narrative streamlines the encoded meaning because the punch line always relies on some pre-existing knowledge of the news, popular culture, or the show itself. Its polysemy was rather limited, because the

intended meaning was clarified by the logic of the joke and by the host or correspondent's explanation.

This complementary comparative textual analysis of the primary text through the prism of mainstream media shows sheds further light on the process of understanding the journalistic role of *TDS*. *TDS* does not report all the news. *TDS* does not report all flaws in media news reporting either. But, because *TDS* reports on some of the flows of some news shows from certain news media outlets, *TDS* is a watchdog of journalism. Like all other news media outlets, *TDS* chooses what news fits its reporting best. Unlike them, *TDS* chooses to report and interpret that news its writers perceive will provide laughter on issues the same writers deem important to their comedic and political goal. Such idiosyncratic critical choices often are a refreshing and entertaining journalistic complement.

Moreover, this comparative textual analysis identified additional flaws in the work of the *CCEPS* literature, finding it equally inconclusive. *TDS'* journalistic value seems to have always been analyzed with respect to specific instances and then its role generalized without empirical support. Sometimes *TDS'* point of view may be more valid than, or importantly supplementary to, that of other news

shows, but scholars seem unconcerned with a fundamental journalistic value, breadth and depth of coverage. *TDS* rarely if ever covers[92] news which does not engender laughter nor does it scrutinize the behavior of its parent corporation and that of its news outlet, CBS Evening News. The only empirically supported generalization is that *TDS*, with few exceptions, will always choose issues, however critically they may then address them, which provoke laughter, and avoid criticizing news shows produced by its corporate headquarters.

Chapter six established the theoretical framework for answering the second question:

Question #2: How does *TDS'* audience decode its text? It set the stage for analyzing the audience's role in decoding the meaning of any primary text, and for exploring the extent to which *TDS'* audiences negotiate their reading according to their own backgrounds and depart from the preferred reading.

Chapter seven described *TDS'* multiple audiences as decoding sites and raised the conceptual problems connected to fandom and their textual production, which may not always engage the primary text in a derivative, tertiary

[92] It covered the internal investigation over Dan Rather reporting (Episode # 10005) and Katie Couric colonoscopy (Episode #14079). http://www.thedailyshow.com/videos/tag/CBS+News

way. This chapter explored whether *TDS*, a late-night political comedy show, encourages something similar to "thick" polysemy, such as uncovering hidden meanings in mocked or ridiculed news of the day.

Chapter eight focused on the empirical data used to answer the second research question. Audience members hold the key to the depth of any decoding process. However, that depth is often hard to gauge and even illusory. The discussion here examined how *TDS'* audiences engaged the primary, *TDS*, text and whether they understood it as a mere joke, political commentary, or a hybrid.

The data used was tertiary texts. Tertiary texts are fluid, especially when both their content and authorship are hard to define. The only "hard" or well-defined tertiary texts used here were those produced in an effort to decode the meaning of the primary text following the encoded signs, negotiating their signifiers, or resisting their meaning.

Bibliometrics, which is more frequently associated with quantitative studies than interpretive methods, proved to be the most appropriate method of defining tertiary texts. I thus defined tertiary texts as the audience-authored texts which contained contextual references to the

primary text. Once I indentified the tertiary text I relied on the contextual meaning of the tertiary text and argued the decoded meaning of *TDS*. To the extent that tertiary texts are multi-media texts, I used a dual coding theory which, as explained earlier, explicated how visual and verbal information is represented in two independent but interconnected subsystems.

In many instances as in, for example, texts produced online in association with the March 12, 2009 and July 22, 2009 episodes, texts produced on online spaces associated with the show ignored the encoded signs, as their role was not meaning-clarification. Thus, the data became limited to texts produced by a professional audience, the mainstream media. The data contained the records of the print and blog media available on the proprietary LexisNexis database and news show transcripts available on the proprietary Factiva database. The research sample covered a somewhat different sample than did the primary text sample, because the episodes aired under the topic "*Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*" produced little reaction in other media. The data collection focused on media responses to *TDS* and its take on the economy during the time period

of my primary text collection, September 25, 2008 through January 12, 2010.

All these examples showed that *TDS* is a media phenomenon the mainstream news media relate to frequently. They also indicated a trend in *TDS'* decoding: it varies with the narrative structure of the text, in the following two ways.

(1) When *TDS'* content was structured comedically, its jokes were consistently interpreted according to their preferred reading for cognitive and comedic purposes supporting my earlier findings of limited polysemy.

(2) To the contrary, when *TDS* did not have a comedic structure, which happened in one exceptional situation, when Stewart interviewed Jim Cramer, the media interpreted that narrative more diversely, and negotiated its meaning according to their own background of external knowledge. As the Cramer interview shows, most newscasters and other audience members engaged the text in a reading which reflected the encoded signs as much as their own show's perceived politics.

TDS' decoded polysemy proved harder to gauge with respect to its online presence. In-depth interviews with live audiences may be suggested but ethnographic

observations of their unrestrained laughing and clapping during the taping of the show is rather substantial proof that they decode the show according to its preferred reading. Data collection of the silent audience's reading could be possible through mass emailing of follow-up questionnaires. The limited data collected here, however, supports a finding of limited decoded polysemy, because they all found the show funny. As explained here, to find the show funny the audience must accept the joke--its premise and the punch line--in other words, the irony and satire used to encode it with meaning. Finally, the way the online population, which temporarily associates itself with the show, functions creates almost insurmountable problems to gauging the way this segment decodes the text. To the extent that they are part of the ***Forum*** online space they tend to be either fans who engage each other on issues related to the show but independent of specific narrative segments, in a rather polite and positive manner, or they tend to be flamers[93] and trolls[94] who deface the text for political reasons. These trends seem more exacerbated on the Facebook space where there is no policing. The Facebook population is subject to rules that are different from

[93] http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/

[94] Id.

those that govern the *Forum* population. However, more research needs to be done to support these ethnographic observations of online behavior. Finally, the polysemy of the text seems minimal in the scholarly writings and only slightly more substantial in other media-authored texts, as shown above. However, more research is required to evaluate these findings, especially to learn whether indeed there is a significant difference between how *TDS'* comedic and non-comedic narratives are decoded.

Thus, the question is whether at the end of this dissertation I can assert that *TDS* adds alternative journalistic value to the traditional news which strives for objectivity in reporting "facts" according to some official account of reality. *TDS*, like all political entertainment news, celebrates the multitude of lenses through which reality can be revealed and thus disclose unexamined aspects reality.

We saw here that *TDS* parodies newscasting to satirize the way the news is delivered. At times, *TDS* employs irony to make the point clearer. Irony tends to minimize political issues by trivializing them, but, as Richard Rorty pointed out, irony personalizes issues and makes the political context more easily understandable while

diminishing its impact. Political satire takes a collective moral and political standard and derides those not conforming to it. In doing so, it defines and thus controls the reading of the joke. Unlike repetitive talking points, or spin, which ultimately alter the political discourse, comedic narrative dilutes it. However, the current data on *TDS* do not support such a bleak conclusion.

The study's findings only indicate that the show's political content and comedic delivery circumscribe its reading to a level not considered previously. Interestingly, it seems that straight news delivery or news criticism is more conducive to negotiated readings than comedic delivery. Additionally, while *TDS* is politically informative, the data only provided support for the proposition that *TDS'* coverage differs from that of mainstream media in a linguistic and cultural manner (e.i. "clusterf#@k"), but it did not suggest that this difference amounted to *TDS* being a revolutionary, alternative form of journalism. The data and its analysis do not suggest the presumed position about *TDS'* critical angle which either "speaks truth to power" or encourages its audience to rethink its cultural values or political beliefs. The data only suggest that unbridled scholarly applause is unsupported, while well-circumscribed

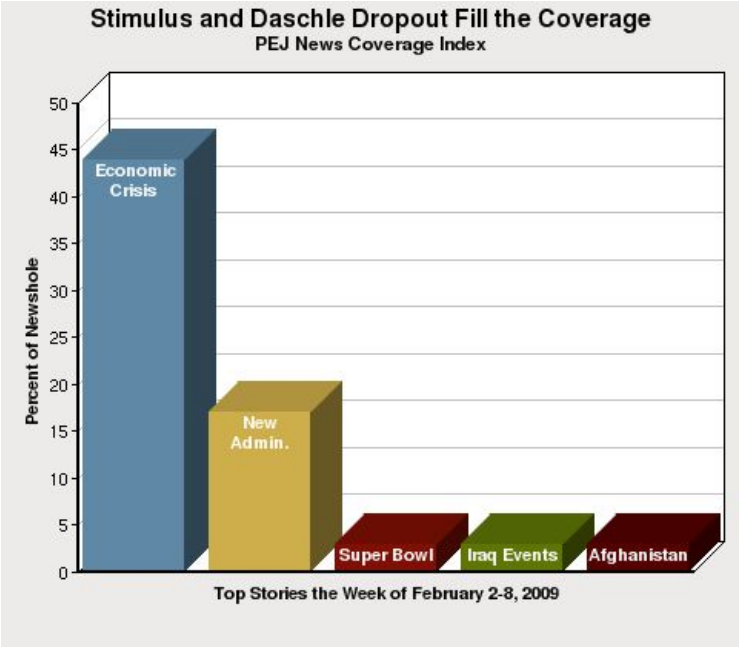
appreciation might be justified. *TDS*, though not a news organization, and under no duty to inform the public, offers its uniquely jocular take on the news, and when it is not just for laughs, it can be a welcome addition to the straight, mainstream, news.

Furthermore, as this dissertation pointed out, perhaps the academic and media attention has been wrong-headed: *TDS* focuses not on the national political news of the day much of the time, but on the media-coverage-of-national-political-news-of-the-day, and that is where its brilliance lies. Moreover, this critical spirit may be what encourages the talk and interaction among its online public, and what deserves further attention.

Appendices

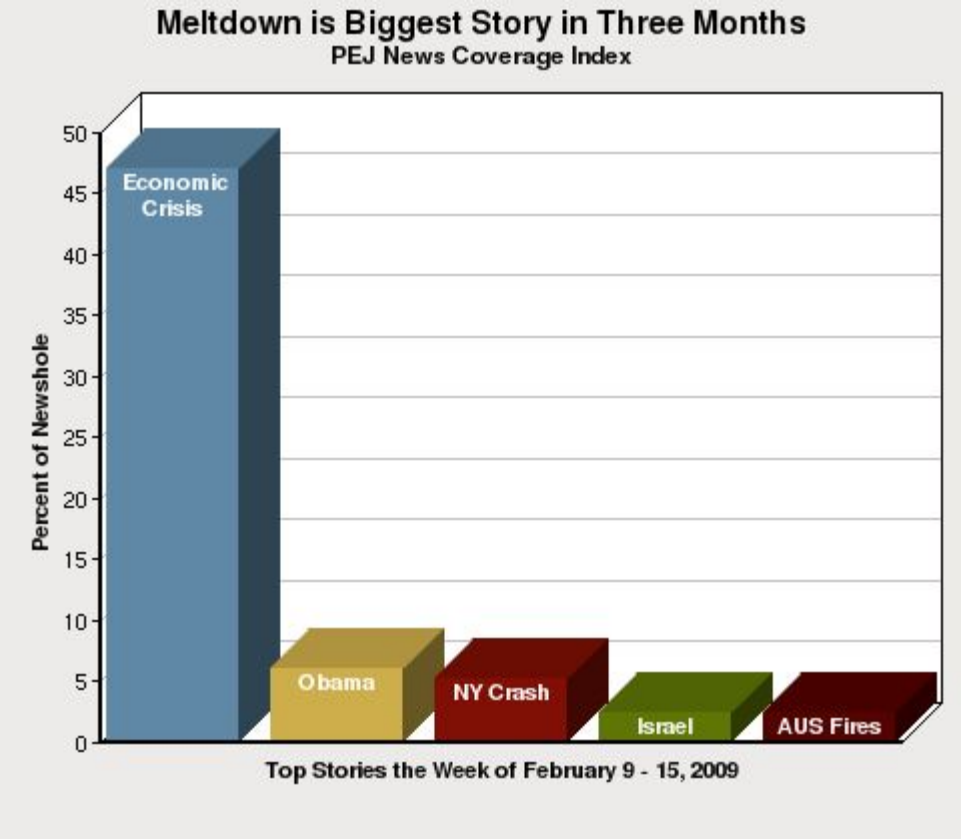
Appendix A. PEJ News Coverage Index for the Weeks when the TDS aired segments on Clusterf#@k to the Poor House (2009-2010): February (4), March (1), April (2), May (1), June (1), and December (1) 2009 and January (1) 2010

PEJ News Coverage Index: Feb. 2 - 8, 2009 – The News Narrative Turns Bearish on Obama



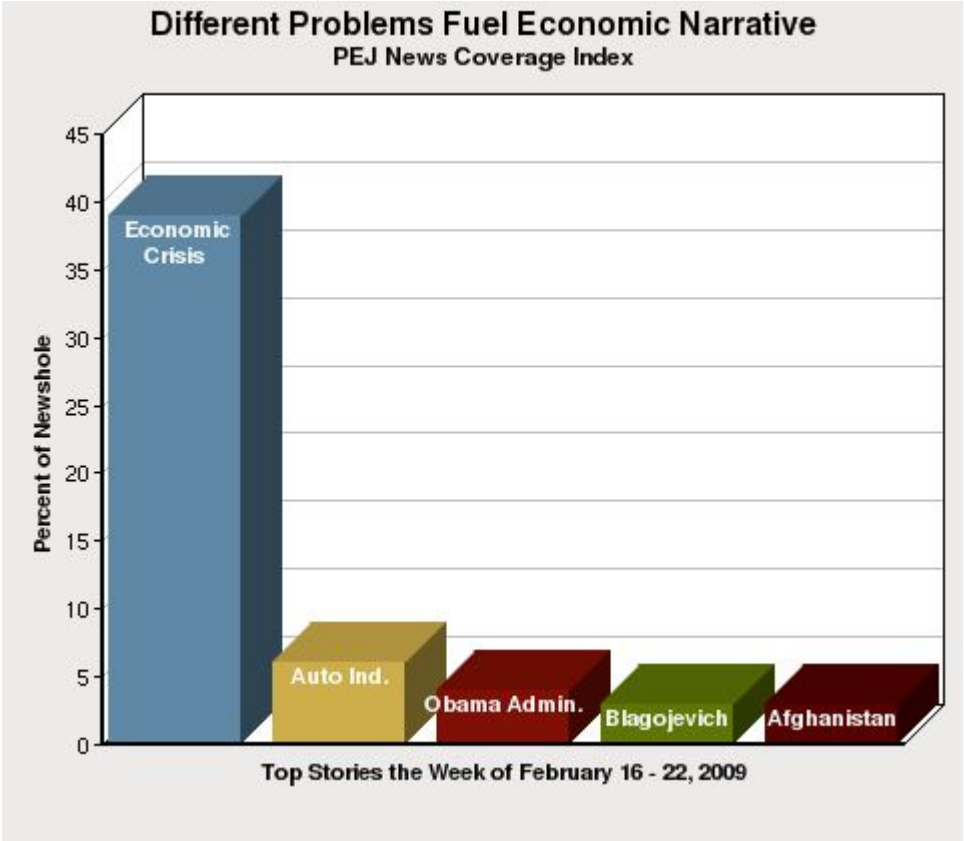
For the second week in a row the economic crisis was the dominant story in the news, filling 44% of the Feb. 2- Feb. 8 newshole in the weekly News Coverage Index produced by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

PEJ NEWS COVERAGE INDEX: FEB. 9 - 15, 2009
STIMULUS SUCCESS SHIFTS THE STORYLINE



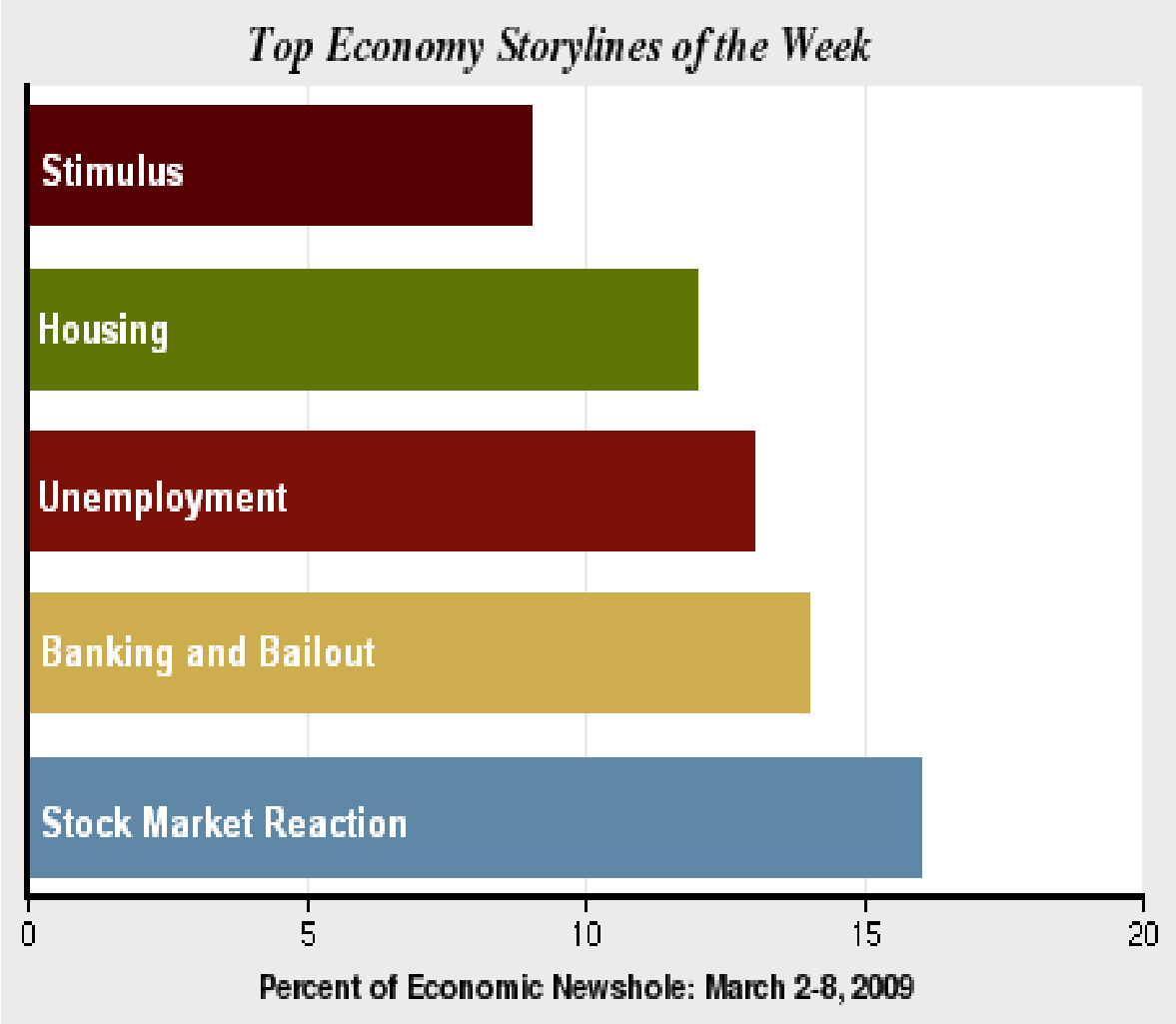
The week of Feb 9-15, the financial crisis filled 47% of the newshole as measured by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. That is the highest level of attention to any story since the final week of the presidential campaign consumed 54% of the time on TV and radio and space in print and online from Oct. 27-Nov. 2.

PEJ NEWS COVERAGE INDEX: FEBRUARY 16 - 22, 2009
FRESH CHALLENGES, NEW DEBATES DRIVE A GRIM ECONOMY STORY



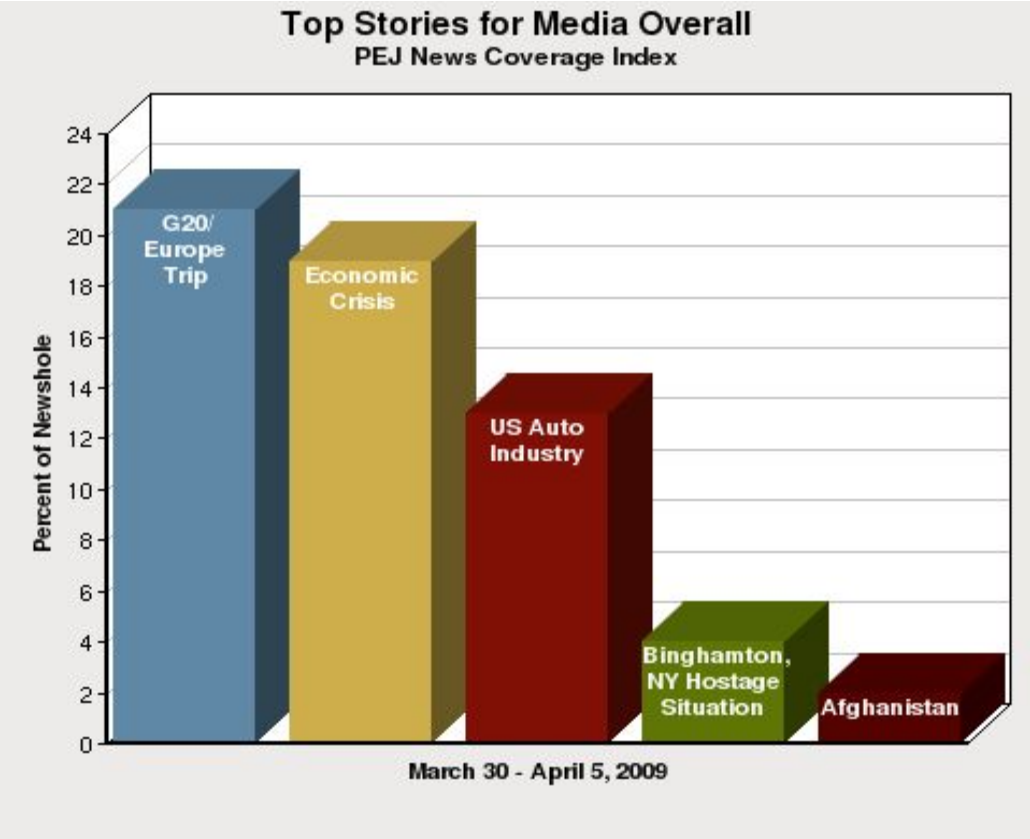
From February 16-22, coverage of the growing financial turmoil accounted for 40% of the newshole as measured by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism—the fourth week in a row it has reached or exceeded 40%. That represents a modest drop from 47% the week of Feb. 9-15.

PEJ NEWS COVERAGE INDEX: MARCH 2 - 8, 2009
FALLING STOCKS AND RISING RUSH FUEL THE NEWS



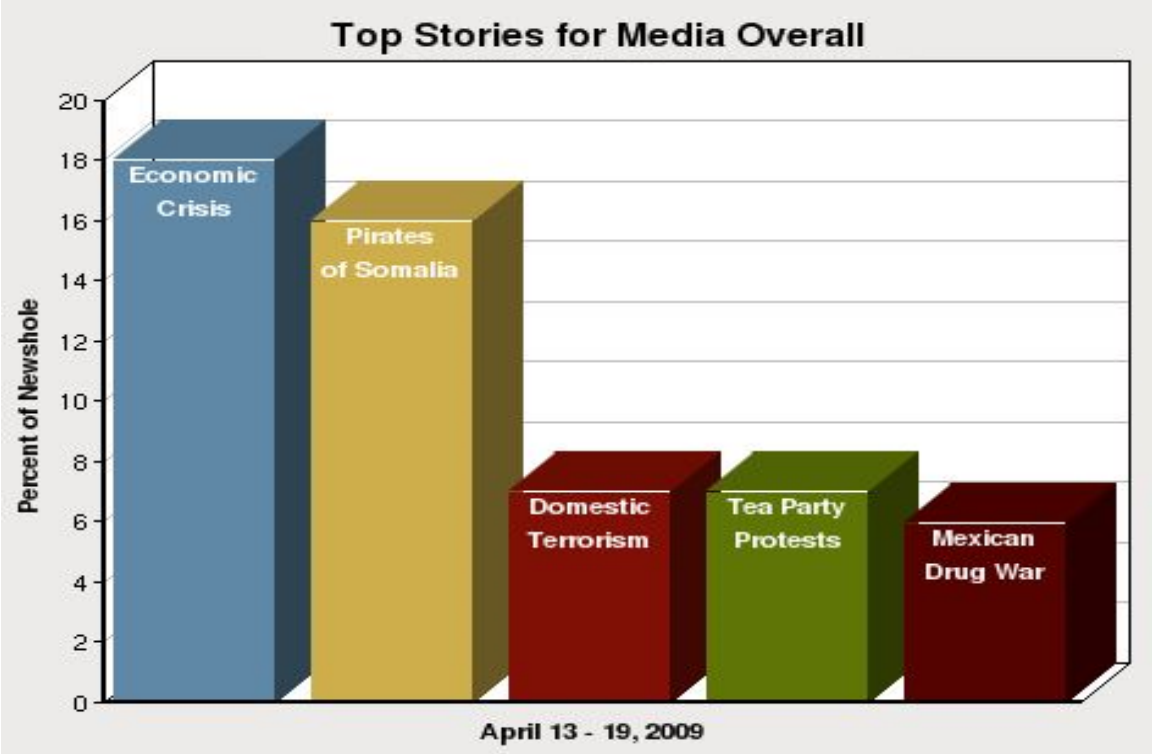
Led by falling stock prices, the financial meltdown accounted for 43% of the newshole from March 2-8 as measured by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. That is up modestly from the previous week when the story registered at 38% of the newshole.

PEJ NEWS COVERAGE INDEX: MARCH 30 - APRIL 5, 2009
OVERSEAS AND AT HOME, ECONOMY DOMINATES



The G-20 Summit and Obama's European trip was the No. 1 story from March 30-April 5, filling 21% of the newshole measured by Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. The U.S. economic crisis was close behind, at 19% of the space in print and online and time on television and radio.

PEJ News Coverage Index: April 13 - 19, 2009
Economy Shares Headlines with Pirates, Tea Parties and Waterboarding

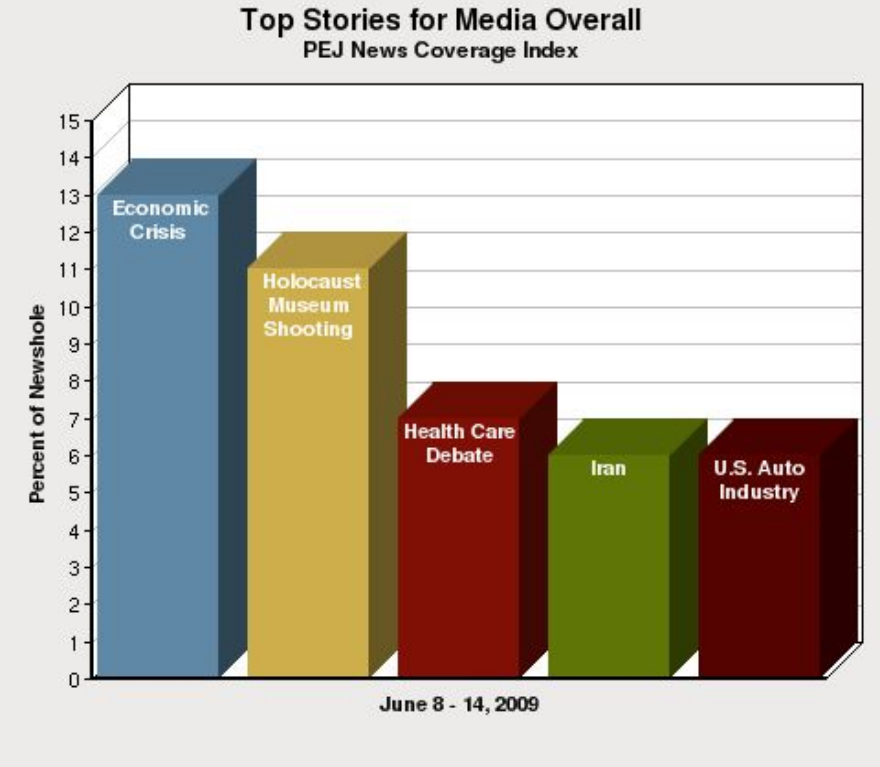


For the week of April 13-19, the financial crisis accounted for 18% of the newshole, according to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. While that's a small increase over the previous week (15%), it marks the third in a row when the subject has accounted for less than 20% of the coverage.

PEJ NEWS COVERAGE INDEX: MAY 4 - 10, 2009
ECONOMY UP AND FLU DOWN IN A STRESSFUL WEEK

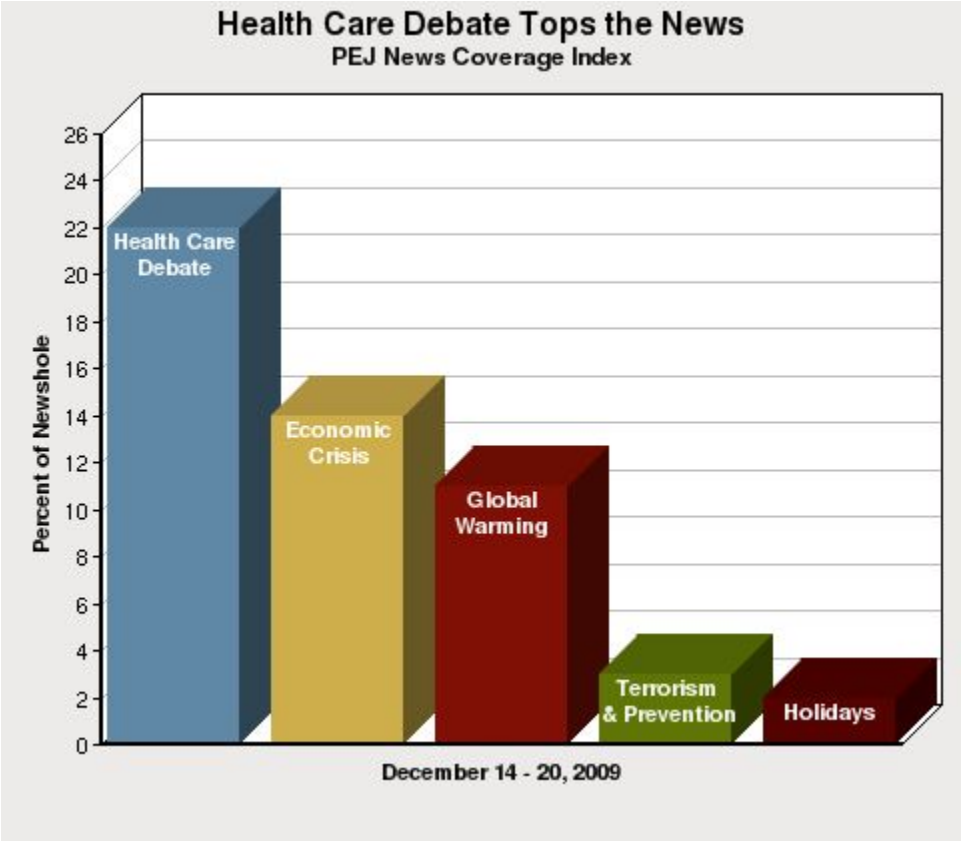
The release of the financial health reports of 19 major banks helped make the economic crisis the top story from May 4-10, according to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

PEJ NEWS COVERAGE INDEX: JUNE 8 - 14, 2009
NO STORY DOMINATES, BUT IRAN FASCINATES



The economic crisis was the No. 1 subject, even as it generated the lowest weekly coverage for any lead story since 2007, according to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

PEJ News Coverage Index: December 14-20, 2009
Health Care Leads the Week, But Economy and Climate Stay Strong
and
PEJ News Coverage Index: January 11-17, 2010
Tragedy in Haiti Dominates the News



Appendix B: Random Sample Selection of Primary Text

This appendix explains why I did not use a randomly selected sample of primary text in my dissertation.

Before I settled for a topical research sample, which best reflected the fact that ***TDS*** is a highly subjective take on the news, I performed a random research sample selection, as described below.

TDS airs four times each week, from Monday through Thursday. Thus, any Monday show could potentially cover "old" news from the previous "uncovered" days: Friday, Saturday and Sunday. For instance, when Rick Sanchez of CNN was fired on Friday, October 1, 2010, ***TDS*** covered that event on its Monday, October 4, 2010 show. This cablecasting reality dictated the smallest logical time unit for random selection, and then the final formula <IF(F31<=4,C31+F31-1,C31+7+F31-5)>.[95]

Though this formula can be applied any number of times to offer any different combination of episodes, when first applied it covered two of the more significant episodes, of the year: the March 12, 2009 episode which contained the interview with CNBC's Jim Cramer and the July 22, 2009

[95] ttp://www.dneacsu.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/danaRandomDays.xls. The 52-week period representing the Obama administration's first year became 26 time units. With an episode randomly selected for each time unit I ended up with a 26-episode sample, chosen according to the following formula =

episode which contained Stewart's monologue about Obama's so-called "birther." However, this scientifically selected sample did not take into consideration the internal structure of the show: the comedic, cognitive and stylistic units which could potentially set the show apart as a form of alternative opinion journalism. I needed to rectify this research want, so I developed a different sample selection.

Appendix C1. September 25, 2008 Segment -- Multi-layered textual analysis

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 1: ABC's news programming is flawed because it praises sensationalism.

JS starts the episode warning America to make no mistake, "we are in a bad way," so bad that had he understood how badly only the previous night.

1a.
News clip of *ABC* interrupting David Blaine's *Dive of Death* to give us President Bush's speech on the economic meltdown.



JS screams that *ABC* should not have interrupted *Blaine's Dive of Death* to hear about our economy's dive of death (*laughs*). But *ABC* did pre-empt Blaine, and so that is the subject of the new segment, Cluster[bleeped] to the poor house.



1.b.
Visual of a shanty town house falling apart and the banner of the segment coming out of the dust, followed by visual and sound of JS coming up from under the rubble



JS comments that it should have been built of a stronger material, "for Chris' sake."



Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 1:

Unit 1a. Political joke about (mainstream) mass media coverage of the economy.

Stewart deprecates himself and alleges he had been ignorant of the state of the national economy until the previous evening when ABC interrupted its prime time sensational segment about a magician who sought fame by doing a free fall jump, to make space for hard economic news from the President. Stewart employs irony to satirize the mainstream media and their bias toward entertainment versus informative hard news. Reporting on a national economic meltdown comparable to a deadly dive caused ***ABC*** to come up with an equally strong visual to support its audience's attention.

Ironically, Stewart suggests that ***TDS'*** decision to create a new segment was caused by the sudden attention ABC gave to the state of our economy and because the subject matter seemed to have the potential to boost ratings.

To compete with ***ABC, TDS*** comes up with an equally sensational segment, which is visually and aurally gripping : cacophonic surrounding sound and provocative language, which gets bleeped even on cable.

Unit 1b. Political joke about the state of our economy.

While the name of the segment seems to be a reference to David Blaine's ***Dive of Death***, the introductory rubble visual is a clear allusion to the state of the economy, "which should have been stronger." It could also contain an equally clear reference to the ***Three Little Pigs*** and the houses they built to resist the wolf. The parody on the popular bedtime story suggests that the mighty United States had an economy on the level of a straw or wooden house, those of the lazier or less intelligent of the Little Pigs.

Stewart also employs irony and scatological language to satirize a mainstream media outlet (***ABC***), ourselves as tabloid-prone viewers and the economy as it follows:

1. He uses irony about the impact *ABC* (always with the lowest Nielsen ratings for its news shows) has on changing the programming of any other channel;

2. He uses culturally shocking compound language whose virtue is in its bleeped sound rather than in its meaning;

and

4. He uses irony to mock the state of the U.S. economy, which should have been stronger.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 2: President Bush's economic address like his previous addresses is manipulative.

A news clip from the previous day's shows "the still president" Bush saying, "this is an extraordinary period."



JS wonders, from the studio, whether "extraordinary" means "super good." (*laughs*)

JS further comments that it looked "weird" for the President to tell us something scary in a seemingly calm manner, while he was standing on his carpet with the "flaggy" behind him.

Watching Bush speak, JS has a déjà vu feeling, "but that was French… I am having a freedom memory."

Clip from a speech given during the final days preceding the decision to invade Iraq. (laughs)



JS claims that Bush gave us the same speech five years ago. JS pretends not to know Bush's speech. He childishly and rhetorically wonders what points Bush made in the speech broadcast a day before on the economic crisis compared to the speech broadcast years ago on the much-hyped national security crisis.

JS wonders whether "we should be scared," and, again, keeping up the pretense that his monologue with his audience is taking place the previous day, purportedly hopes that the information would be "dumbed down," because he was "going to watch the David Blaine special afterwards" (*laughs*).



The two clips are played side by side. We hear "our economy is in danger" (from the day before) and then "the danger is clear." (from March 2003)

JS sighs. (*laughs*)

Maintaining the same pretense about his ignorance of the message, JS purportedly imagines that the President will tell us that the current bona fide economic crisis would require bold action.

> *The news clips are played in quick succession. Both show Bush asking for bold action: with billions of dollars in economic instance and military action required five years ago.(*laughs)

In the same imaginary cognitive ignorance, JS wonders what the President would say about potential consequences of inaction; that is, what "if we don't" act.

> *The news clips are played one after the other. Each contains similar phrases: "the risk of inaction would be far greater," five years ago, and that if we do not pass the recovery bill now it "would cost these Americans much more later." (*laughs*)*

Continuing his presumed cognitive ignorance, JS wonders about the meaning of "risk."

> *The side by side clips tell us about the murders, "nucular" weapons, and genocide threatened by not going to war with Iraq five years earlier and, similarly, businesses, banks and the value of our homes collapsing if we do not act now.* (laughs, cheers, and applause)

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 2:

JS abandons playing the adult vs. inquisitive-but-naïve child roles and re-assumes the grown-up persona and the savviness that comes with it, only to experience déjà vu, which he describes as "memory freedom." This is an ironical reference to our more bellicose days as a nation at war when we were encouraged to eat "freedom fries" instead of the French variety, "French fries."

JS assumes a satirical position vis-à-vis that superficial display of patriotism. In a self-deprecating mode, he purportedly hopes that the President's speech would be "dumbed down," even if it is scary, so he could still enjoy the ***David Blaine*** special.

All this comedy enables JS, the grown-up, to express his feelings of discomfort ("it feels weird") at Bush's display of patriotic paraphernalia, such as the flag ("flaggy") in the background. Satirical emphasis on the presentation and the made up idioms ("freedom memory" suggestive of "freedom fries") portray our jingoistic attributes.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 2:

Flaggy = While ***flaggy*** literally means the attribute of an abundance of flags, it becomes obvious that Stewart uses it in a child-like manner: to underline his child vs. adult role play to highlight Bush treating us as children.

Dumbed down = The OED defines "dumb down" as an original American colloquial expression "to simplify or reduce the intellectual content of (esp. published or broadcast

material) in order to make it appealing or intelligible to a larger number of people."

déjà vu and freedom memory = These phrases bring to mind the media hysteria which surrounded our reaction to the French rejection of the United States' decision to prematurely invade Iraq, without firm evidence of WMDs.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 3: President Bush's Economic Address is a scary bed night story

JS: "Thanks for the bedtime story."

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 3:

Ironically, and satirically, JS summarizes the economic speech as one intended to scare, due to its time of delivery: it is an adult bedtime story.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 3:

Thanks for the bedtime story = This is a phrase reminiscent of the potential tongue-in-cheek, "Thanks, but no thanks."

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 4: President Bush abused his presidential powers.

JS states what the two Bushes ("you guys") would like is extraordinary powers with very little oversight, and which would change the course of this country's history. JS wonders whether there is time to think this over.

In both clips played side by side Bush emphasized immediate action. JS rhetorically asks whether that means "now." (laughs)

JS wants to know whether the President takes any responsibility for " whose fault this situation is."

News clips from the two speeches played in quick succession, one after the other, show Bush asserting disclaimers in both instances. (laughs)

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 4:

Parody and irony are employed when the role play of adult vs. child returns, with the child persona wondering about the meaning of specific signifiers, such as "immediate" to mean "now." The adult Stewart, abandoning comedic tools, addresses the "two Bushes" with the disrespect suitable for addressing a deceitful, two-faced, President: "you guys." JS views the President as trying to abuse his powers by playing the emotional card.

Then, returning to his child-like persona, JS uses parody and childishly inquires "who did it" and whose fault it was. Bush seems to play his game at this level, because the clips are edited to say nothing more.



Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 5: President Bush abused his paternal position.

JS thanks and blesses the President.

Clips with the end of the two speeches: We hear and see the president blessing America twice. (laughs)

JS thanks him for the blessing.

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 4:

Parodying the paternal figure in the bedtime story, ironically JS blesses the President to trivialize the significance of Presidential blessings.

Satirically, the President appears as a bedtime story teller; though his words are scary, not soothing.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 6: If we believe President Bush, we deserve the unknown outcome.

JS adds " it is true that those who do not study the past get an exciting opportunity to repeat it."

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 6:

Paraphrasing an old saying, JS uses satire to criticize the American people for not paying attention to an event from the recent past – how we started the war in Iraq. JS creates a tragic joke on the ironical premise that repeating the past out of ignorance is an exciting opportunity.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 3:

It is true that those who do not study the past get an exciting opportunity to repeat it = George Santayana wrote in *The Life of Reasons, or, The Phases of Human Progress* (1905-06): "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 82). The original passive and punitive "condemned" is replaced with the active and rewarding "exciting opportunity," in response to the previous replacement of the passive "remember" with the active "study." The negative sense is preserved, although the meaning is altered from one of passive disinterest to chosen ignorance or willing blindness.

Appendix C2 - September 25, 2008 Segment – Potentially Encoded Meanings

Potentially Encoded Meanings – Unit 1:

1.a

a. JS was ignorant of the status of crisis of our "bad" economy until *ABC* decided to interrupt its circus-like entertainment.
b. JS was upset when *ABC* chose economic sensationalism as stated by the then-President Bush, over tabloid sensationalism.
c. JS pretended to be ignorant, but he wasn't. *ABC* failed to inform him because, implicitly *ABC* airs sensationalism, and until the national meltdown, hard news could not compete with sensational tabloid-type entertainment-oriented events.
d. JS pretended to be mad at *ABC* for choosing to inform its viewers about the state of the economy rather than offer them senseless sensationalism.
e. JS sees Blaine's act of free falling similar to our economic free fall in Fall 2008.

or

f. *TDS* uses irony to satirize the lack of civic responsibility of a mainstream network, *ABC*.

1.b

a. *TDS'* decision to have a new segment named "clusterf#@k" is somewhat inspired by ABC's decision to preface the President's address with shocking entertainment.
b. *TDS* chose the name of the segment at random.
c. *TDS* chose its title because it alludes to poor people being gang-banged.
d. *TDS* has little faith in its viewers and uses a sensational title to keep us entertained.
e. *TDS* relies on its fans to connect the past segments prefaced "clusterf#@k."

f. The image and sound of the rumbling house is a meaningless joke.
g. The image and sound of the rumbling house represent a metaphor of our economy: something perceived to be stable is collapsing.
h. ***Clusterfuck*** to the poor house represents a shocking language joke.
i. ***Clusterfuck*** to the poor house identifies the social segment who suffer in this crisis: the poor, which is a metaphor for the people.
j. Acting to entertain his audience, JS pretends to be afraid of the falling chips of the imaginary house.
g. JS meant that the house featured in the clip should have been stronger;
h. Stewart satirically attacks the wanting state of our economy.
i. Stewart acted afraid of the impact of our falling economy.

or

j. Stewart wishes the state of our economy had been stronger, perhaps as the house of the most intelligent little piggy which built its house out of brick, with an eye to the big bad wolf, not, with an eye to expediency, out of straw nor wood.

Potentially Encoded Meanings -Unit 2

(1) JS does not really know what extraordinary means.
   a. JS really believes that it may mean super good.
   b. JS knows it means the opposite.
(2) JS has a foreboding feeling about Bush's presentation due to the surroundings that remind him of how Bush made his case for the war in Iraq.
(3) JS does not like to use French expressions because he is a patriot.
   a. JS does not believe that using French words makes you less patriotic.

b. JS finds it funny that people thought about replacing well established idioms with fabricated idiotic ones.

(4) JS really hopes Bush will be scary but clear to understand.
   a. From past experience, JS knows Bush will be simplistically scary to employ the listener's emotional and not cognitive response.
   b. JS knows that Bush's use of the same scary language in 2003 and 2008 is intentional.
   c. JS believes Bush's use of this identical language is an indication that again he is not telling the truth.

Potentially Encoded Meanings – Unit 3

(1) JS sincerely thanks the President for telling his story, which reminds JS of stories his parents told him, JS, as a child.
   a. JS pretends to thank the President for telling us a scary story, because JS believes that Bush cannot tell the truth.
   b. JS believes Bush likes to scare us right before we go to bed.

(2) JS ironically thanked the president, believing that he treats all of us as children.

Potentially Encoded Meanings -Unit 4 –

(1) JS believes that Bush is overreaching.

(2) JS wonders whether Bush wants us to think about his demands.

(3) JS believes that Bush is making an emotional, not rational, plea for extraordinary powers.
   a. "Extraordinary" does not mean "superlative."
   b. JS does not know that "immediate" means "now."

(4) JS does not know whose fault it is and hopes to be illuminated by the President's speech.

(5) JS does not know whose fault it is but he does not expect an answer from the President's speech.

(6) JS does know both whose fault it is and that the President will not explicate his position, though he pretends to expect the President to illuminate him.

Potentially Encoded Meanings – Unit 5

(1) JS sincerely gives the President the blessing and, then, thanks him for the received blessings.
(2) JS is not sincere in either giving or thanking Bush for the blessing.

Potentially Encoded Meanings – Unit 6

(1) JS believes repeating the past out of ignorance can be exciting.
(2) JS does not believe in the excitement of repeating the past.

Appendix D1. November 17, 2008 Segment – Multi-layered textual analysis

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 1: Obama is too media savvy for his own good.

JS states that Barack Obama is not yet President, but he is "hoping and changing all over the place." JS mentions that Obama's "weekly radio address is on YouTube." (laughs)

YouTube clip of Obama assuring us that we can pull ourselves out of this economic situation.



JS comments that Obama combines the self-assurance of FDR's fireside chats with the visual oomph of a man sitting. (laughs)

JS adds that "Obama youthed it up a little bit for his exit."

YouTube clip of a young man whose face resembles Obama's, riding a skateboard, probably at a sports competition, who takes a fall.

Voice over JS announces into his make-believe microphone hidden in his sleeve "Renegade took a nuts shot"

(laughs)



JS: “Barack Obama is not the first president to jazz up his weekly address with the latest technology.”

JS reminds us of Jimmy Carter's ill-fated presidency.

A badly-rendered still picture of Carter with a voice-over introducing himself as the big peanut talking about the country's malaise.
(laughs)



(an aside impromptu) JS clarifies for those confused in the audience that what we heard was President Carter referring to himself as a “big peanut” and not to the size of his “penis.” (*louder laughs*)

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 1:

Ironically, JS points out the linguistic incongruities of the newly-elected President Obama, who uses "hoping" and "changing" in the same sentence, only to confine himself to a stern sitting-down position during his weekly radio address available on YouTube. The clip also contains other optimistic words, coated in American individualism:

"[we’ can pull ourselves out of our problems," Obama is heard saying in the clip. *TDS’* presentation of that clip implicitly satirizes Obama’s words as closer to wishful thinking than examples of “change.”

JS explicitly uses irony and satire to comment on the originality of Obama’s radio talks, pointing out their eerie similarities to FDR’s even if physically, Obama and FDR are differently able people.

JS uses satire to criticize the much sought-after youth voting base. Stewarts points out that Obama’s trying too hard to be perceived as young and rebellious (“renegade”) has its own risks – such as taking “nut shots.” Finally, Stewart reminds Obama (through irony, parody and satire) that he may find himself closer to the ill-fated presidency of Carter rather than that of the

charmed FDR presidency if all he uses are gimmicks without substance.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 1:

"Renegade took a nuts shot" = The expression comes from "nut shot," common in video game parlance (see e.g., comments on the escapist blog/magazine - http://www.escapistmagazine.com/), where it means *to injure your testicles*. The genitals remain a linguistic reference in the subsequent Carter joke.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 2: President Bush is an innefective G20 summit host.

Clip of Bush talking.

JS (*voice over*): "As for the former president G.W.Bush

Clip of Bush being filmed coming out through guarded doors

JS:… he played host to the G20 summit, welcoming leaders of 20 nations to deal with the financial crisis.

Clips of the welcoming protocol with doors opened by guards and Bush, formally dressed, coming out of the White House, presumably to welcome the heads of the other 19 states; Bush going back and coming out over and over again.



(sound track of cuckoo clock)

(laughs and applause)

JS: "Once every 10 years he comes out and spins around." *(laughs)*

JS: "Then Bush set out the tone for his speech."

The video clip shows Bush stating that although he is a market oriented guy, he changes views when he is faced with the prospect of a global meltdown. (laughs)

JS (imitating Bush): "I don't believe in wearing a helmet unless I have crushed."*(laughs)*

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 2:

Through satire JS criticizes Bush's presidential role in the current G20 summit, presenting him as an impotent wooden cuckoo clock figure.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 3: Stewart defends the free market system.

JS comments that the free market system has not failed us. We have failed the free market system. He adds that it is still a very good system.

A clip of Bush's speech is edited to finish the sentence "it is what has transformed America from rugged frontier to the greatest economic power in history," with JS's "a nation that gave the world the steamboat, the airplane, the computer, the Internet, and the Ipod." (laughs)

JS adds continuing Bush's sentence: "the monster truck *(laughs)* and monster mush *(discernible female laughs),* the electric light to the electric light orchestra *(female laughs),* and the Frisbee and the sham-wow."(*laughs*)

News reel with Bush showing him explaining that free market is more than free market theory, it is the engine of social mobility, the highway to the American dream. "It is what makes possible for a husband and wife to start their own business, or a new immigrant to open a restaurant [...]."

JS adds, "or 27 derivative traders to make $30 mil bonus for pushing imaginary money from one unregulated house of cards to another." *(laughs)* "In the process bankrupting a million people ... It is a beautiful thing." *(applauses*)

"If it is broke, don't fix it," JS screams over the applauses.

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 3:

JS parodies Bush in order to clarify Bush's economic position, which is not yet presented as a dogmatic irresponsible belief. JS is critical of both Bush and us. His satire ends with a "Bushism" take on the popular saying: "if it ain't broke don't fix it." JS addresses us and Bush and Obama (presumably) and challenges us: if it is broke don't fix it.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 3:

"mush" = It could conceivably come from Margaret Wise Brown's ***Good Night Moon***. ("And a comb and a brush and a bowl full of mush.")

"If it is broke don't fix it" = A 1976 ***Washington Post*** article attributed the phrase "If it ain't broke don't fix it,"[96] to so-called budget-boss Bert Lance, the Georgia banker, whom President Jimmy Carter put in charge of the Office of Management and Budget. Lance did not want to "fuss much with the banking regulatory system" because no depositor had lost a dime, "even with recent major bank failures" (Hobart, 1976, p. A11).

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 4: The leadership role of the G20 Summit is minimal.

JS: "It is not some evil world domination conspiracy, despite members toasting with $500 bottles of wine at a long banquet table."

"So there are many misconceptions about the G-20 meeting, including those who believe that it is an evil Kabala meeting behind closed doors to plot world domination."

"But one look at the meeting space should dispel this paranoia (laughs) Let us pay homage to our true master."

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[96] Rowen, Hobart. "Budget-Boss Lance: 'If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It'" The Washington Post. Dec 23, 1976: A11.

Clip of a superpower type figure coming out of the floor. (ominous sound track)

JS's voice: "Magneto!" *(laughs)*

JS: "Seriously, if you want to have some work done, this is the best sitting arrangement."

JS screams: "Hey Australia, what do you think we should do about import tariffs? *(laughs)* Ah, fuck [bleeped] it, *(laughs)* we'll talk later."

Visual of JS screaming over the imaginary table pictured above his right shoulder. (left side of the screen)

JS: "There is no evil plot, as the later banquet showed when they all toasted," JS says, "this is true, with wine that sells over $500 a bottle. "*(laughs*)

Clip of the reveling party

JS adds that the meeting loses menace when you see the children's table where they drink juice boxes at $200 each (laughs)

Clip of reveling children

JS: "They got stuff done. They issued a 5-page plan of action. And you cannot forget this: They made a firm decision to meet again in April, evidently because there is a racy new Merlot they are dying to try." (*laughs)*

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 4:

JS advances a theory about the world-ruling power of the summit. Then he minimizes it with absurd visual jokes about a giant war-like figure supposed to dominate the meeting. Also, JS uses satire to criticize what the summit actually seems to be: A publicity stunt where leaders meet to enjoy special treatment and achieve little (a seemingly 5-page memorandum about meeting again to party).

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 4:

Magneto = Created in 1963 by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, Magneto, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, is one of the most notorious Marvel Comics evil characters, according to some. He is the central villain of the X-Men comic, as well as the TV show and all the X-Men films.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 5:
Bush is an ineffective summit host (II)

JS: "At the end, the President said, 'good bye'."

Video clips of Bush greeting good bye.

Voice-over: JS mocks Bush's style of calling people by the nickname he gives them, including "Putin" for the new Russian President, "Back rubbing" for the German Chancellor, and "Mr. Oil Man" for the Saudi representative. *(laughs, cheers and applauses)*

JS comments that it is "good practice for when he starts running his boat shows." *(laughs)*

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 5:

JS uses irony, parody, satire, and jokes to criticize Bush's presidential job of foolishly greeting world leaders. Jokingly, JS remarks that Bush's true talents are to perform brainless entertainment.

Appendix D2 - November 17, 2008 Segment – Potentially Encoded Meanings

Potentially Encoded Meanings – Unit 1:

(1) JS believes that Obama is actively engaged in bringing together hope and change, and posting his address on YouTube constitutes such an example.
(2) JS does not believe that Obama's YouTube address signifies real hope and change.
(3) JS has no beliefs about what Obama can do or does, but JS is amused by Obama's YouTube presence.
(4) JS admiringly points out Obama's limited connection with FDR.
(5) Ironically, JS points out Obama's desire to copy FDR.
(6) JS believes that Obama tries too hard to connect with his youth base, and his YouTube presence is as transparent a ploy as the doctored clip *TDS* presents of the skate boarding Obama.

or

(7) JS views the YouTube act as a technology-driven stunt which may have a negative impact on Obama's future credibility, making him the next big peanut in the country.

Potentially Encoded Meanings – Unit 2

(1) JS believes Bush engages in empty protocol rather than substantial presidential acts.

Potentially Encoded Meaning – Unit # 3:

(1) JS believes Bush is a dogmatic fool.
(2) JS admires Bush as a principled president.
(3) JS believes in responsible capitalism which comes with both good and bad.
(4) JS believes that it is the people's responsibility to say when capitalism needs to be fixed and to fix it.

or

(5) JS believes, even if the people decide that the system is broken, we should not fix it.

Potentially Encoded Meanings- Unit #4

(1) JS jokes about who is in charge of the Summit, ironically criticizing conspiracy theorists.
(2) JS believes in conspiracy theories as much as he believes in Magneto.
(3) JS believes that the Summit offers a good opportunity for treaty work.
(4) JS does not believe that any real work can be done at such meetings.
(5) JS believes that an honest attempt to work out arrangements is made at the summit.
(6) JS believes that the Summit's purpose is for participants, adults and children to party.
(7) JS believes that the 5-page plan and the decision to meet again represents real achievements.
(8) JS does not believe the skimpy 5-page plan and the decision to meet again represents anything but "stuff done."
or
(9) JS believes that all that can be achieved at the next meeting is tasting more wine.

Potentially Encoded Meanings- Unit # 5

(1) JS likes Bush's style of calling people by the nicknames he gives them.
(2) JS scorns Bush for doing that.
(3) JS believes that Bush does not know the name of those foreign dignitaries.
(4) JS believes Bush entertains thoughts about a post-presidential carrier as an entertainer.
or
(5) In JS's assessment, Bush is only good as a show-boat entertainer.

Appendix E1 - February 5, 2009 Segment – Multi-layered textual analysis

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 1: The economy is in tatters.

JS: "Once again" *TDS* starts with the economy.

1. *a*
   Clip of the September 25, 2008 audiovisual introduction to the segment.
   We see and hear the lonely wood-made house, reminiscent of the second youngest of the Little Pigs' house falling apart;



JS and his audience laugh. JS hopes that at home we have the show in surround sound. *(laughs)* [*broken glass is heard falling on Stewart's head;* JS does not finish his sentence.]

Still picture over Stewart's right shoulder (left side of the screen). A frontal view of the Whit House partially obstructed by dollar bills and the words "Clusterf#@k to the Poor House."



JS announces that the level of economic threat moved from magenta to "evicted from the trailer park." *(laughs)*

1. b

Visual of those words in a presentation reminiscent of Bush and Cheney's security color-coded threat level system.
TDS' "Economic Threat Level" starts with Low=Green=Monkey Butler, Guarded=Blue= Top Hats and Monocles; Elevated=Yellow=Making Mortgage Payments; High=Orange=Evicted From Trailer Park; and ends with Severe= Red= Wearing Barrels



JS tells us that Bush uses the economy to scare us into acquiescing with everything the administration demands.

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 1a:

JS uses irony, visuals from children's story, such as ***Three Little Pigs*** and scatological language to make fun of the state of the U.S. economy. JS believes that because those in power built a weak economy the poor suffer.

(N.B. Potential ambiguous encoding: irony that uses children's story risks to have limited credibility.)

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 1b:

JS uses irony, parody, and satire to criticize the handling of our current economic crisis and connect it to the Bush-Cheney handling of the terrorist threat.

(N.B. Potential downside: irony that uses Bush-Cheney theme downplayes the real problems.)

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 1:

The level of economic threat moved from magenta to "evicted from the trailer park" = JS parodied the "Color-coded Threat Level System" created on March 11, 2002, for the

"war on terror," and which was subsequently used to communicate with public safety officials and the public at-large through a threat-based, color-coded system the likelihood or impact of an attack (Homeland Security Presidential Directive-3).[97] In the original color scheme, the five threat conditions were identified by a description and corresponding color. From lowest to highest, the levels and colors are: Low = Green; Guarded = Blue; Elevated = Yellow; High = Orange; Severe = Red.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 2: President Obama should not have let Congress take the decision on the economic stimulus.

JS introduces President Obama's decision to take the case of his economic stimulus package directly to the people.

The news archive reel (stamped "yesterday") showed Obama explaining that failure to immediately act would turn crisis into a catastrophe.

Visual of Obama's picture over JS' right shoulder.



JS is feigning faint because Obama "brought out the alliterations, oh my God." *(laughs)*

JS adds "Crisis to catastrophe" It's going to go from disaster to doom, from failure to fucked [bleeped]. *(laughs)*

JS [seriously]: "If one fears failure to act, then there is no better place to go to than the United States Congress, because the fate of the bill rests with it."

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[97] Homeland Security Advisory System. http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/Copy_of_press_release_0046.shtm and http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/laws/gc_1214508631313.shtm#1.

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 2:

Stewart uses irony, parody, and satire to criticize Obama's presidential job. JS portrays Obama as pedantic and seemingly insensitive and removed from the poor masses. JS uses satire to criticize Obama's presidential job. Using Obama's alliteration style, JS portrays Obama's act belying his words on bringing a quick resolution.

(N.B. Potential decoding ambiguity: The audience has to connect with the values used as the platform for criticism.)

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 2:

fears failure = The alliteration (the repetition of the same starting sound) "fears failure" is reminiscent of FDR's *First Inaugural Address*: "The Only Thing We Have to Fear Is Fear Itself."

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 3: Republican legislators are playing politics with the economic stimulus package.

JS begins by pretending to rhetorically ask Sen. John Thune (R-SD) what he believes about the virtues of the hundred-billion-dollar stimulus package.

Archive news reel shows the senator explaining that stacking all the dollar bills of the stimulus package would make a pile 689 miles high. (laughs)



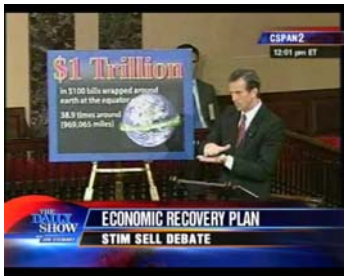
JS comments that he did not think that Thune's plan was the plan Obama proposed.

Although he could see how that plan would threaten Thune's state and its highest pheasant statue.



JS continues as if addressing Thune and asks him to concentrate on the merits of the recovery plan.

Another archive news reel shows Thune explaining that side by side the bills could go around the earth (visual of the earth belts at the Ecuador) almost 39 times.



JS then adds mockingly that if the bills were sown they would make a blanket for Jupiter. *(laughs)*
Then JS adds: "My name is John Thune. I spend bricks and wood and I build with money." *(laughs)*



Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 3:

JS uses irony, parody, satire, and jokes to criticize the Republican opposition to Obama's economic stimulus plan. JS presents the Republican opposition and criticizes it as absurd, though it seems that the Republicans' criticism is based on their view of the Democratic stimulus as proposal absurd and wasteful. JS points out the limits of the Republican criticism.

(N.B. Potential reading ambiguity: While using the absurd card JS leaves the Republican position unaddressed: what if the Obama proposal was as absurdly useless and lacking in merit as going around the Earth 39 times?)

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 4: Democratic legislators play politics with the economic stimulus package

Still, picture over Stewart's right shoulder (left side of the screen). A frontal view of the Whit House partially obstructed by dollar bills and the words Clusterf#@k to the Poor House.



JS: "Perhaps the Democrats can focus the discourse on the bill's merits."

A clip of Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), dressed in a blood red jacket who says she and everyone she works for are mad.



JS wonders whether that happens because she works with bulls and her red shirt is perhaps enraging them. *(laugh)*

JS also wonders whether the mad Senator from Missouri who was raised by wolves was married to a beast. *(laughs)*

Still image of the senator over JS' right shoulder



Another clip shows the senator saying that "we have a bunch of idiots on wall street kicking sand in the face of the American people. What planet are these people on? These people are idiots."

JS concludes that the honorable Senator from Missouri will "fucking [bleeped] cock you." *(applauses and cheers)*

Still picture of the senator dressed in a red jacket (over JS' right shoulder)

JS repeats: "I will fucking [bleeped] cock you. I am mad" (JS laughs) (*applauses*)

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 4:

JS uses parody, satire, and jokes to criticize Democratic legislators' economic job. JS believes the Democratic politicians failed in their job to engage in a rational discourse about the state of our economy and how to improve it and succumbed to emotions.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 4:

blood red jacket = blood-red fashion = Female politicians who want to project a powerful, male-like persona, often wear red while campaigning or addressing crowds. One of the most famous such female politicians was Margaret Thatcher, who stated:

> I stand before you tonight in my Red Star chiffon evening gown. (*Laughter, Applause*), my face softly made up and my fair hair gently waved (*Laughter*), the Iron Lady of the Western world. A cold war warrior, an amazon philistine, even a Peking plotter. Well, am I any of these things? Well yes, if that's how they … . (*Laughter*) … . Yes I am an iron lady, after all it wasn't a bad thing to be an iron duke, yes if that's how they wish to interpret my defense of values and freedoms fundamental to our way of life.
>
> Speech to Finchley Conservatives. BBC Radio News Report 2200 31 January 1976.[98]

This fashion symbolism is not limited to England's politics. For instance, as the 2007 First Ladies Red Dress Collection shows, American politicians, whether Republicans or Democrats, adhere to this fashion code, too.[99]

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[98] http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102947.
[99] http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/educational/hearttruth/events/first-ladies-collection.htm#.

"I will fucking [bleeped] cock you" = The ***OED*** recognizes "cock" as a transitive verb meaning bending a limb; expletive language suggesting a truck-driver-type of woman. The Urban Dictionary offers a meaning to the expression JS probably had in mind, but shied away from: cock fucking.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 5: The economy is a score card issue for Republican legislators.

Still picture over JS' right shoulder (left side of the screen). A frontal view of the Whit House partially obstructed by dollar bills and the words Clusterf#@k to the Poor House.

JS: "The Senate debate vacillated from angry populist ranting to feigned outrage of government spending."

JS: "The Republicans threatened to abstain 100% of their vote over 2% of the bill they find objectionable."

News clip shows the same John Thune (R-SD) objecting to money for the removal of fish passage barriers. Similar Republican voices hypocritically oppose the bill, including Se. John McCain (R-AZ), who opposed the honey bee taxes.

In the clip we hear Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) opposing a $246 million tax earmark for the movie industry.

JS comments: "movie industry! Phe!"

Still picture of the senator over JS' right shoulder

JS, mockingly: "Those export generating global image boosting carpenter employing homos." *(laughs)*

Still, picture over JS' right shoulder (left side of the screen). A frontal view of the White House partially obstructed by dollar bills and the words "Clusterf#@k to the Poor House."

JS adds that some of the earmarked money was to be used for family planning as well, and wonders whether the only senator to bring that issue up would be a senator involved in a prostitution scandal.

JS uses a fake monkey paw and says touching it "make it so monkey paw; make it so." (*laughs)*

> *News clip shows Sen. David Vitter (R- LA), who opposed the money earmarked until recently to fight sexually transmitted diseases* [making JS's dream come true].

"Look, at some point," JS states, "you're going to get one. It does not matter. *(laughs)* It's life. It's not a stimulus package that is going to make the burning stop." *(laughs, female sound).*

> *Image of the Senator over JS' right shoulder. JS impersonating the Senator.*

JS: "Doctor after doctor. For Chris' sake I said I wanted a virgin." Umph. *(laugh)*

Then, JS continues with the House Minority Leader, Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), who, JS explains, argued that deficit spending is no way to build up a nation.

> *Clip of Boehner explains his opposition to the bill: borrowing billions upon billions is not the way to bring us back to prosperity.*

JS retorts toward his audience "unless the billions are for building up Iraq."

JS: "Get him monkey paw." *(laughs)*

> Image of the Rep. over JS' right shoulder.
> *Clip of Rep. Bohner having a different opinion when the borrowing was to build Iraq. Archival footage shows Boehner in favor of the bill to support the war in Iraq (in Boehner's words, "The cost of this bill is high. It's a price for freedom. You cannot put a price on freedom and security in our country").*

JS smiles and retorts: "Yeah. In our country". *(laughs)*

> *Image of the senator over JS' right shoulder.*

JS reminds the Republicans that C-Span does not destroy the tapes when a new administration steps in (laughs).

Clip of Rep. Darrel Issa (R-CA) who opposes the recovery bill because he does not want to borrow $2 bill.

Still image of the Rep over the right shoulder.

JS explains mockingly that we cannot spend billions to repair roads and create jobs and parks. Then with the same mocking-serious face, JS comments that he expects the Republican Rep. to have been very angry in 2007 when it was revealed that $12 billion had disappeared in Iraq.

We see Rep. Issa who did not display any anger, to the contrary, he took the time to put that amount in "perspective for the committee". Rep. Issa, a well-contained politician, explained that certainly it seems like a lot of money if you put it in 100 bills and put in forklifts.

Still image of the Rep. over JS' right shoulder



JS mockingly: "Go on."

Continuation of the clip explaining that $12 billion was less than $1000 per person, if you counted all people from that region, and it was certainly a measured amount.

JS: … "a measured amount to be spent [then screaming]: It had just disappeared."

JS: "But let's hear the moral objections from Sen. Grassley (R-IA), who once requested 450 million to build a rain forest in Iowa."



Still image showing a Republican document mentioning "moral objections"

Clip of the Senator opposing the bill because he has to make sure that this is a stimulus bill and not a "porkulus" bill.

Still image of the Senator over JS' right shoulder



JS mockingly:
"Now, if you excuse me I have to go back to the Des Moines rain forest. Apparently two pigs have eaten the lima." *(laughs)*

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 5:

JS uses parody, satire, irony and jokes to criticize the Republican legislators' decision to abstain 100% of their support for proposals that amounted to 2% of the stimulus bill. JS believes the Republican legislators feigned outrage over spending because their objections involved minor spending (tax on honey) , or supported an important sector of our economy – movie industry – or it came from legislators whose own sexual life did not follow the conservative family values lacking in the stimulus package (political issue; political personality.

JS exemplifies his generalization by using parody, irony and satire to criticize Boehr's and other's position on deficit spending. JS uses parody, satire, and jokes to criticize the Republicans' moral opposition to the bill which is in fact political, and neither rational nor even moral.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 5:

"Porkulus" bill = On February 8, 2009, on *The New York Times* blog the bill was defined: "[it] is [the] opponents' word for the economic stimulus bill now before Congress, a conflation of 'pork' and 'stimulus.'"

The blog continues by stating that a Nexis database search for a use of the word with this legislative meaning found nearly 70 citations from major news sources. They were all

published since Jan. 28, 2009. A Google News search also showed a similar spike, and it attributes the word's currency to Rush Limbaugh: "On his show Wednesday [Jan. 28], Limbaugh called it the 'porkulus' package, for all the pork-barrel projects he saw in it."[100]

[100] 'Porkulus' http://ideas.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/08/porkulus/ (February 8, 2009, 6:32 am)

Appendix E2 - February 5, 2009 Segment –Potentially Encoded Meanings

Potentially Encoded Meanings Unit 1:

1.a

(1) The image and sound of the crumbling house is a meaningless joke.

(2) The image and sound of the rumbling house represent a metaphor of our economy.

(3) ***Clusterfuck to the poor house*** represents a shocking language joke.

(4) ***Clusterfuck to the poor house*** identifies the social segment who suffer in this crisis: the poor, which is a metaphor for the people.

1b

JS satirically uses the Homeland Security color scheme to better communicate the depth of our economic crisis;

a. JS uses this color scheme to connect the two crises: because both are fabricated;
b. JS does not believe the economic crisis is fabricated, but that both the Bush and the Obama administration are engaged in scary tactics.

Potentially Encoded Meanings Unit 2:

(1) JS is impressed with Obama's figures of speech,

a. JS would have preferred a more sincere and direct one.
b. JS believes Obama's figures of speech hide the truth.

or

(2) JS does not believe going to Congress was the most effective way for Obama to obtain relief for the economic crisis:

a. JS doubts that fear of failure was behind the decision to go to Congress;
b. JS does believe that Obama did the right thing by going to Congress.

Potentially Encoded Meanings Unit 3:

(1) JS believes Thune's criticism has some value

a. JS does not believe that Thune's criticism is valuable because it is not on the merits of the bill.

(2) JS does not believe that Thune has a tall statue-fetish.

b. JS believes Thune is given to nonsensical statements

c. The joke about the statue was ironical

(3) JS expects politicians to engage in a different type of criticism based on merit-oriented criteria.

or

(4) JS believes Thune is "bizarre" using the wrong instruments to achieve his goals (Thune builds with money instead of bricks and wood and spends bricks and wood instead of money)

d. JS used the joke about building with money to satirizes meaningless criticism

Potentially Encoded Meanings Unit 4:

(1) JS does not believe that Congresswoman McCaskill works with bulls, but the joke was ironical satire of female politicians who do wear red blazers as a symbol of power

(2) JS does not believe her blanket assertions about everybody being mad at bankers.

(3) JS does not believe the senator was raised by wolves nor that she married a beast,

a. JS offers that explanation as the only one which would rationally explain her behavior as believable

b. JS believes McCaskill's display of her emotions is feigned.

or

(4) Stewart does not believe that the senator can "fucking cock" anybody

a. JS used that outrageous statement to satirically criticize her behavior: short of engaging in what I believe JS meant to convey ("cock fucking") but refrained from doing so, the senator should change her behavior

b. like the senator's assertions about Wall Street idiots, JS' statements are purely meant to shock (and awe).

Potentially Encoded Meanings Unit 5:

(1) JS believes that unless Republicans fear that Hollywood is too liberal, and hires too many homosexual carpenters, for example, their opposition is bogus.

(2) JS believes that Republicans are so unreasonable in their opposition to the economic stimulus bill, that their attitude can only be the result of children's stories and monkey paws.

(3) JS believes that pretending to embrace family values which oppose family planning while being caught in a sex scandal delegitimizes criticism of family planning.

e. JS does not believe that everybody is doomed to get an STD but fatalistic Republican attitudes might proceed from that premise.

f. JS does believe that STD is common and only a criminal who can order his minions to bring him virgins can avoid STDs.

(4) JS believes that Boehr rationally distinguishes between military security needs which justify deficit spending to support the war in Iraq and deficit spending in general;

(5) JS believes that Boehr's position is politically motivated;

(6) JS believes Republicans opposition to Obama's stimulus bill has no other basis but crude politics.

or

(7) JS believes that Grassley has no legitimate reason to criticize the bill as "porkulous" when Grassley had demanded an indoor rain forest in Des Moines, a "porkulous" request.

Appendix F1 – April 2, 2009 Segment – Multi-layered analysis

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 1: First Lady Michelle Obama upstaged the President at the G20 summit

JS: "Michelle wasn't the only Obama who went to the Summit. She was accompanied by her spouse, Barack."



JS: "As they stepped out of the plane, were welcomed by British Chancelair, Alistair Darling, and made history with the largest gap black name to white name ever seen *(laughs)* at the G20."

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 1:

Through parody, JS satirizes the lack of substance of news media's coverage of the event.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 2: Foreign Protest to the U.S. Presence to the Summit.

JS comments that what did not make history was the typical boisterous protest greeting an American president visiting foreign soil.

Still picture of the national flags of the 20 countries partially obstructed by the segments' slogan: "Clusterf#@k to the Poor House" – and the additional, Global Edition



JS: "Everybody was there, rock throwers against capitalism to cane swingers for fiscal equality to grunters against windows." (laughs)



Clip and still picture of the grunter. (laughs)

JS: "My favorite thing about that guy is the sweater tied around his waist."



JS in a nasal voice: "I am an anarchist who dressed for a chili morning."

JS: …"and then it became increasingly warm throughout the morning. (*laughs*) And I took off my sweater, but I believe come night time it would again become chili (*laughs*), so I want to have my sweater (laughs), so I tied it around my waste. (*laughs*) Fuck [bleeped] the police."

JS comments that protesters weren't alone in denouncing U.S. policy, "Member nations of the EU were not shy about expressing their disdain for the recovery package."



[and] "The American reticence to participate in global regulations, and starting this economic collapse in the first place."



Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 2:

JS minimizes the protesters' poise and purpose by emphasizing their fashion failures: wearing sweaters around their waist.

Audio-Visual Summary - Cognitive Unit 3: President Obama is more popular than former President Bush; TDS' Wyatt Cenac believes that it should be enough to quiet the opposition.

JS adds that for more G20 analysis "we go to our Senior Foreign Relations Analyst, (correspondent) Wyatt Cenac [WC]." *(applauses)*

WC: "Shut up! Shut up."

JS: "Wyatt, what's going on over there?"

WC displays anger.

WC: "It's bullshit [bleeped] Jon. I'm hearing anti - American slogans, I'm seeing protest. This was not the deal. The deal was we gave them Obama they don't hate us anymore (*laughs).* You tricked us mother fucker (bleeped). (*louder laughs*) I already ripped the Canadian flags out of their knapsacks and put it on the back of my suit. What am I supposed to do now?"



JS tells WC that G-20 summits always have protests.
WC: "It's not only the protesters. It is everybody. The only person kissing our ass is the Prime Minster of Britain. How is that different than before?" (laughs).



JS attempts to calm down Wyatt.

WC: "No. The Chancellor of Germany, remember when the last American president tried to feel you up?" *(laughs)*

Still picture of Bush rubbing Merkel's shoulders

JS: "OK Wyatt."

WC: "No, I thought the reason they never cooperated with us was because the last guy was such a dick. Who was that? Who threw that? Not cool."

WC screaming and throwing something back at an imaginary protest group.



Split screen

JS: "Wyatt, are you alright?"

WC: "No. It was a brick. Jon. *(laughs)* A brick. (*laughs)* The world sucks. *(laughs)* They've got Taylor Hicks syndrome. "

JS asks Cenac to elaborate: "What?"

WC: "They begged us to vote for the guy and now that he's won nobody is buying his album. (laughs) Suck it up Europe. He's your American Idol." *(Laughs)*

Comedic Analysis for Cognitive Unit 3:

Parody, satire and irony are used to point out Obama's credentials: Michelle and his own physical attributes, whether the color of his skin (contrasted with the British whiteness) as well as Obama's appearance. WC identifies them as Obama's credentials as "our American Idol." Even more targeted is WC's satirical threat to the invisible Europeans who have to live with our President, although it is us who have to do that.

Specific Cultural Signifiers Identified in Unit 3:

Senior Foreign Relations Analyst = On Facebook, ***TDS*** introduces itself as a show with "one anchor, five correspondents, zero credibility."[101] On a rotating basis, Samantha Bee, Lewis Black, Wyatt Cenac, John Hodgman, Jason Jones, Asif Mandvi, John Oliver, and Larry Wilmore become the senior analyst of the moment, without any credentials except their lack of objectivity, "journalistic integrity or even accuracy."

"kissing our ass" = The ***OED*** recognizes both "ass-kissing" and the transitive verb, "ass-kiss". According to the ***OED*** "ass-kissing ppl. a. and vbl. n., toadying, flattering; hence (as back-formation) ass-kiss v. trans., to flatter, truckle to; ass-kisser, one who does this."

Taylor Hicks and American Idol = WC is referring to Taylor Hicks, the winner of the fifth season of the British import reality TV show, ***American Idol***. Apparently, despite his sudden fame in 2006 due to this popular show, his albums have, according to MTV, "tanked." American Idol has become an oxymoron, as an idol is an object of worship. Often, the winner of ***American Idol*** stands for the opposite.

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[101] http://www.facebook.com/thedailyshow#!/thedailyshow?v=info.

Appendix F2 – April 2, 2009 Segment – Multi-layered analysis

Potentially Encoded Meanings -Unit 1:

(1) JS believes that Obama's presidential role is mostly cosmetic.

or

(2) JS believes that Michelle was our representative to the G20 summit

a. JS used that as a joke to ironically point out Obama's progressive stature: "the largest gap, black name to white name, ever seen at the G20."
b. JS does not believe that anything but cosmetic results can be achieved at any G20 summit.
c. JS used that joke to criticize the media coverage of the summit – which focused equally on Michelle and Obama.

Potentially Encoded Meanings - Unit 2:

(1) JS believes that the mainstream media did not cover the protests as they should have.

(2) JS believes that protesters are ineffective: "grunters against windows" with sweaters tied around their waists.

(3) JS believes the EU representatives are equally ineffective when expressing their disdain for the recovery package, for American reticence to participate in global regulations, and for causing the economic collapse in the first place.

(4) Contrary to JS, WC is irritated by the EU representatives' lack of subservience and approves British servility.

- WC is irritated by the British unrepentant submissiveness.

or

(5) WC believes that Obama is different from Bush and the world should be happy with that:

a. WC believes that the world should be happy that it voted for Obama;
b. WC believes that the world voted for Obama because he was popular;

c. WC believes that the world should have seen through Obama but that even if it decided to vote for him on a whim, it should stand by him.

Appendix G. Summary of Joseph Stiglitz's Explanation of the Economic Meltdown

TDS' segments entitled "*Clusterf#@k to the Poor House*" offered a satirical interpretation of the economic meltdown and its disproportionate consequences on working- and middle-class individuals within the context of the historically dramatic election of the nation's first Black president. I ensured the accuracy of my final interpretation of the analyzed primary text by limiting it within the accepted understanding of the economic meltdown, which this appendix contains.

I chose as common understanding of this phenomenon the interpretation offered by Columbia Finance and Business Professor Joseph Stiglitz. Stiglitz identified its beginning with Clinton's Treasury Secretary Alan Greenspan's lax monetary policies (Stiglitz, 2009, p. 7). Despite its world-wide impact, Stiglitz contended that the United States has reacted largely with small-minded protectionist measures which are not sufficient to help individuals who were most hurt by the economic downturn. Stiglitz criticized the populist "buy American" provisions installed after the November 2008, G-8 meeting in Washington (Stiglitz, 2009, p. 3). As Stiglitz pointed out,

U.S. banks were the primary beneficiaries of the colossal $700-800 billion bailout. The bailout hurt individuals twice: the banks fired employees and also refused loans to their customers (Id). Moreover, while cyclical downturns are supposed to be expected, the U.S. government had weakened the "automatic stabilizers," which had historically eased such crises. Stiglitz's "automatic stabilizers" consist of social protection and unemployment schemes (p. 4).

> The extent of progressivity in tax systems has been lowered and we have moved from defined benefit systems to defined contribution retirement systems, again weakening the automatic stabilizers of the economy and in some cases converting them into automatic destabilizers. (pp. 4-5)

The current downturn has seen people's retirement accounts all but wiped out and home values diminished by 50% (Stiglitz, 2008). As of 2009, the stimulus package was expected to create over 3.5 million jobs, although more than 2 million had lost their jobs by 2009 and more than a half a million were losing it monthly. In addition, more than 2 million people were expected to join the work force in 2009 for the first time. Stiglitz thought that by 2010, the national economy would be faced with a more than 7-8 million job deficit, which made the stimulus package, even if successful, totally "inadequate" (p. 5). Worse, Stiglitz

explains, the system here and abroad is broken because it is based on people borrowing to spend beyond their means (p. 8). That spending bubble broke in 2008, and it cannot be fixed unless banks agree to lend money in the same lax way Greenspan encouraged. So far, banks have been reluctant to do so.

This explanation offered the cognitive parameters to evaluate the news reporting and its *TDS*' satirical rendition. These resources transpire in my interpretation of *TDS'* cultural and political symbolism of the show's linguistic, aural and visual coding.

Appendix H1. Questionnaire for Audience Members of Jon Stewart's The Daily Show

Questionnaire for audience members of Jon Stewart's The Daily Show

1. Default Section

1. How many times, including tonight, have you been an audience member?

2. How did you get your ticket?

- ☐ Online; or
- ☐ Some other method (please explain).

Other (please specify)

3. When did you start watching the Show (years or months ago)?

4. How often do you watch the Show(in a week or month)?

5. Why do you watch The Daily Show? Because

- ☐ it conveys political information you cannot access anywhere else;
- ☐ it is an enjoyable way of staying abreast of political information;
- ☐ some other reason (please explain)

Other (please specify)

6. How do you rate The Daily Show's coverage of the 2008 Presidential Elections? [You should choose as many answers as you want]

- ☐ informative on substantive issues;
- ☐ informative about the candidates;
- ☐ simply enjoyable;
- ☐ better than any other news show on television.

Other (please specify)

7. How would you describe your political views:

- ☐ liberal;
- ☐ neither liberal nor conservative;
- ☐ conservative.

Questionnaire for audience members of Jon Stewart's The Daily Show

8. Does this show represent you or your views in any way?

- ☐ No.
- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ Other (please specify)

9. Does this show represent your friends or family's views?

- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ No.

10. Name a news show or network that you watch as often as The Daily Show.

11. Name a newspaper you read as often as you watch The Daily Show.

12. Where did you get your news today?

- ☐ newspaper;
- ☐ TV;
- ☐ online;
- ☐ nowhere.

13. Where do you live?

- ☐ New York City;
- ☐ another city/state/country

Please identify

14. Please choose your gender:

- ☐ female;
- ☐ male.

15. How old are you?

Questionnaire for audience members of Jon Stewart's The Daily Show

16. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- [ ] college
- [ ] other

Other (please specify)

17. If you would like to participate in a follow-up survey, please write down your email, or contact me at edneacsu@eden.rutgers.edu. Your participation in this study is voluntary There are no known risks for participating in this research, which is anonymous, unless you decide to provide your e-mail address, which will remain confidential. That means it will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be limited. If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at 212-854-1345 OR edneacsu@eden.rutgers.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at: Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 3 Rutgers Plaza New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559, Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104, Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Appendix H2: Audience Questionnaire – Response Summary

This appendix contains some of the responses to the questions submitted to the TDS' live audience:

Questionnaire for audience members of Jon Stewart's The Daily Show Edit

Default Report | + Add Report

Response Summary

Total Started Survey: 36
Total Completed Survey: 36 (100%)

PAGE: DEFAULT SECTION

1. How many times, including tonight, have you been an audience member? Download

	Response Count
Show replies	31
answered question	31
skipped question	5

2. How did you get your ticket? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
Online; or	73.1%	19
Some other method (please explain).	26.9%	7
Show replies Other (please specify)		8
answered question		26
skipped question		10

3. When did you start watching the Show (years or months ago)? Download

	Response Count
Show replies	36
answered question	36
skipped question	0

4. How often do you watch the Show(in a week or month)? Download

	Response Count
Show replies	36
answered question	36

skipped question	0

5. Why do you watch The Daily Show? Because Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
it conveys political information you cannot access anywhere else;	17.1%	6
it is an enjoyable way of staying abreast of political information;	77.1%	27
some other reason (please explain)	34.3%	12
Show replies Other (please specify)		13
answered question		35
skipped question		1

6. How do you rate The Daily Show's coverage of the 2008 Presidential Elections? [You should choose as many answers as you want] Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
informative on substantive issues;	50.0%	17
informative about the candidates;	52.9%	18
simply enjoyable;	97.1%	33
better than any other news show on television.	20.6%	7
Show replies Other (please specify)		3
answered question		34
skipped question		2

7. How would you describe your political views: Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
liberal;	88.9%	32
neither liberal nor conservative;	8.3%	3
conservative.	2.8%	1
answered question		36
skipped question		0

8. Does this show represent you or your views in any way? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count

	No.	5.6%	2
	Yes.	88.9%	32
Show replies	Other (please specify)	5.6%	2
		answered question	36
		skipped question	0

9. Does this show represent your friends or family's views? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes.	88.9%	32
No.	11.1%	4
	answered question	36
	skipped question	0

10. Name a news show or network that you watch as often as The Daily Show. Download

	Response Count
Hide replies	33

1.	MSNBC	Thu, Aug 20, 2009 9:53 AM	Find...
2.	none	Thu, Aug 20, 2009 4:09 AM	Find...
3.	Olberman, Maddox	Wed, Aug 19, 2009 11:22 AM	Find...
4.	bill mahr	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 9:14 PM	Find...
5.	CBS news/ McNeil Lehrer on PBS	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 9:28 AM	Find...
6.	none	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 8:25 AM	Find...
7.	NPR	Sun, May 24, 2009 10:12 PM	Find...
8.	none	Fri, May 22, 2009 7:57 PM	Find...
9.	anything on MSNBC	Tue, May 19, 2009 9:36 AM	Find...
10.	c-span	Tue, May 19, 2009 7:13 AM	Find...
11.	Colbert Report	Mon, May 18, 2009 10:34 PM	Find...
12.	none. don't watch much tv	Tue, Mar 17, 2009 4:51 PM	Find...
13.	Hardball with Chris Matthews	Tue, Mar 17, 2009 4:17 PM	Find...
14.	none	Tue, Feb 3, 2009 5:47 PM	Find...
15.	NBC morning news	Fri, Jan 30, 2009 12:26 PM	Find...
16.	NBC Nightly News	Tue, Dec 9, 2008 11:14 AM	Find...
17.	CNN morning edition	Mon, Dec 8, 2008 10:34 AM	Find...
18.	NBC local and national; CNN	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 1:10 PM	Find...
19.	NPR	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 6:28 AM	Find...
20.	none	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 5:04 AM	Find...

21.	none	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 12:25 AM	Find...
22.	NPR, radio. Otherwise, none. Question 12 needs an "other" option.	Sat, Dec 6, 2008 11:25 PM	Find...
23.	ask me about what newsfeeds I read	Sat, Dec 6, 2008 10:13 PM	Find...
24.	CNN	Thu, Nov 6, 2008 1:16 PM	Find...
25.	None	Tue, Nov 4, 2008 3:26 PM	Find...
26.	CNN	Tue, Nov 4, 2008 11:36 AM	Find...
27.	CNN	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 8:09 PM	Find...
28.	None	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 6:27 PM	Find...
29.	msnbc	Sun, Nov 2, 2008 9:14 AM	Find...
30.	PBS	Sat, Nov 1, 2008 1:24 PM	Find...
31.	Rachel Maddow	Fri, Oct 31, 2008 9:24 AM	Find...
32.	MSNBC	Thu, Oct 30, 2008 12:07 AM	Find...
33.	HDLN	Wed, Oct 29, 2008 9:07 PM	Find...

50 responses per page

answered question	**33**
skipped question	**3**

11. Name a newspaper you read as often as you watch The Daily Show. Download

	Response Count
Hide replies	34

1.	none	Thu, Aug 20, 2009 9:53 AM	Find...
2.	none	Thu, Aug 20, 2009 4:09 AM	Find...
3.	Times	Wed, Aug 19, 2009 11:22 AM	Find...
4.	new york times	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 9:14 PM	Find...
5.	NT Times	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 9:28 AM	Find...
6.	bbc world news website	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 8:25 AM	Find...
7.	The Press Enterprise	Mon, Aug 17, 2009 10:05 PM	Find...
8.	NY Times online edition	Sun, May 24, 2009 10:12 PM	Find...
9.	NY Times online	Fri, May 22, 2009 7:57 PM	Find...
10.	Wall Street Journal	Tue, May 19, 2009 9:36 AM	Find...
11.	times	Tue, May 19, 2009 7:13 AM	Find...
12.	New York Tmes	Mon, May 18, 2009 10:34 PM	Find...
13.	ny times	Tue, Mar 17, 2009 4:51 PM	Find...

14.	The New York Times online	Tue, Mar 17, 2009 4:17 PM	Find...
15.	cnn online	Tue, Feb 3, 2009 5:47 PM	Find...
16.	NY Times	Fri, Jan 30, 2009 12:26 PM	Find...
17.	San Francisco Chronicle	Tue, Dec 9, 2008 11:14 AM	Find...
18.	New York Times	Mon, Dec 8, 2008 10:34 AM	Find...
19.	SF Chronicle	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 1:10 PM	Find...
20.	The Washington Post	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 6:28 AM	Find...
21.	NY Times	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 5:04 AM	Find...
22.	New York Times	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 12:25 AM	Find...
23.	None.	Sat, Dec 6, 2008 11:25 PM	Find...
24.	See previous	Sat, Dec 6, 2008 10:13 PM	Find...
25.	Charleston SC Post and Courier	Thu, Nov 6, 2008 1:16 PM	Find...
26.	New York Times	Tue, Nov 4, 2008 3:26 PM	Find...
27.	The Star Tribune	Tue, Nov 4, 2008 11:36 AM	Find...
28.	New York TImes	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 8:09 PM	Find...
29.	New York Times	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 6:27 PM	Find...
30.	nytimes	Sun, Nov 2, 2008 9:14 AM	Find...
31.	The New York Times	Sat, Nov 1, 2008 1:24 PM	Find...
32.	NY Times	Fri, Oct 31, 2008 9:24 AM	Find...
33.	Reading Eagle	Thu, Oct 30, 2008 12:07 AM	Find...
34.	WSJ	Wed, Oct 29, 2008 9:07 PM	Find...

50 responses per page

answered question	34
skipped question	2

12. Where did you get your news today? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
newspaper;	34.3%	12
TV;	25.7%	9
online;	85.7%	30
nowhere.	0.0%	0
answered question		35
skipped question		1

18.	61	Tue, Dec 9, 2008 11:14 AM	Find...
19.	29	Mon, Dec 8, 2008 10:34 AM	Find...
20.	33	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 1:10 PM	Find...
21.	32	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 6:28 AM	Find...
22.	29	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 5:04 AM	Find...
23.	28	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 12:25 AM	Find...
24.	28	Sat, Dec 6, 2008 11:25 PM	Find...
25.	29	Sat, Dec 6, 2008 10:36 PM	Find...
26.	29	Sat, Dec 6, 2008 10:13 PM	Find...
27.	57	Thu, Nov 6, 2008 1:16 PM	Find...
28.	26	Tue, Nov 4, 2008 3:26 PM	Find...
29.	20	Tue, Nov 4, 2008 11:36 AM	Find...
30.	26	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 8:09 PM	Find...
31.	25	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 6:27 PM	Find...
32.	27	Sun, Nov 2, 2008 9:14 AM	Find...
33.	66	Sat, Nov 1, 2008 1:24 PM	Find...
34.	57	Fri, Oct 31, 2008 9:24 AM	Find...
35.	23	Thu, Oct 30, 2008 12:07 AM	Find...
36.	45	Wed, Oct 29, 2008 9:07 PM	Find...

50 responses per page

answered question	36
skipped question	0

16. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
college	71.9%	23
other	31.3%	10
Hide replies Other (please specify)		14

1.	Graduate degree	Wed, Aug 19, 2009 11:22 AM	Find...
2.	finished high school and currently attending college	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 9:14 PM	Find...
3.	Law School	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 9:28 AM	Find...
4.	MS	Tue, Aug 18, 2009 8:25 AM	Find...
5.	M.S.	Tue, Dec 9, 2008 11:14 AM	Find...
6.	PhD	Mon, Dec 8, 2008 10:34 AM	Find...
7.	Juris Doctor	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 1:10 PM	Find...

8.	PhD	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 6:28 AM	Find...
9.	Graduate school	Sun, Dec 7, 2008 12:25 AM	Find...
10.	J.D.	Tue, Nov 4, 2008 3:26 PM	Find...
11.	Law School	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 8:09 PM	Find...
12.	law school	Mon, Nov 3, 2008 6:27 PM	Find...
13.	law school	Sun, Nov 2, 2008 9:14 AM	Find...
14.	Graduate School (Masters)	Fri, Oct 31, 2008 9:24 AM	Find...

25 responses per page

answered question	**32**
skipped question	**4**

Appendix I. Summary of Stewart's Monologue (Segment 2): "The Born Identity." July 22, 2009

This appendix exemplifies the data collection process used in this dissertation. I started with a summary of the segment of the primary text I wanted to analyze. Here I summarized Stewart's monologue, entitled "The Born Identity.[102]"

The summary has the advantage of pointing out the potential cognitive, and comedic units of the text, whose meaning is further deciphered in accordance with the (a) the organization of the text (in segments and content units), (b) the value judgments Stewart promotes through its text, and (c) the relationship between the various judgments Stewart, the show's reporters, and their guest, promote through the show (Hartley and Fiskes 1978).

- Stewart addressed Obama's birther controversy, which coincided with his sixth-month anniversary as the U.S. President. Stewart lamented that Obama's "fixing fairies were still to materialize," but he acknowledged Obama's hefty agenda, which included health care and fixing the economy.
- Stewart played news clips which covered a different issue, than Obama's "hefty" agenda, including, health care, two wars and climate changing, the birther controversy: whether Obama was actually born in the United States. The newscasters (including CNN's Larry King, Lou Dobbs and Kitty Pilgrim) reported that the issue still persisted, and Pilgrim added that it was the prevalent issue on the Internet.

[102] http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-22-2009/the-born-identity.

Stewart commented on the reliability of the Internet and concluded that it appeared that "Barack Obama is not only the United States' first black president -- he's also the first not-American president."

- The next news clip, described by Stewart as "crazy" showed a group of people and one woman screaming that the President was "a citizen of Kenya." Again, Stewart dismissed that comment by using the term "crazy."
- He then acknowledged his hopes to find something more "intellectual" from mainstream media, such as CNN. The clip showed a young-looking blond woman, displaying fake eye lashes, and speaking with a heavy foreign accent, identified as Orly Taitz, a California attorney, dentist, and real estate agent. She supported the view that Obama lacked proof of U.S. citizenship. Stewart joked about her professional credentials.
- Next, a July 17, CNN clip from Lou Dobbs' show with anchor Kitty Pilgrim filling in for Dobbs, announced that the media had access to Obama's birth certificate. A re-play of a later July 20, CNN clip showed Lou Dobbs stating that "A lot of questions remained unanswered." In editorial reply Stewart joked about CNN's lack of coherent reporting and about how the Kenyans were supposedly destroying the "fabric of the country" through the Obama conspiracy.
- A clip of MSNBC's Chris Matthews showed him interviewing John Campbell (R-CA). Matthews asked Campbell if he believed that Obama was a "legitimate, native-born American or what." Campbell answered "As far as I know, yes." Stewart ended the segment with the observation that Campbell's answer as "one of these perfect phrases which allows you to distance yourself from perverse allegations while winkingly embracing them."

Appendix J. Texts posted on *TDS'* Online *Forum* – "NBC Boss Blasts Jon Stewart for Criticism"

This appendix contains the data collected from the postings entered under the heading, " NBC Boss Blasts Jon Stewart for Criticism," as well as the data analysis the postings entailed.

In *NBC Boss Blasts Jon Stewart for Criticism*, *Forum* members engaged in debating tertiary texts that *TDS* produced, rather than the primary text itself. Those exchanges debated the some of the media reaction to the episode. Those postings referenced *TDS* only tangentially and rather affectively, exposing the author's perceived relationship with the episode, its topic, *TDS* in general, and its host, rather than exposing the author's understanding or reading of that episode.

The direction of the discussion was set by someone with the alias of *BobbyDonnell,* who was the character interpreted by Dylan McDermott on the 1990's TV legal series, *The Practice*. This *BobbyDonnell* was identified on the *Forum as "*a researcher." The thread started by posting an Internet article on Stewart's media criticism of CNBC's financial coverage of the crisis. It contained excerpts from Stewart's on-the-air criticism.

> "Listen, you knew what the banks were doing, yet were touting it for months and months," Stewart said during his March 12 show. "The entire network was. Now to pretend that this was some sort of crazy, once-in-a-lifetime tsunami that nobody could have seen coming is disingenuous at best and criminal at worst."
>
> It also contained excerpts from Zucker's statement:
>
> "Everybody wants to find a scapegoat. That's human nature," Zucker said during a keynote address at a media industry conference. "But to suggest that the business media or CNBC was responsible for what is going on now is absurd."
>
> "Just because someone who mocks authority says something doesn't make it so," Zucker said, describing the comedian's comments as "completely out of line."

This posting produced a limited conversation: only nine exchanges. Directly or indirectly, these exchanges discussed the role of the media and whether "CNBC has a responsibility to" (1) "the average 'viewer investor'" (quoting Intern-***hamdend***), or (2) "mere individuals" (Production Assistant –***aglet***). The conversation also addressed Stewart's journalistic role. In some instances the focus was on then-NBC-President, Jeff Zucker:

> Zucker's thinking is absurd. What we saw the night Cramer was on the Daily Show is a lot closer to actual journalism than what sadly passes for it on the networks today. Stewart was not scape goating anyone. (quoting Intern-***scriss***)

In others the focus was other news media outlets:

> Oh, clearly, the media isn't to blame for the fiasco, in their yellow-journalistic fantasy-land. Their editorial decisions had absolutely nothing to do with

> millions of Americans losing their 401k and their jobs. […] Listening to CNN's Richard Quest trying to justify the Bonus Contract at AIG is the latest in galling charity devoted in editorial decisions to make it to the air. Another CNN correspondent was still touting the "advantages" of maintaining the 401k, this morning.
>
> I've about had it with these bullsh*t artists speaking in argument negating cliche's. Their credibility is a giant goose-egg filled with p**p. When Mr. Stewart aptly finds an example of their dereliction [sic] and proceeds to expose it, I think it's as ironic as it is expected - that they, invariably, have chosen one messenger after another to shoot instead of honoring the truth of their message.

The final commentary on this thread was posted by an associate with the show, as usually happens when discussions seem unproductive, ***Sr.Producer-CryptKicker5***. It capped the discussion with something SNL would call "deep thought."

> I think the interview could have served as a catalyst for change in the media. I think it really served to express people's demand for actual journalism. Still, thinking that will change anything may be too optimistic on my part.
> (quoting Sr.Producer-CryptKicker5)

In conclusion, this thread recorded opinions twice removed from the episode – reflections on how others have viewed the episode – and commentary on larger issues, such as the role of journalism, public access to information, and journalistic accountability. This thread became a space for public debate of some of our democratic ills.

The participating *Forum* members implicitly had viewed the episode but bypassed commenting on its meaning through a direct interaction with the primary text in favor of interacting with secondary texts. Thus, it might be safely assumed that they had decoded the primary text and found its meaning clear. It is unclear however whether they followed the preferred reading or negotiated more meaning into the encoded signs. This is one of the very few instances I came across when the audience's involvement with the primary text was ambiguous and thus *TDS*' decoded polysemy was ambiguous. This relative ambiguity could be explained by the lack of comedic structure encoded in it. The narrative contained live questions and answers rather than a monologue built on ironic satire and delivered to a captive audience whose sole role is to laugh or not to laugh.

Appendix K. Texts posted on *TDS'* Online *Forum* – "Jim Cramer Comes to Call"

This appendix contains the data collected from the online postings under the heading "Jim Cramer Comes to Call," as well as the analysis the postings entailed:

This thread encouraged a discussion among potential audience members before the primary text was produced. The Executive Producer, identified as ***Dustin***, started the thread, ***Jim Cramer Comes to Call***, on March 10th, 2009, two days before the infamous interview with Jim Cramer took place. ***Dustin*** started the thread with the open-ended question: "How did you think Jim and Jon handled themselves tonight in the wake of the past week's blow-up?"

The thread continued for over two weeks, until March 28, 2009. It contained 219 postings whose common thread was a showcase of emotions, some supporting, some denigrating Stewart.

> Shabat Shalom, Jon! Best! Actually, it was too best! Jon Stewart is now King of all Newsmen! Wolf, Anderson, Larry, Brian, Katie? You all are getting it wrong! A guy on a comedy show just ate your lunch and you now look like rank amateurs. Watch Jon Stewart so you will know how to handle a totally new kind of contemptible when it is sitting in the Aeron chair two feet away from you! Jon couldn't have been more deadly if he had a weapon in his hand. Cramer looked like an 8th grade science teacher who got stoned in the parking lot and came back inside to find his classroom en fuego! Seriously, that was the best

> actual news interview I have EVER seen. Jim Cramer got his @ss handed to him! I can't buh-lieve MSNBC served him up like that for sacrifice - LOL! It was even better that watching the Republican Party's sacrifice Bobby Jindal like Joe vs. the Volcano! (quoting Intern-***SoSoSonya***, who registered as a member on March 13, and posted the above message same day at 6:27AM)

Similar feelings were shared by another new member, an Intern called ***ncastner***:

> "Fabulous, Jon. Incredibly cathartic. Brilliant and badly needed. He had absolutely no come back because there is no one. Go Jonny go." (posted on March 13, 2009 at 7:32 AM).

Or:

> I love you, Jon, for taking him [Cramer] on. Our whole office was talking about it today. (posted at 03-13-2009 08:59 PM by Intern-***ksimon***, registered on 03-13-2009)

At the opposite end of the spectrum, some ***Forum*** members engaged in ***ad hominem*** attacks, posting in a way that can easily be described as trolls[103]:

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[103] On ***Journalist ie.,*** Margaret Ward explained the terms:

> Flamers are those who strongly disagree with someone's point of view online. They criticise opinions but fail to add anything constructive to the conversation.
> If a flamer personally attacks someone, or purposely offends, they are called a troll. (When this happens I'm not sure if their hair turns orange and stands on end or if and the flamer-turned-troll shrinks to half their normal size. You see, no one actually sees a troll because they hide behind their keyboard or username). Lurkers just hang around staring at stuff on message and discussion boards. They're usually mute and fairly harmless. If quiet people annoy you then so will a lurker. "Why aren't you

> You're no better than the media you're beating up on. You are so biased it's ridiculous. Maybe you should be interviewing the head of CNBC instead of Jim Cramer. Last I knew he wasn't in charge of CNBC or the financial news industry. At least he's trying to look out for the little guys. I'm not sure why you're having such a serious discussion on Comedy Central. Is it because you couldn't get a job with a serious network? Perhaps your frustration at being snubbed for a financial reporting job is rearing its ugly head. Maybe you should just stick to being funny. (quoting Intern- fastturtle, member since March 13, 2009, posted March 13, 2009 at 7:35 AM)

Some engaged in name-calling, an activity closer to that displayed by a flamer[104] rather than a "troller: [105]"

> armchair quarterbacking is the career choice of bitter people unwilling to make the initial call but always on the spot to question it after the outcome has been determined. cramer should have asked stewart how his financial advisor had performed...or better yet, cramer should have asked stewart if he manages his own money and what return he had achieved. i'm sure stewart stewart's protforlio took the same beating he attempted to give cramer....bitter little man (posted on 03-25-2009 07:12 AM by Intern -ONE_FROMER_VIEWER, registered on 03-23-2009)

However, on the ***Forum***, unlike the Facebook space, (real or perceived) ***ad hominen*** attacks (and thus "flamers[106]") are discouraged because they are against the

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saying anything? Contribute or go away!" Eavesdroppers and lurkers swim in the same genetic pool. http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/

[104] http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/

[105] http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/

[106] http://journalist.ie/2010/02/sticks-and-stones-2/

Forum's Constitution. Three hours later, Sr. Producer - *jforgizmo* intervened and admonished the participants:

> "bitter little man" is not an argument to discuss; it's a personal attack. even jon stewart, who went after cramer the public personna[sic?], did not resort to calling cramer names in a personal attack. this is [sic?]discussion forum, not a place for personal attacks, and you can check the guidelines by clicking up left at Forum Home and then scrolling down to jon stewart or tech problems boards, in which you can review the constitution - the rules, maaann. (posted on 03-25-2009 at 10:09 AM)

This thread proved difficult to analyze in a manner that allowed any generalization on how the primary text was decoded. It is hard to assess whether the episode's encoded signs reached such a level of polysemy that it provoked such emotional exchanges, whether the very topic of the episode or its political tenor caused it, or whether the *Forum* itself is a space which encourages emotional display.

Appendix L. Texts posted on *TDS'* Online *Forum* – "In Jon We Trust"

This appendix contains the data collected from the online postings under the heading "In Jon We Trust," as well as the data analysis the postings entailed:

Production Assistant - *fastlane68*started this thread on March 13, 2009 at 04:25 AM.

> …all the post about this not being funny.... it was not suposed [sic?]to be funny!!!! and i think in part what really pissed Jon off was, when the ahole [sic] went around on all the network shows bashing Jon. I give Cramer credit for coming on the daily show... but let it be known that if you F*%k with Jon and play tough on the morning shows bad mouthing him... u better have more balls for when u come on THE DAILY SHOW. BOOYAAA

This thread produced only 25 postings. All lauded Stewart's performance. While all treated, and probably viewed, Stewart as a journalist, some characterized him more specifically as a "media pundit." Stewart was hailed as a kind of Tim Russert.

In the final posting, entitled: *Jon - The Next Tim Russert*, Intern -*Arwen5* (registered on 03-24-2009) ended the conversation by stating:

> Thank you Jon, who will save us from the inane media coverage like CNBC?
> Your confronting Jim Cramer with his own words on the video was brilliant!!! Just like Tim Russert did for years on Meet the Press.

> I bet CNBC is shaking in their boots right now and asking how they can report on the finacial world in a responsible way. If not they must be brain dead. Wow, for a fake news show your doing a damn good job of keeping people honest and quite frankly doing a better job than most legitimate news orginaztions! Thanks for looking out for us Jon...keep up the good fight! (posted on 03-24-2009 at 12:23 AM)

This thread was also difficult to analyze, though for different reasons. The decoded reading was inferred, and it remains unclear whether fans negotiated emotions into the preferred reading or negotiated more meaning into the encoded signs according to external knowledge. If they negotiated emotions, it is unclear what that was a result of the primary text's polysemy or of the topic. However, this lack of clarity pointed out that the encoded reading is harder to decipher when *TDS* is not ludically structured.

Similarly, because the only arguable polysemy was caused by the emotional display of *TDS'* online fandom, these tertiary texts were not used as data to analyze *TDS'* decoded polysemy beyond the mere illustrative power of this distinctive example. The online fandom engages in many more activities than decoding the primary text. At times, the activities seem to suggest that the reading of the primary text is something which does not need decoding. They omit it to engage in something else, a paratextual

activity. A similar conclusion was reached when reading audience responses to a comedic *TDS* narrative.

Appendix M. Textual Analysis of Media-Authored *TDS* Tertiary Texts

This appendix contains the additional data about media-authored tertiary texts, as well as the analysis of those texts:

NBC News: Nightly News

Twice in October 2008, ***TDS*** was mentioned on this show. On October 28, 2009, ***TDS*** was identified as one of the shows where Senator Presidential Candidate Obama would be a guest. On October 19, 2008, ***TDS*** was mentioned as one of the comedy shows taking shots at the candidates.

> Stewart: But his [Obama's] body language did not give away whether he was campaigning for the presidency or posing for the cover of a 1960s soul album.

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Williams did not provide any contextual reference, so its mention of the show does not shed any light on the issue of ***TDS'*** decoded polysemy.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. In light of the fact that Williams does not provide any context, he seems to believe that the polysemy of the primary text either does not exist or is easy to decode. Thus, Williams seems to follow the

preferred reading: Obama is too cool, which can be viewed as a negative.

Fox News: The O'Reilly Factor

The show which quoted and referenced *TDS* the most, almost two dozen times, was Bill O'Reilly's Fox News show, The O'Reilly Factor. Each reference was used by Fox to illustrate liberal displeasure with Obama's performance: even the liberals are making fun of him. Some references added to this unilateral commentary, and they are further analyzed below:

a. December 3, 2009

> O'Reilly: Check three, Jon Stewart, big global warming guy. Nevertheless, mocked the warming e-mail scandal
> *TDS* clip: CNN correspondent: A hacker in England got a hold of email between leading scientists which skeptics say show a clear effort to raise fears about global warming and hid evidence against it.
> Stewart: Oh, for [expletive deleted] sake. Poor Al Gore. Global warming completely debunked via the Internet you invented. Oh, the irony…
> O'Reilly: Had to be hard for Stewart to do that.

Reference or Quote Interpretation: O'Reilly read Stewart's joke at its face value, literally,: mocking Al Gore.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text could not tested in this instance because O'Reilly prefaced

the quote with a summary of the joke which was identical with the encoded meaning – Stewart mocked Al Gore "poor Al Gore. Global warming completely debunked via the Internet you invented. Oh, the irony…"

b. March 13, 2009. Cramer vs. Stewart;

> O'Reilly: Impact Segment tonight as you know, John [sic] Stewart does not like financial guy Jim Cramer. From what I can figure out, Stewart thinks Cramer's incompetent. And when Jim went after President Obama, Stewart turned up the heat [*TDS* video clip]
> O'Reilly: All right, now my take on this is that you don't have to watch Cramer, number one, Stewart's not wrong. Cramer is a buffoon, but the head was ratcheted up after Cramer went after Obama. See, Cramer was doing this stuff when everything fell apart last fall. And [*TDS*] didn't go after him. But Stewart's not wrong. […]
> O'Reilly: Well, look, NBC – it's a ridiculous operation to bottom[huh?] away. But anybody – Jim Cramer I can't imagine anybody buying stock because that guy would tell you to buy it, but that's just me. Political component?
> Tracy Brynes, Fox Business Corresp.: A little bit. He started out as a full-fledged supporter of Obama. And, let's face it, Obama's been disappointing. And he said it. And Jon Stewart did not want to hear anything like that.
> O'Reilly: Okay, so both of you agree it's a minor political thing here, but it's based - it looks like Stewart lost some money in this crash to me. But again, I'm not hammering Stewart on this. Stewart is upfront about – he's right, Stewart's up front about what he does every night. Now one of the components of the debate is that Stewart did not go after Barney Frank, who is absolutely culpable and a big Dem, and Chris Dodd, a big Senate Dem, but we don't hear them taken apart on [*TDS*].

Reference or Quote Interpretation: O'Reilly read the interview as a political slap at Cramer, because Cramer stopped being an Obama supporter, a reading which rests on specific Fox News knowledge.

Reading: Negotiated Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text was clear because O'Reilly summarized his reading for us, a reading which could be interpreted as different than the encoded meaning. O'Reilly's clear reading, while possible, that Stewart simply dislikes Cramer, is not the only possible interpretation of the segment. This is a clear instance of decoded polysemy.

During the same show, on the same night, Bill O'Reilly devoted a second segment to *TDS* and its interview with Cramer:

> O'Reilly: Personal Story Segment tonight, it's getting very personal between comedian Jon Stewart and NBC financial analyst Jim Cramer. As you may know, Mr. Cramer has had a rough year, making bad stock calls on companies that collapsed like Bear, Stearns. So when Mr. Cramer began criticizing Barack Obama, Mr. Stewart, an ardent Obama supporter, let Cramer have it. [*TDS* clip]
> O'Reilly: […] Stewart did a great job. Stuart Varney, Fox News Business Corresp. It was funny
> O'Reilly: No, but it was beyond funny.
> Varney: Yeah, he was accurate.

> O'Reilly: Right […] Stewart got him and said look, this guy is a charlatan on economic issues, which he's supposed to be an expert. You can't listen to him on anything else. So I don't begrudge Stewart doing it. I think that you're correct and I'm correct in our assessment that if Cramer had blasted Bush and said the whole think is Bush's fault, the whole recession is Bush's fault, he never would have made [*TDS*].

Reference or Quote Interpretation: O'Reilly read the interview harsher than *TDS* encoded it: O'Reilly viewed Cramer as a charlatan.

Reading: Negotiated Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seems limited. O'Reilly's reading, "Cramer is a charlatan" indicates that although negotiated, it is based on the encoded meaning of the primary text, which was critical of Cramer.

ABC News.

On March 13, 2009, ABC News' Charles Gibson, reported:

> (Off-camera) On the subject of the stock market, two very high profile and opinionated TV personalities faced off last night. "The Daily Show" host, Jon Stewart let loose on CNBC's Jim Cramer, laying some of the blame for the economic crisis and the crisis of confidence squarely on Cramer and his network.

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Charles Gibson, an ABC journalist, reported on the *TDS* show, as it if were

political news. Gibson summarized the episode along its encoded meaning.

Reading: Negotiated Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text was clear because, again, while Gibson's reading is possible, it is not the only one.

Journal and Newspaper References:

a. On April 16, 2009, in *Salon*, Sarah Hepola wrote in "Financial chicken soup for Jon Stewart's soul," about Elizabeth Warren's interview on *TDS*:

> At a time when economic assurance is as hard to come by as, um, economic stability, Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren has been a voice of reason. A bankruptcy expert and consumer crusader, Warren was chosen last year to head up the Congressional Oversight Panel on TARP, and though it's hard to say too many positive things about that $700 billion question mark, let's say this: Good to know she's on the case. Warren has been beating the drums for more transparency and accountability in the bank "pulling the threads out of the regulatory fabric." Funny, Seth Rogen didn't mention any of that in his appearance last week. Warren scored major points for her final exchange, about the question that plagues everyone about banks these days: What happens next?
> "We have two choices," she said. We're going to make a big decision in the next six months, and it's going to go one of two ways. We're gonna decide we don't need regulation -- it's fine, boom and bust, and good

> bailout, holding Tim Geithner's little piggies to the fire, and apparently we're not the only ones who admire her for this: Last night she landed the coveted hot seat on "The Daily Show," where she managed to calm even Jon Stewart. Warren seemed a bit out of place in the first segment -- not quite certain how to navigate Stewart's jabs at the floundering TARP -- but she was back to her old self in the second segment (posted below), offering a brief overview of our country's cycle of financial panic and the problem with luck with your 401K. Or alternatively we're going to say, no. We're going to put in some smart regulations, we're going to adapt to the fact that we have new products and we're going to have security and prosperity going forward for ordinary folks. "And that," Stewart quipped, "is socialism." But he went on to add: "That, by the way, that is the first time in probably six months to a year that I felt better ... That was like financial chicken soup for me."

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Stewart's comments are interpreted as Stewart seems to have meant them: laudatory of his interviewee, Elizabeth Warren. The *Salon* journalist is obviously a Warren admirer as well.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text is hard to gauge, because the reader's decoded reading, that Warren reassured Stewart, seems identical to Stewart's encoded meaning "That was like financial chicken soup for me."

b. On March 19, 2009, Emma Tom from *The Australian* reported:

> […]The face of debauched US capitalism was not some Machiavellian Ponzi schemer but Jim Cramer, a squealing celebrity investment adviser whose cable-television show uses ka-ching sound effects.
> His relentless prosecutor was not a finance journo or government regulator but a greying comedian who claims he's most comfortable throwing spitballs and making fart noises.
> Yet despite the unlikely nature of the protagonists, last week's epic media war between Cramer and The Daily Show host Jon Stewart provided more insight into the roots of the global economic meltdown than the sum of regular journalism on the subject.
> What's more, Stewart's savage j'accuse has made him the champion of all bewildered workers who are watching their nest eggs, jobs and homes go up in pongy, panicky puffs and are wondering what the hell went wrong.
> The Daily Show's take on the financial crisis has been gold from the get-go. In January, Stewart -- who is proving to be the smartest, funniest and most principled human being on telly today -- marvelled at the way supposedly respectable US financial institutions had been permitted to sell nothing more than the aroma of mortgages. Mortgage molecules, in fact.
> ``What do you need to do to go to jail for a financial crime?'' he railed. ``Do you need to do a financial crime and then punch a baby in the face?''
> Now the award-winning comedian's attacks on the influential CNBC business channel have gone viral on the internet and generated approving comments from as far up as the White House.
> On March 4, Stewart crucified CNBC for bullishly talking up companies such as Bear Stearns days before they crashed and burned.
> ``If I had only taken CNBC's advice, I would have a million dollars today,'' Stewart said. ``Provided I started with $100 million.''
> Heated media back-and-forths followed, culminating in a Daily Show appearance by CNBC host Cramer last Thursday. In a riveting onslaught, Stewart accused

> CNBC in particular and the business media in general of sins of omission and commission when it came to honestly reporting on modern capitalism's two markets. […]
> When a squirming Cramer tried to say it wasn't him but some of the bigger boys, Stewart produced devastating internet interview footage of the former hedge-funder smirking as he encouraged short selling and manipulating the market with false rumours.
> ``I understand that you want to make finance entertaining,'' the funny man said with icy seriousness. ``But it's not a f---ing game.''
> And so say all of us who've lacked the pass code required for entry into this secret, second market, this gleaming executive bathroom where industrial strength deodorisers work overtime to disguise the smell.
> In many ways Stewart's fearlessness, pig-dogged determination and unwavering ethical drive is putting regular reporters to shame. What does it say about the health of the fourth estate when the hacks entertain and the harlequins newshound?
> Yet it's precisely Stewart's outsider status as a lowly clown, as the follow-up act to a show starring crank-calling puppets, that leaves him free to call a spade a f---ing spade as he furiously patrols the grounds of what's starting to look very much like a one-man fifth estate.

Reference or Quote Interpretation Nothing but admiration for Stewart as a person and media personality. “Stewart's fearlessness, pig-dogged determination and unwavering ethical drive is putting regular reporters to shame,” and Stewart is regarded as a bona fide journalist and his interview as journalism, too.

Reading: Negotiated Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text is hard to gauge, because the reader’s decoded reading was

emotionally filtered. It also contains many contradictions which seem only to support the author's positive attitude about everything Stewart does on his show.

c. On March 18, 2009, Jeanne Jackson wrote about "Cramer vs. Blamer" in ***East Bay Express***:

> […]. Last week Stewart went head to head with Cramer - well, it was more like heads to head, once you count the boisterous, Stewart-idolizing audience.
> How Stewart is still able to get anyone who disagrees with him to appear on his show is beyond me. It's hardly a fair fight, with his minions cheering down any rebuttals with sheer noise.
> The Cramer interview went much the same way as most of Stewart's antagonistic discussions. Rather than a light-hearted exchange over their perceived (read, "spun") feud, Stewart took Cramer to task over everything from his inability to detect when CEOs were lying to Mad Money's hyperactive format. This was not comedy; it was a news interview.
> To his credit, Cramer never alluded to the disclaimer that runs after every installment of Mad Money stating that the show is for entertainment purposes only. This would not be so ironic were it not for the fact that Stewart, when coming up against his own critics, has consistently hidden behind the excuse that he is not, in fact a journalist - he is a comedian, he says, and his show is not a news show, it's strictly entertainment (no such disclaimer appears in his credits). This exempts his sloppy journalism from being judged harshly.
>
> The March 12 show was not entertainment, so much as a cringe-fest every time Cramer tried to make nice with Stewart and his screaming worshippers. He was badly outnumbered and ill-prepared for such an intense interview.[…]

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Though not a fan of the show, Jackson read the interview as the angry lashing Stewart exercised.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: although the author's cultural sympathies are not with Stewart, she decoded the interview for what it was: Cramer's ordeal.

d. On March 15, 2009, *The Washington Post*, reported in its Financial section:

> Tim Hanson, an analyst at Motley Fool in Alexandria, was making no predictions about a turnaround.
> "After seeing Jim Cramer get raked over the coals by Jon Stewart, I hesitate to make any bold macro-economic predictions about 'the bottom,' " Hanson wrote in an e-mail, referring to Thursday night's "Daily Show" slapdown of the CNBC "Mad Money" host.

Reference or Quote Interpretation: The reading seems to be the preferred one: Stewart verbally slapped Cramer.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author decoded the interview for what it was: a slapdown.

e. On March 14, 2009, *The Bismarck Tribune* reported:

> WASHINGTON (AP) - The White House's chief spokesman on Friday said he enjoyed watching "The Daily Show" host Jon Stewart give a lashing to CNBC's Jim Cramer over how he and the business network have covered the collapsing economy.
> Cramer's Thursday appearance on Stewart's Comedy Central program garnered buzz that carried all the way to the White House briefing room.
> Press secretary Robert Gibbs said he had spoken with President Barack Obama on Thursday about watching the Stewart-Cramer showdown.
> "I forgot to e-mail and remind him that it was on, so I don't know if he's seen it," Gibbs said when asked by a reporter Friday. "I enjoyed it thoroughly."
> The spokesman added: "Despite, even as Mr. Stewart said, that it may have been uncomfortable to conduct and uncomfortable to watch, I thought it was - I thought somebody asked a lot of tough questions."
> Gibbs has been dismissive of cable chatter, particularly about the economy, and has also been critical of CNBC's Rick Santelli after he spoke harshly of Obama's plan to stem home foreclosures. Stewart had invited Santelli to be on his show earlier, but Santelli was a no-show.
> On Thursday, Stewart took Cramer to task for trying to turn finance reporting into a "game." Stewart claimed CNBC shirked its journalistic duty by believing corporate lies, rather than being an investigative "powerful tool of illumination."
> For his part, Cramer insisted on the show that he was devoted to revealing corporate "shenanigans."

Reference or Quote Interpretation: The journal reported on the interview and its media impact; it read the interview as *TDS* encoded it: Stewart believed CNBC shirked and abandoned its journalistic duties.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author

decoded the interview for what it was: Stewart's attempt to ask "tough questions."

f. On March 14, 2009, Alessandra Stanley wrote in *The New York Times*:

> The showdown on ''The Daily Show'' between Jon Stewart and Jim Cramer, the host of ''Mad Money'' on CNBC, felt more like a Senate subcommittee hearing than the hyped expectation of a ''Brawl Street.'' And while it's never much fun to watch a comedian lose his sense of humor, in an economic crisis it's even sadder to see supposed financial clairvoyants acting like clowns.

Reference or Quote Interpretation: The reading seems to be more complex than the preferred one: the exchange between Cramer and Stewart felt like a "Senate subcommittee hearing."

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author decoded the interview for what it was: a non-comedic interview on non comedic issues

Blog References:

a. Blogger Kathy Lauer-Williams, on Morning Call, commented that on December 7, 2009:

> The Daily Show, during a segment in which Jon Stewart took President Obama to task about stimulating jobs, featured the incident last Friday when a second-year

> LCCC student suggested legalizing prostitution, gambling, drugs and non-violent crime in order to stimulate the economy during Obama's visit to the Lehigh Valley.
>
> Feigning a look of shock, Stewart threw up his arms and proclaimed "Caligula 2012," before going to a commercial.
>
> Not included in the clip is Obama's answer.
>
> "I have to say this, I appreciate the boldness of your question," he told the student. That will not be my job strategy."

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Blogger understood Stewart's joke when she decoded Stewart's joke "feigning a look of shock."

Reading: Negotiated Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text is ambiguous: the author decoded the video-clip and Stewart's comment as a not-so-funny joke, and offered Obama's omitted answer for clarification.

b. Damon Lavrinc on PRODS@WEBLOGSINC.COM wrote the following:

> With last year's round of bank bailouts, John Stewart's comedic cup overfloweth with material. Now, with General Motors (OOTC:GMGMQ) ' bankruptcy official, Stewart takes aim at the late, great automaker in the segment "BiGMess."
> Although Stewart was late to the game with last night's Daily Show and a few of his quips provide further proof that the MSM are still woefully uninformed about what brought down two of the Big Three, between gags, he poses a few questions the average American is asking. Namely, what happened to

> the $20 billion we (U.S. taxpayers) loaned GM, why are we going to drop another $30 billion into the bankrupt automaker and why, if we're in the business of taking over corporations, can't we start buying companies that - you know - make money?

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Blogger understood Stewart's BiGMess joke which he connected to the last rounds of unpopular bailouts.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author decoded the interview as encoded – specific corporate performance criticism.

c. On March 17, 2009, on ***Hart Energy Publishing***, spayne asked on the blog, "Can Financial Journalism Be Trusted?"

> The Daily Show host Jon Stewart has made some national headlines recently when he attacked CNBC, and especially its news personality Rick Santelli, for basically being cheerleaders for big business.
>
> Following Santellis criticism of Barack Obama's latest bailout plans, and especially his attack on subprime mortage holders for being losers who don't deserve a government rescue, Stewart went on to show a montage of clips from CNBC during the past two years where Santelli and other CNBC personalities interviewed corporate executives of now defunct banks such as Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns and Merrill Lynch (OOTC:MERIZ) as well as one glowing interview with Texas billionaire Robert Allen Stanfor, who is currently being investigated for running an allegedly fraudulent business scheme. Stewart essentially sought

> to show Santelli as a hypocrite for badmouthing mortage holders while defending the same banks who themselves received government bailout funds.

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Blogger understood Stewart's attack along its encoded meaning, which depicts CNBC as "cheerleaders for big business."

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author decoded the monologue as encoded – a criticism of CNBC journalism.

d. On January 8, 2009, Jezebel reprinted from Gawker media:

> Jon Stewart said, "Apparently the MS in MSNBC stands for All Malia and Sasha." Witness what the "big news" is on the various networks, as the "economy continues to struggle and the Mideast continues to burn."

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Blogger seems to have understood Stewart's media criticism of MSNBC: Stewart's position is that MSNBC is too frivolous in its news coverage, choosing to cover the President's daughters rather than something more substantial for the public.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author decoded the monologue according to its encoded meaning.

e. On December 10, 2008 , Pop and Politics published: –

> On Mondays The Daily Show, Jon Stewart asks the question: Can't we just have the guy on the left already? in the Clusterf#@k to the Poor House" Goofus and Gallant skit. The guy who he is referring to is President Gallant (a.k.a. Obama) instead of who is currently in charge, President Goofus (a.k.a. Bush). With the economy in shambles, Obama is working on creating stimulus packages while Bush is literally hanging himself. After examining the efforts of both presidents, Stewart pleads…Do we really have to wait until January 20th?

Reference or Quote Interpretation: Blogger understood Stewart's jokes as encoded: Stewart views Bush as Goofus, as unpresidential.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author decoded the monologue as encoded: linguistically funny but inconsequential -- Bush is Goofus and Obama is Gallant.

News Services References:

a. On March 20, 2009, the Australian News Bites's Peter Olszewski wrote "NBC Universal CEO Defends CNBC Business

Coverage in the face of a Scathing Attack by Comedy Central's Daily Show Host":

> PaidContent reports that NBC Universal ceo, Jeff Zucker, in a Q&A with Ellen Pollock, executive editor, BusinessWeek, opened the McGraw-Hill Media summit by taking on Comedy Central's Jon Stewart, who on the Daily Show last week took CNBC and one of its main stars, Mad Money host Jim Cramer, to task for not doing more to be in front of the economic collapse.
>
> Zucker said, "I think Jon Stewart was incredibly unfair to CNBC and to the business media in general. Everybody wants to find a scapegoat. I'm upset that my 401(k) isn't what it was.
> "But to suggest that CNBC is responsible is absurd. […].

Reference or Quote Interpretation: The news service reports the interview as it was: a scathing attack of Cramer.

Reading: Preferred Reading

Decoded Polysemy. The decoded polysemy of the primary text seemed easy to interpret as being limited: the author decoded the interview as encoded: Stewart took Cramer "to task for not doing more."

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Curriculum Vitae

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1993-1994	Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA LL.M.
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1985-1989	Universitatea Bucuresti, Facultatea de Drept, Bucharest, Romania Diploma de Drept,(J.D. equivalent)

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2000-present	Librarian III and Lecturer-in-Law Columbia University, Arthur W. Diamond Law Library, New York, NY.
2003-present	Adjunct Assistant Professor, Barnard College, New York, NY.
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Selected Publications

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