

Satirizing Ethics

by

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Abstract

In “Satirizing Ethics,” I explored three late-night satirical monologues from *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* and *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting on 12 June 2016. I examined the monologues using a social constructionist approach in order to understand what lessons each host believed could be drawn from the event and how a satirist references the nomos when tackling an issue in the world. Satire in this sense uses comedic tools like analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm to point out follies within society and each host used his or her platform on late-night television to address issues they believed needed to be addressed following the shooting. I conducted a narrative analysis on each monologue in order to understand what the host and their team of writers thought about the event and what they thought should be the next step following another mass shooting in America. What I found in this sociological analysis of the monologues was that each host aimed to set an agenda in their monologues by emphasizing a) certain facts and information about the event and by b) presenting the audience with a way of viewing what happened and why the issue of gun violence and hate crimes in American needs to be addressed to ensure incidents like the one that happened in Orlando do not happen again. In other words, satire is the start of politics, as the host and his or her team of writers look to start difficult conversations with their audience about the world they live in and how it might improve through democratic means.

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Qu'est ce que c'est? – An introduction to “Satirizing ethics”

Indeed, an argument could be made that the social scientists who does not perceive this comic dimension of social reality is going to miss essential features of it. ... These remarks, needless to say, are not meant to denigrate the serious study of society but simply to suggest that such study itself will profit greatly from those insights that one can obtain only while laughing.

– Peter Berger (1963:165)

This project explores the role of satire on late-night American television in calling attention to political and social follies deemed noteworthy by the creative team behind a given programme in a comedic way. I focus on the opening monologues from three late-night cable programmes and illustrate how conventions in late-night are used in order to persuade the audience that the issues should be viewed as ridiculous and reprehensible and that they need to be discussed.

I situate satire in this project as a form of story telling that aims to make sense of the social world by presenting social reality in a comedic way in order for audiences to draw lessons from what happened (Benjamin 1969:86; Campbell 2008:337; Frank 2002:3 and Weber 1965:152-153). However, in order for a satirist to get an audience thinking about social reality in an entertaining way, a satirist needs to workshop their playful and constructive critique of the target and present the target in a way that gets the audience thinking about the target in a different light. Accordingly, when constructing a monologue, late-night hosts and writers aim to construct a topical monologue. A topical monologue gives the satirist the best chance to connect with the audience, as the writers and host seek to connect with an audience by covering issues discussed in the news media.

But what makes satire different from comedy? Berger (1961:212) explored both comedy and satire: to him, “comedy is a signal, an intimation, of transcended.” In other words, by presenting social reality in an entertaining way, a comedian aims to make an audience laugh at the drama surrounding reality. Satire still aims to entertain an audience, but the satirist is more interested getting the audience thinking about how society can improve (Berger 1997:157). Consequently, a satirist sets a political agenda by presenting the target in a filtered manner, where the weaknesses and troubling features of the target become the subject of discussion.

I explore monologues following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting from *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* (2016), *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (2016a) and *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* (2016). Each monologue was broadcasted on 13 June 2016, one day after the shooting. The hosts sought to deliver a topical monologue that could get the audience thinking about the responses following the shooting and what can improve. Indeed, the hosts wanted the audience to sympathize with the victims and their families, but the hosts also wanted the audience to view the responses as weak, since nothing was being done to fix the issues discussed. However, if a satirist wants to get the audience thinking about the agenda, the satirist must act reflexively when presenting the folly, as the satirist wants the audience to come to understand the issue through their point of view. In other words, a satirist writes about things that bug them within the social world, but in order for the message to connect with audiences, the satirist must get to know their audience, what they value and what they believe in so that the satirical message can get the audience sympathizing with the issue discussed. In this sense, while the stories discussed in the monologue might be

unsettling for audiences, the job of the satirist is to present a story that can challenge an audience to illustrate to them how important it is to maintain the nomos.

A satirist ergo must take their work seriously as they wish to have their point of view heard by an audience. Yes, comedic tools like analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm are used to present the weaknesses of the target in an entertaining way, but this does not take away from the serious nature of what is discussed. In fact, these tools can heighten audience awareness on an issue and how important it is to work towards improving the situation.

With what I have written in this introduction, satire appears to be a powerful tool that can be used to change how audiences think about the world. In a sense, this is true, as stories do play a part in making sense of what happens in the world and provide audiences with the capacity to learn from political and social follies. At the same time, satire alone cannot fix the issues discussed, as people need to be mobilized to fix the issue. With this in mind, I argue in this project that a satirist plays a role in world building and world maintenance by initiating conversations with an audience regarding what they emphasize as important to political and social life and what lengths are individuals willing to go in order to protect the pillars of political and social life.

In chapter one, I write about the serious nature of satire and give examples to illustrate how satire is a tool for world building and world maintenance, how it challenges ways of being in the world, the role of play and workshop, how satire is a martial art, why you would not want to be the target of a satire and how satire has a sociological slant in making the world legible. The research I did on social constructionism, satire and humour informed this writing.

Chapter two explores agenda-setting theory (McCombs and Shaw 1972) and how late-night television hosts are successful in getting audiences to think about the incongruities of everyday life and issues discussed in the news. In this chapter, the monologue is understood as a satirical editorial which presents a point of view on the follies of the day. The monologue prioritizes what the audience should think about and the information in it goes through several filters and workshops until it reaches the audience. Network gatekeeping theory (Barzilai-Nahon 2009) is explored in this chapter to order to provide us with an idea about how material for the monologue is selected for presentation.

My methods chapter is third. I explore the rationale for the research design, address my research questions, and explain the protocol I constructed in order to make sense of the sociological messages that can be drawn from satire. My research questions are as followed:

- a) How is analogy used to get the audience thinking about the event and how it should be viewed?
- b) How is exaggeration used to heighten a feature of the target in the satire?
- c) How is irony used to heighten incongruities between audience expectations and the reality of the situation?
- d) How is sarcasm used to ridicule personalities who fall short of a standard established through exercises of world building?
- e) What do the hosts want to happen following this incident?

I provide an explanation as to why I decided to explore satire through these comedic tools and how I was able to recognize when these tools were used in the monologue.

The fourth chapter is my analysis of the monologues following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting from *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* (2016), *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (2016a) and *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* (2016). I demonstrate how analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm were used in each monologue and illustrate how the satire following this shooting gave audiences an opportunity to think about the shooting and those affected by the tragedy.

I conclude this project by providing an overview of the findings, by exploring the lessons I learned from the project, and by discussing the sociological implications of satire on late-night television and what sociologists can learn from satire. I also reflect on the limitations of the research and offer suggestions and new directions to future researchers.

Chapter one : The purpose of satire

In its higher reaches the satirist's art merges into the social scientist's quest for truth.

– Arthur Koestler (1964:73)

Introduction

I start this chapter with this premise. “Satire imitates reality critically” by revealing audiences to a heightened reality in order to make a point about how social reality can be ridiculous and reprehensible (Davis 1993:95) and I explore three arguments to understand how satirists serve this purpose.

I first explore how the satirist employs tools in order to build a world in their work, while simultaneously maintaining the world they inhabit. The next section dives into the importance of play in the construction of a satire and why play is essential in opening the audience up to another way of viewing the world around them. I then explain how satire can be viewed as a martial art, a magic spell and why it is important for the satirist to be careful when targeting objects engraved into the fabric of society. In this section, I also delve into the similarities and differences between satire and sociology as this helped me understand the role both have in the projects of world building and world maintenance. I conclude this chapter by stating three key points for you to take away from this chapter.

Satire as a tool for world-building and world-maintenance

What is the difference between a satirist and a comedian? A comedian is someone who wants to make an audience laugh. As Ziv (2010:17) notes, the comedian is “generally received in a friendly spirit,” as their job is to play with the drama of everyday life and present it in a fun way to audiences. The job of the comedian

therefore is to find things that are funny. A satirist, on the other hand, while they employ comedic tools like analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm, is someone that is interested in making an audience think about the everyday life as deeply flawed. Both aim to connect with their audience by tapping into the social stock of knowledge they share,¹ but the satirist is keen on getting his or her audience to think about the ideas and values they cherish and deem important to political and social life and whether or not they hold up to an expected standard.

The message from the satirist is grounded in the morals which holds society together. To Caron (2016:156), this means “satire entails an act of judgement based on an implicit or explicit (moral) value often made with an intent to reform or change the comic butt (target) or a ridiculing presentation.” The ideas conveyed by the satirist therefore aim to inspire the audience to think about the weaknesses within the social body and how important it is for them to work towards improving it.

A satire is therefore constructed with a particular audience in mind as it takes some intellectual sweat to decode the references made in a satire. Ergo, if you are able to solve the puzzle, in this case, the hidden meaning within the satire, it can be cathartic for the audience as *the truth is revealed* and the audience is overfilled with sudden glory for deciphering the message.

Satire evokes the social stock of knowledge when targeting an object and then takes it to absurd heights in order to make the audience “conscious of conventions and prejudices which [they] have unquestioningly accepted, which were tacitly implied in

¹ In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann (1967:41) argue that the social stock of knowledge “includes knowledge of my situation and its limits.” For the satirist, when these limits are crossed, it is humorous.

the codes in control of our thinking and behaviour” (Koestler 1964:73). Employing comedic tools makes this possible, but the audience needs to think about the world presented to them in the satire and how it resembles the objectivated world they inhabit. When the audience puts the two together, it means they were thinking about what was said and found the message interesting.

In this sense, Georg Simmel (in Swedberg and Reich 2010:36) was right when he said “Thinking hurts”: it can be difficult for anyone to question their belief system when the things one values are shown to be not what they were always believed to be. Research shows how presenting someone with facts that go counter to their beliefs can trigger the same effects in the brain as physical pain (Campbell 2015; DeWall et al. 2010:931; and Mooney 2011). In the eyes of the satirist, yes, thinking hurts in the sense that it can be a bit of a downer, existentially speaking, to think about follies in human existence, but a good satirist approaches their work seriously so that they can produce a written piece of art that frames the world in a provocative and entertaining way.

The satirist writes not merely to entertain an audience, but to show them the incongruity that exists between their shared beliefs, laws, norms, rules and values and the reality of the situation presented. These shared constructs form the *nomos*, which serves as a sort of canopy that shields individuals within a given context from the dangers of the social world: it keeps chaos at bay (Berger 1967:24). The *nomos* is therefore shaped through exercises of world building, as objects are created, given significance and made a part of our world (Berger 1967:4). However, the objects constructed to shield us from the dangers of the world are fragile objects which exist

precariously, as the humans who made these objects are bound to make mistakes when constructing social reality. As a consequence, enterprises of world building and world maintenance are ongoing and required multiple social actors to play a part in preserving the world we live in.

Where does the satirist fit within this project? The satirist plays a role in world building and world maintenance as their humorous take on social reality provides audiences with an ironic view of society and what is happening within their world. It makes the world legible and challenges the audience to question “old way[s] of thinking, perceiving, [and] believing” (Caron 2016:156) so that society can improve.

The role of play in satire

The satirist must be in a playful mood when they are writing if they wish to “open us to a second, that is, alternative view of our world” (Speier 1998:1361) where incongruities are apparent, but, while guiding the audience through their story, the satirist, like a sociologist, must act reflexively in order for the audience to follow the logic behind the work and how the satirist reached his or her conclusions.² According to Giddens, agents of reflexivity constantly monitor their actions and constantly question the world around them in order to construct their sense of self and to find

² I turn to Giddens’ understanding of reflexivity in this project on satire on late-night television in order to illustrate how satirists and late-night writers construct their editorials relating to social follies. To Giddens (1991:5), “In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experiences, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choices as filtered through abstract systems.” In this case, the satirist actively reconstructs narratives about social follies that they hope can reach an audience. When trying to tell the audience where the satirist stands on a particular topic or issue, the satirist must present a narrative which allows the audience to think about the object in hand and all its weaknesses. The hope is that through this reflexive project, the satirist can make the world legible to the audience so that it can be transformed. A satirist must therefore be up front with the audience about where he or she stands on a particular issue or topic so that the audience can be understand what the meaning behind the narrative is and so that the satirist can get their point of view across.

their place within modern society. A satirist in this sense is an agent of reflexivity as he or she must carefully organize and hash out their view of the world so that their audience can identify and empathize with it.

Connecting with the audience and their social stock of knowledge is an effective way to ensure that they can effectively decipher the subversive meaning behind a satire. What this means is that the satirist must ground their practice in the objective reality he or she shared with the audience (Koestler 1964:64). As Berger (1997:158) notes:

To be sure, there must be a commonality of social context between satirist and audience. A satirical attack on, say, some intricacies of American politics will not be understood by an audience of foreigners who know none of the references. But it is not necessary that the audience agree with the satirist to begin with. Satire can also be educational: it may be a *result* of the satirist's labors that the audiences comes to understand the undesirability of what is attacked [emphasis in original].

Put differently, it is the job of the satirist to make a conscious effort when writing their story to connect with the audience and walk them through points in the story where the audience might have difficulty trying to get what he or she is implying. If a satirist does all this and does not try to rush the audience through the story, the audience might learn something new from the satirist about the world around them.

To illustrate what Berger is arguing, let's look at a piece from Trevor Noah. In his fourth episode hosting *The Daily Show*, Noah responded to the claims that then-presidential candidate Donald Trump was unqualified to run for president in America because of comments he made about Mexican immigrants at the start of his campaign. Noah (on *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2015) starts this editorial by reminding his audience what Trump said during his first press conference as a presidential candidate:

“When Mexico sends its people, they are not sending their best. [...] They are bringing drugs. They are bringing crime. They are rapists. And some, I assume are good people.”

To some people in the media, these comments made by Trump should have disqualified him from running for president, seeing that it is racist to paint Mexicans as rapists and criminals, but Noah (in *The Daily Show* 2015) responds by saying, “I know these comments about immigrants were upsetting to some people. But for me, as an African, there is just something familiar about Trump that makes me feel at home.” Noah proceeds to show the audience how Trump shares similarities with other African leaders he was familiar with growing up in South Africa. Clips are presented where former South African president Jacob Zuma spews similar anti-immigration and xenophobic rhetoric. In one of the clips, Zuma (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2015) says, “It is also not true that all foreign nationalists are involved in criminal activities. There are some who are, but not all of them.” Noah presents these two quotes because both Trump and Zuma employ xenophobic rhetoric to widely paint immigrants as criminals. Zuma is a president, so what makes some like President Trump so unpresidential?

Noah (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2015) continues by saying he “does not see what is unpresidential about Donald Trump” because, where he is from, African presidents use racist rhetoric like this to gain support and maintain power. Noah (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2015) then shows his audience how Trump shares similar characteristics with other African leaders: Trump brags about how much money he has and how he has a ‘very good brain’ just like former president of Uganda,

Idi Amin; Trump has a lavish lifestyle, as did former leader of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi; Trump even promises his supporters that they will be “winning so much,” as did President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. To this, Noah (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2015) responds by saying how, in his eyes, “Trump is presidential, he just happens to be running on the wrong continent.” In this sense, it is ironic how Trump is unpresidential to Americans but presidential in the context of African politics.

After Noah (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2015) compares Trump to African leaders, he says:

I understand that Trump is a little scary and a little exotic for some; a little out of America’s comfort zone. But this great country is capable of bold leaps. It took one in 2008 when it elected its first black president and now in 2016, I say it is time to be bold once more and elect America’s first African president.

The analogy works because Noah supported his satire by presenting evidence to suggest that Trump, even though he has a number of reprehensible features, could be “America’s first African president” based on how similar he is to other African leaders.

The Noah example also illustrates why it is important for the satirist to provide information about the object before they use their comedic tools to expose its weaknesses. The satirist, in this sense, is acting as a gatekeeper that controls how the object is portrayed in the story, including what information is presented to the audience (Barzilai-Nahon 2009:1). For the satirist, because he or she is looking to emphasize what they believe to be the weaknesses of the target, he or she must ensure they emphasize said attribute clearly before they deliver their punchline.³ As former late-night writer, Gabe Abelson (2017) noted, if the subject matter is too ambiguous or

³ The punchline is the final phrase of the joke, where the humour is.

vague, there is a chance that the audience might not get the punchlines. Consequently, the satirist must ensure that they present the audience with enough information on the subject matter discussed so that they can solve the puzzle.⁴

Constructing the punchline, where crucial elements of the satire is emphasized with humour, is a hardest part of writing a satire. Koestler (1964:91) makes note of this difficult task but argues that something is believed to be funny when it surprises and shocks the audience. Play ergo gives the satirist the opportunity to explore different ways of presenting the object in question so that its portrayal can surprise and shock the audience. In finding this balance, Abelson (2017) noted that:

If you give the audience too much information, you might make them feel dumb, which is an insult. If you give too little information, there's too much processing needed to identify the reference and find the joke. This isn't just true for Maher, but for every single monologue joke on any show. The audience, for Maher, needed enough information to solve the equation fast. When they see the fit among facts, when they fill in the blanks, they feel smart. There's nothing better than an audience that feels good about itself; they transfer that feeling to the host and the show.

In other words, if the audience can correctly fill in the blanks, they will be able to solve the puzzle.

Delivering a strong punchline is important for the satirist as the message within the punchline can serve as a social lubricant to serious discourse regarding the world the satirist shares with his or her audience and how it might improve (Mendelsohn 1964:245). With that said, a satire has to have a serious and clear point of view to it if the satirist wants to get the audience thinking about the issue discussed. This point was stressed by George Orwell (1968c:288) in his essay "Funny, but not vulgar:" "You

⁴ I explore the satirist as a gatekeeper more in the next chapter.

cannot be really funny if your main aim is to flatter the comfortable classes: it means leaving out too much. To be funny, indeed, you have to be serious.” What Orwell is saying is that the satirist must be frank when using their comedic tools to go after an object and sincere in their attack on what they believe to be serious issues. Yes, humour makes the conversation go down easier for the audience, but a satire strives to get the audience thinking about the world they live in and the precarious nature of its existence so that they can work towards preserving it.

Humour is used at times to power the satire and get the audience thinking about a punchline, but humour does not take away from the serious nature of the critique.

As Watson (2015:416) notes:

Laughter frees us, however briefly, from the grip of the discourses within which we are immersed and enables us to glimpse something else; when hegemonic discourse renders critical argument ‘unavailable’ then ‘a laughter of *non-discursive dismissal* can liberate us from the sense of feeling obliged to argue against the System *on its own terms*’ (Lippitt 1999:461; emphasis added).

In other words, satire aims to upset the established order of how politics and social life is discussed in order to open the audience up to an alternative way of viewing objects taken for granted.

The satirist is therefore working on two different planes when they are writing: on one plane is the object and on the other plane is the *nomos* (internalized by the satirist and the audience). The punchline is the clash between these two planes or the rules which are implied “as hidden axioms and taken for granted” (Koestler 1964:64). This bisociative shock shatters the illusion behind the ideas the audience takes for granted as it can “make [the audience] suddenly discover the absurdity of the familiar and the familiar of the absurd” (Koestler 1964:73). In other words, a good satire breaks

down the target and exposes its weaknesses so that the audience can think about the object, how it is presented and what questions the satirist is posing to them. It is the job of the satirist in this sense to provide the audience with a new way of viewing the target, one which confronts the actions of the object and challenges how the object is discussed.

Let me give you an example of what Koestler is arguing. In the opening monologue of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* from 7 February 2017, Colbert had a joke relating to the claim of President Trump that the media underreported certain terrorist attacks. To support Trump's claim, the White House released a list of 78 terror attacks they deemed were underreported.

In setting up the joke, Colbert points out how the list was filled with terrorist attacks extensively covered by the media while also pointing out the fact that the press release was loaded with typos such as how "attacker" was spelt "attaker" and "Denmark" was spelt "Denmakr." To this, Colbert (in *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* 2017) responded: "So at least we know Steve Bannon is not a grammar Nazi."

This punchline received a huge reaction from the audience because Colbert and his writers were able to effectively link the typos in the press release to the Alt-Right rhetoric associated with the Trump presidency and then-chief strategist Steve Bannon. Indeed, the audience laughed and clapped at the joke because a grammar Nazi is someone who always corrects the grammar of others and it would not be fair to call Bannon such after seeing how the press release was filled with typos such as "attaker" and "Denmakr."

A play frame allowed the writers to fiddle with the object, in this case, the Trump administration, until they could effectively insert the object into a ridiculous, but plausible, premise that the audience thought was clever and funny (Carroll 2014:42; Schutz 1995:53; and Speier 1998:1356). The punchline must therefore “fit in a surprising, unexpected or funny way” (Abelson 2017); arguably, the Colbert joke worked because the link between typos and Nazis was unexpected and hilarious.

Linking the object to the nomos of the audience in this sense helps the satirist get their message and point of view across. In the Colbert monologue, he sought to get his audience thinking about the Trump administration and its Alt-Right politics. Colbert believes this feature of the administration to be reprehensible and, judging by the response, the audience agreed on “the undesirability of the object of attack” (Berger 1997:158).

Play gives the satirist the chance to workshop their writing until they can effectively “juxtapose and remediate prevailing discourses in different contexts, thereby challenging conventional decoding and opening up news narratives for reflexive inquiry” (Anderson and Kincaid 2013:174). In other words, when the satirist plays with the world, deeper meaning about the world can be unpacked which can allow for audiences to think about the subject matter and how they should view what is happening.

Satire as a martial art and a magic spell

The picture I paint of satire makes it seem quite violent. This is noted by Caron (2016:158) who argued “satire is marked by a methodological paradox, one committed ethically to promote the process of social change, yet also committed comically to use

the symbolic violence⁵ of ridicule and artful insult.” This quote highlights two things. First, the satirist is committed to starting a conversation regarding how an audience should live in the social world by advocating for common sense in everyday life. Second, this is done through comedic tools which can be perceived as destructive to the ideas and values which holds society together. Schutz (1995:53) illustrates this point further by noting how the words of the satirist can cut deep into the social fabric and into the ideas and values emphasized as important by the audience.

The satirist must therefore be reflexive when they are writing their piece on a given social folly so to ensure that their abstract message is read as it was intended to be. A satire is written for an audience who understands the objects questions, as it seeks to address moral dilemmas like how we should live in the world, as the satirist can use their platform to “*say things which even a reformer or critic cannot easily say*” (Winick 1964:276, emphasis in original). In other words, yes, the satirist is given much leeway in their playful and constructive critique of society, but they must own their critique and be willing to have a difficult conversation with others about the social follies targeted in their work.

On that note, I must stress the following: a good satirist does not poke holes into the fabric of society. He or she merely uses his or her tools of storytelling to expose holes that the audience may have missed. What this means is that if the satirist can be

⁵ In “Rethinking the State,” Bourdieu (1998:40) argues that “[the ideals and beliefs of the dominant class] incarnates itself simultaneously in objectivity, in the form of specific organizational structures and mechanisms, and in subjectivity, in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought. By realizing itself in social structures and in the mental structures adapted to them, the instituted institution makes us forget that it issues out of a long series of actors of *institution* (in the active sense) and hence has all the appearances of the *natural*.” In sum, symbolic violence occurs when the dominant class superimposes their beliefs and way of life onto another class by making their way of life seem better and natural.

said to be held to a certain ethic when writing and delivering their take on a social folly, their words must go after hegemonic ideas, personalities and practices which stifle social growth in order to open the audience up to new ways of viewing political and social life and all its blemishes (Becker 1974:774; Berger 1997:157; Hall in Day 2011:21; and Orwell 1968c:286).

The target of a satire however is not an adversary to the satirist. In fact, as former late-night host Jon Stewart (in *Comedy Central* 2015) noted in his opening monologue following the *Charlie Hebdo* attack on 7 January 2015, where 10 staff members of the French satirical magazine and two French police officers were killed by Islamic fundamentalists:

For the most part, the legislators and journalists and institutions that we jab and ridicule are not, in any way, the enemy. For however frustrating or outraged the back and forth can become, it is still a back and forth; a conversation amongst those on, let's call it, team civilization.

This is important to keep this in mind for this project because the job of the satirist is to jump onto the stage and show the audience the incongruity of a given situation where individuals and institutions profess one thing but do the complete opposite. In this light, the satirist may be engaging in a sort of verbal joust where they hope to “win by amusement and laughter” (Schutz 1995:53), but this is done in the hope that a conversation can get started about how audiences might think about the target which has breached an idea established through exercises of world building.

Satire can therefore be seen, figuratively, as a martial art as the satirist “always uses the adversary’s strengths against himself and thus turn them into weaknesses” (Berger 1997:160). Koestler (1964:73-74) echoes Berger and argues that the aim of satire “is to defeat the opponent on his own ground by pretending to accept his

premises, his values, his methods of reasoning, in order to expose their implicit absurdity.” Tools, like analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm, are used in this sense to show the audience the contradictions and absurdity of the situation with the hope that they can identify the incongruity of the situation as told by the satirist and work towards addressing whatever the issue is. This non-physical and non-violent form of resistance to hegemonic objects, consequently, allows the audience to view the object through another lens, where their weaknesses are plainly visible so that it might be changed.

The satirist must adopt and distort the rhetoric of the object in order to illustrate its weaknesses and to allow the audience to ask questions “clarifying the underlying morality of a situation” (Day 2011:73-74). To Koestler (1964:74), this makes satire an intellectual exercise as the satirist “must have the imaginative power of seeing through the eyes of his opponent, of projecting himself into the other’s mental world.” Ergo, the satirical imagination allows the satirist to effectively take down the object using comedic tools on its own grounds as the satirist explores the object, its limitations and its irredeemable qualities which hinders world building and world maintenance in order make a case for why it should be thought about differently by the audience.

A satire in this sense can have magic-like powers in changing how an audience views the target. As Berger (1997:159) notes, “satire is always a curse, and its effects on the targeted individual can be very destructive indeed.” In other words, like a magic spell, satire can destroy the reputation of the object in question as it can cloud how

others see the object, almost as if the satirist drops the object into a giant vat of molasses.⁶

For example, even after his death in 1994, former US president, Richard Nixon is still making people laugh, as late-night hosts still find clever ways to insert this personality into their editorials on current political and social issues. For example, in *The Not The White House Correspondents' Dinner* in 2017, hosted by Samantha Bee, Bee had a segment where she roasted former U.S. presidents from Woodrow Wilson to Bill Clinton. For each roast, Bee wore period-appropriate attire. For the Nixon segment, Bee (in *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* 2017) said: “Mr. President, you successfully achieved Kennedy’s two biggest goals: landing a man on the moon and getting fucked by a deep throat.”

Her joke comes after a long history of comedians poking fun at Nixon. In this case, the joke works because of how Bee successfully made light of the fact Nixon was brought down by “a deep throat,” which refers to the pseudonym of Mark Felt, the Associate Director of the FBI who leaked the information to the press regarding the Watergate scandal (Von Drehle 2005). Of course, the humour stems from the double-meaning of deep throat as it also refers to fellatio and a prominent pornographic movie of the 1970s.

The Bee monologue joke reminds the audience to be ever and deeply wary of politicians. Bee is also making a point regarding the world the audience lives in and how precarious the beliefs and values are when in the wrong hands. Of course, we do

⁶ If you have even been dropped into a vat of molasses, you would know how sticky it is and how difficult it is to get it off you.

not necessarily need to satirize Nixon to know how he was a flawed figure,⁷ but the satirist is still supporting the notion that these beliefs and value emphasis need to be protected and upheld within political and social life no matter who the personality is (Schutz 1995:51; Waisanen 2013:301; and Winick 1964:276).

Upon realizing this, I should note how satire shares some parallels with the discipline of sociology. As Davis (in Bingham and Hernandez 2009:336-337) illustrates, both the satirist and the sociologist use play to challenge rules and social conventions we take for granted, both “reorder and reverse the audience’s perspective,” both allow the audience to examine the object under a different view, both, creatively, compare phenomenon so as to make conclusions about the world around us and both challenge hypocrisy within society by laying them out for critical examination. The main difference being that the sociologist explains social phenomenon using the scientific method and the sociological imagination,⁸ whereas the satirist uses comedic tools such as analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm in order to expose weaknesses in the fabric of society.

The goals of the satirist and the sociologist are similar, as they both try to expose follies within society with the hopes that their work can bring to light social phenomenon. With that said, the satirist is more successful in exposing these fallacies, since their words are “much more accessible to the public than academic sociology”

⁷ Journalists, historians and even Hollywood films have noted his weaknesses.

⁸ According to C. Wright Mills (1959:5), “The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social position. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.”

(Bingham and Hernandez 2009:338). This begs the question as to why this form of entertainment is more accessible to the public.

Let me illustrate how this is the case when an example from the popular sitcom *The Simpsons*. In *The Simpsons'* Christmas special from 2003, titled “‘Tis the Fifteenth Season,” Bart is playing a video game at a toy store where the object of the game is to bomb US state capitals (Moore 2012). After bombing Salem, Oregon, Bart realizes the video game is educational, as it teaches him the state capitals. After realizing this, Bart (in Moore 2012) throws the controller at the television and yells out “that’ll teach you to teach me!”

This example illustrates how a form of entertainment, such as a video game, although it may serve as a form of diversion, can also serve a latent function in educating the audience about the world around them (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1974:23). Bart did not need to slog through a geography textbook to learn the state capital of Oregon: he just had to bomb it! In other words, even though satire is a form of entertainment, the pleasure the audience derived from a satire can make the message more palatable and intelligible as the laughter it produces can open the audience up to another world where politics are discussed through play.

This is nothing new, as disciplines, such as sociology, have always had a difficult time in trying to connect with the public at large and making relevant connections to the audience and their value emphasis. Of course, there will always be self-taught learners that are keen on learning about the world around them, but if an instructor or teacher is unable to spark this curiosity in the individual, it is unlikely that the student will come back to learn more about the subject. When it comes to satire,

the audience comes back to hear more from the satirist because they enjoy their take on the object of the day: it does, after all, make the world readable to them and gets them thinking about how things could be better.

My criticism was not intended to devalue the discipline of sociology as the sociologist does provide us with valuable insights into society and how it operates. I would even argue that satire employs a sociological slant in order to make sense of political and social follies. What I intended to illustrate was that no actor, discipline or institution has a monopoly on world building and world maintenance. Different actors, disciplines and institutions can bring forth news ideas regarding how we should live and provide insights into what works within a given society and what does not. Even though the satirist is successful in reaching a larger audience and educating them about the issues of the day, the sociologist still provides insights which need to be considered when engaging in the project of world building and world maintenance.

Chapter conclusion

Satire does indeed serve multiple purposes. In the case of late-night television, satire serves as an escape for the audience in the sense that they tune in to watch the satirist's take on a given object. Satirical discourse therefore forges communities as the laughter produced "confirms, reinforces, and celebrates" membership within the *nomos* (Carroll 2014:84)

This means the satirist must first construct a piece that the audience can understand and read. If the audience can figure out the meaning behind a satire, this means that they recognize the ways in which the object was targeted and how it has violated a feature of the *nomos*. The satirist must therefore tailor their material to

whatever values are emphasized as important to the audience as their comedic form of communication can “provid[e] a release from the repression of society and its authority” (Schutz 1995:53). Even when the audience might not be fully aware of the situation in question, it is through the satirist’s labour “that the audience come to understand the undesirability of what is attacked” (Berger 1997:158). In other words, laughter is produced when the audience understands the nuance of the satire, why the object is targeted the way it is and when they are on board with the message.

The comedic tools of the satirist give him or her much leeway in their critique of social follies and weaknesses. With all this leeway, the satirist must be responsible in their critique and act as an agent of reflexivity when approaching the issues of the day. This is because the satirist wishes to connect with her or his audience and the values they emphasize as important to political and social life. By making a conscious effort to connect with the audience and their value emphasis, this ensures that the message can be at the very least legible.

This chapter sought to drive home three key points. First, in employing comedic tools, the satirist is looking to maintain the *nomos* by targeting those objects which act to stifle social development and growth. Second, the satirist engaged with the object through play and reflexive monitoring to ensure that the audience can read the piece and figure out what the satirist’s point was. Third, although satire is, metaphorically speaking, violent, the satirist’s work is guided by an ethic towards attacking hegemonic objects so to open new ways of viewing political and social life.

The satirist is therefore a critic of society who, like any critic, is willing to give praise when due while also making a case for why things within society can be better.

This is indeed a serious endeavour as the satirist must have a moral message within the writing so that the audience can come to understand the salient issue at hand. In the next chapter, I explore the agenda-setting function of the media and gatekeeping theory to illustrate how the satirist is setting an agenda when they are attacking an object and how the satirist, when constructing a satire, acts as a gatekeeper for the audience in deciding what information and what facts are presented in the agenda.

Chapter two : The field⁹ of late-night television and the agenda-setting function of the monologue

The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.

– George Orwell (1968a:4)

Introduction

I argue in this chapter that monologues in late-night television set agendas by getting the audience to think about the political and social issue of the day and that items are consciously selected by gatekeepers in order to get audiences thinking about the message and why the object was targeted with satire. Using Bourdieu (2010:45), the agenda, in this project, is defined as “the issues up for discussion, the subjects of the editorials [and] important problems to be covered.” In the case of late-night television, the monologues set an agenda as the hosts discuss topics and objects deemed salient through a satirical lens.

It is important that I dive into the agenda-setting function of the media in this project because the audience does “learn [about the objects of the day] from the immense quantity of information available” from the media, whether it is from the nightly news or a late-night monologue (McCombs and Shaw 1972:176). What this means is that although a late-night programme might not be affective in influencing how the audience thinks about the world around them, the host and his or her team of

⁹ Bourdieu (with Wacquant 1989:39) defined the field “as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). Each field presupposes, and generates by its very functioning, the belief in the value of the stakes it offers.”

writers sure do succeed in getting the audience to think about the weaknesses of an object up for discussion.

This chapter is divided into two sections. I first explore how the monologue on late-night television acts as a satirical editorial which discusses political and social issues deemed important. The primary goal of the monologue is to make the audience laugh at gaffes, but it *does* set an agenda that prioritizes what issues are worthy of ridicule in order to get the audience thinking about said blunders. Second, I demonstrate how the host of a given programme and his or her team of writers are gatekeepers who filter through the news and decide what objects are to be satirized. Indeed, because satire targets social follies, the host and the writers of a given programme seek to get the audience thinking about how the object in question has defied social norms and expectations. The material selected for presentation will therefore be in support of their message.

The monologue as a satirical editorial on the objects of the day

Satire serves a political purpose, as it shares the opinion and thoughts of the satirist on the objects of the day. In the case of late-night television, while telling jokes is the top priority, the monologue serves this purpose as it aims to get the audience thinking about the objects of the day and its problematic features (Berger 1997:157).

A monologue is defined, in this project, as “a predominantly verbal presentation given by a single person featuring a collection of ideas, often loosely assembled around one or more themes” (Sankey 2001:1).¹⁰ The host of a given show

¹⁰ This definition is suitable for this project as it emphasizes how a monologue is a predominantly verbal performance. Indeed, the late-night hosts for this project are resourceful when delivering their monologues as news clips, articles and images are presented throughout to ensure audiences can understand their message.

performs and delivers the monologue to open the programme. Current events, issues and personalities are satirized in the opening monologue. The absurd and reprehensible qualities of each object are emphasized by the host through the jokes they tell.

The jokes in the monologue aim to win the audience over by getting them to laugh and think about the object discussed. This serves to bolster the agenda as set by the host. To help us understand how laughter supports the agenda as set by the host, consider this quote from stand-up comedian and satirist, Lenny Bruce (2004):

When I am getting laughs, there is a great gratification because I am getting acceptance. Every time I make the audience laugh, that means that the audience is thinking the way I think and we think in sync that way.

For Bruce, whenever he got a laugh, it meant, for him, that he was effectively connecting with his audience and their world. The audience literally got his message, meaning that were in on the joke.

The audience in this sense is actively participating in the artform when they laugh at the comedic message. When they laugh at something, they feel as if the satirist has pointed out something they believe to be true. In other words, if they laughed, they got it. If they do not, perhaps the message was not clear, or the audience did not find the message appropriate.

The jokes in the monologue ergo seek to create a consensus between the satirist and the audience (Schutz 1995:51). Once the two parties come to understand why the object is presented how it is, this allows them to continue the conversation. Of course, the audience is more likely to get behind the message of a satire if they can recognize the object being targeted and the ways it has been playfully distorted by the satirist.

In the field of late-night television, an occupational norm exists where the writers of a given programme tailor the monologues around the events, issues and personalities of the day as they assume the audience has some level of understanding of what is happening in the world (Abelson 2017; Macks 2015:78; and Mulkey 1988:178). For the joke to work, the set up must present some basic information about the object before the punchline is reached. Where needed, late-night programmes will insert news clips, snippets from newspapers, articles, graphics, sound bytes and tweets to ensure the audience is brought up to speed on said object before they reach the punchline (Day 2011:44). Consequently, a topical monologue is easier for the audience to decode since the objects targeted are part of their social world: they are familiar with what is being discussed.¹¹

What this means is that the news media sets the agenda for late-night television as the items prioritized and deemed important by the news media will be deemed important by the creative team behind a late-night programme (Toplyn 2014:58). In other words, the most talked about events, issues or personalities in the news media will be the object satirized in the monologue. The writers, of a given programme, will therefore shape the monologue around relevant objects, assuming the audience has some idea about what happened in the news today. This is important to keep in mind because, as Feldman and Young (2008:403) noted, “some degree of knowledge about public affairs is necessary to appreciate topical humour.” Without this basic level of knowledge, chances are the audience will not be in on the joke.

¹¹ Former late-night writer Toplyn (2014:50) also noted that topical monologues “helps make the host relatable to viewers.” This fact illustrates how the host is acting as an agent of reflexivity as they shape their persona and stature around the audience and what they are talking about that day.

Why is it so important to explore the agenda-setting function of satire on late-night? Although agenda-setting theory deals primarily with the role of the news media and journalists in shaping social reality, I would argue that this theory is relevant to the project because it helps us learn about how the monologues get audiences thinking about things deemed absurd and questionable. As Berger (1967:29) notes, the *nomos* provides individuals and institutions with rules and manners to guide their actions and behaviour. When a target breaks these customs, the late-night host gets on stage and shows the audience what they did and why, in their eyes, it was bad and unacceptable.

Hariman (2008:251) argues that the satirist “put[s] social conventions on display for collective reflection.” This occurs in the late-night monologue as the host presents an object to the audience and illustrates to them how its actions or inactions has defied expectations. Think of it as an event happens, an issue is brought up or a personality enters the collective imagination of the audience. The host and his or her writers come together, review the story, identify the absurd and reprehensible features of the story, rewrite the story to emphasize these features, rehearse the monologue, rework the monologue after it is gone over, when finally the host reports to the audience about what they thought. This is repeated for the next episode.

As Jon Stewart (2015a) stated in his last episode of *The Daily Show* on 6 August 2015: “The best defense against bullshit is vigilance. So, if you smell something, say something.” Indeed, the satirist plays an important role in finding ways to tell audiences that the objects we hold dearly are not perfect and that they need to be held accountable for their actions. Everything believed to be absurd is fair game to the host

and writers, and the more absurd they find the story, the more likely the story will be tackled in the monologue.

What exactly is the absurd? In this project, I use an existentialist definition from Camus (2005:25), as the satirist is confronting “the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.” “The human need” refers to our need for meaning within the world, as this provides us with maps to make sense of the world, including what is happening. On the other hand, “the unreasonable silence of the world” refers to when said needs are not met in reality because of human and social follies. A satire therefore confronts the incongruity between the principles which holds people together and how they are dealt with in reality and the satirist, consequently, uses comedic and conventional tools to ensure the audience can identify the “abuses and deformities” (Koestler 1964:73).

To understand why the satirist tackles absurdity, consider this quote from stand-up comedian, *Daily Show* contributor and very angry man, Lewis Black (2016):

I know, comes as a shock to many of you, but I wake up every morning... shoo... brimming with optimism. My nipples are pert and I'm ready to go. 'Cause I truly believe that today is gonna be the day that this great country gets it right. Why wouldn't today be the day? We all pretty much share exactly the same hopes and dreams. We all have— we all basically want the same thing, and, uh... Why wouldn't we find it today? Why wouldn't this be it? After making mistake after mistake, after mistake after mistake, after mistake, and then there was the time, you know, after mistake... that wouldn't we, just by accident, stumble in the right direction? Why wouldn't today be the [expletive] day? God, I'm happy. I got dancin' feet. I put on “Dancing Queen.” And I get up to my, uh, coffee table there, and I grab a mug, and look down at the front page of the paper, and go, “[expletive]! Maybe tomorrow.”

The passage from Black helps us understand what late-night hosts do every night during their monologues. The monologue targets objects and seeks to point out social

follies with the hopes that the targets of the satire can fix their mistakes and try to live up to the beliefs and values they profess as important. Although humans will continue to mess up, it is the job of the satirist, as an agent of reflexivity, to try and “bring back [the object] into line” (Berger 1967:11) using comedic tools with the hope that by humiliating the personalities and holding them accountable for their actions (Merry 2017), this will address the issue at hand.

Satire on late-night television ergo focuses audience attention on the absurd qualities of a given object. To McCombs et al. (2014:786), this means the agenda set on late-night television is horizontal and partisan because the joke aims to highlight and emphasize what the host and writers believe to be the irredeemable attributes of the object discussed. Yes, late-night television is not apart of the news media, but the monologues does push forward a specific agenda, which seeks to highlight what is believed to be the unpleasant qualities of an item in the same way news outlets like *Fox News* and *The Rebel Media*. The biggest difference is that their bias is towards attacking whatever is deemed absurd and reprehensible, regardless of political affiliation. The jokes accordingly act as a sort of judgement on the political climate at the time and, like a thermometer, they aim to reflect the feelings of the audience towards the issues of the day (Macks 2015:215 and Toplyn 2014:73).

Late-night television, as a form of horizontal media, also tries to get the audience to think of the narrative they construct surrounding the news. The creative team behind a late-night programme assumes that their audience has a low level of uncertainty towards an object. This means they have some background knowledge about the items discussed. Still, they value the object discussed as relevant to their

world (McCombs et al. 2014:786). As I addressed earlier, the jokes work because the audience has some knowledge regarding the current events: their level of uncertainty therefore is low; otherwise they would not get the jokes.

Although the level of uncertainty of the audience may be low, if the monologue does serve to inform the audience about the events of the day, it does so in an entertaining way. The monologue aims to make people laugh, but a latent effect of the monologue is that it can serve to deepen the audience's knowledge of the issues. As Landreville et al. (2010:493) noted, while the goal of late-night is to entertain an audience, "that does not mean that engagement with [late night] media content cannot produce substantive democratic outcomes." Indeed, when late-night tackles issues within the politic, this makes the audience think about current issues within the public sphere. A consequence of this can be democratic outcomes like getting audiences thinking about political causes.

The satirist as a gatekeeper

The gatekeeping hypothesis, first conceived by Lewin (1947), is used in this project to explore how decisions are made regarding what objects are satirized during a monologue and how the object is presented to an audience. Before we dive into how agents within the field of late-night television act as gatekeepers, let me briefly explain the gatekeeping hypothesis. Basically, a gatekeeper makes decisions regarding what information reaches a community and what information is left out (Lewin 1947:145). Information passes through various channels before it reaches the audience it is intended for. Gatekeepers ergo manage how information is presented to an audience.

There are multiple reasons as to why something is presented to an audience or why something is left out of.¹² In the case of late-night television, the job of gatekeepers is to ensure the jokes presented in the monologue make sense and that they challenge the audience to think about the item through an ironic lens.

Gatekeepers, in this sense, aid audiences in the construction of the “pictures in our head” (Lippmann 1922:4) as the information selected for presentation is prioritized and deemed important to the host. What the audiences sees therefore is a constructed reality which emphasizes certain elements of the real.

To understand the gatekeeping hypothesis (Lewin 1947), let’s explore how gatekeepers in the media shape a news item. First, the outlet notes and records the item, whether it be an event, idea or personality. Second, the outlet decides what aspects of the item to present to the audience. Third, the outlet presents the filtered item to the audience, and because “time on television is a rare commodity” (Bourdieu 2010:18), a media outlet can only cover a limited number of stories each day and devote a limited amount of time to any given item. The gatekeeper therefore sets the agenda for the audience and decides what stories are covered and how much time and space an item will receive (Bourdieu 2010:21; McCombs et al. 2014:794; and White 1964:163). Consequently, the more time and space an item receives, the more likely the audience will deem that item salient.

The decisions made by the gatekeeper, as Lewin (1947:146) notes, “depend partly on [the gatekeeper’s] ideology, that is their system of values and beliefs which determine what they consider to be “good” or “bad,” and partly on the way they

¹² To explore how decisions are made by gatekeepers in radio and other mediums, I recommend exploring Barzilai-Nahon (2009) and White (1964).

perceive the particular situation.” This is the case for late-night television as the hosts and writers aim to share their opinion and feedback on an item and look to highlight the reprehensible and ridiculous attributes of the target. The information and facts selected for presentation will therefore be in support of the satire.

The jokes selected for the monologue have the audience’s social stock of knowledge in mind as the creative team behind a late-night programme aim to bring the audience in and help them navigate through the precarious social world (Barzilai-Nahon 2009:17). The host, in this sense, becomes a political consultant to the audience who helps them make sense of the world around them in an entertaining way. The audience indeed values the opinion and feedback from the host and his or her team of writers as they come back to hear what they have to say.

The decisions regarding what makes it into a monologue does not fall strictly into the “what is funny” category. Yes, they wish to entertain audiences with jokes, but, as Gondwe (2017:4-5) pointed out, the creative teams in late-night tend to focus on “issues of government and politics in the United States,” as this topic was deemed most noteworthy to agents in the field of late-night television. These issues are indeed apart of the social world of the creative team and the audience and because late-night television aims to provide the audience with a satirical take on objects the audience is familiar with, late-night hosts and writers will target political stories as there is plenty of material for the writers to draw from.

Writers for late-night television, as Mulkay (1988:179) noted, develop “recipes for generating humour in which repeated use is made of a restricted range of techniques, themes and semantics scripts.” Much like any artist (Becker 1974:771),

writers rely on conventions when writing the monologue. This ensures the material is produced in a timely manner while also ensuring the audience can decode the jokes made as the use of conventions trains the audience to read the monologue.

The job of a comedy writer in this sense is quite serious: you make up in the morning, read what happened in the news, get a feel for what is in the news cycle and what people are talking about, go to work for 9 am, talk with your fellow writers, who are mostly white men, about last night's show and what the plan is for tonight's show (Thede 2015 and Toplyn 2014:38).

In the case of *The Daily Show*, writers gather in a room to watch news clips while riffing on what they, as a team, believe to be absurd and reprehensible (in *WorkLife with Adam Grant* 2018). Organizational psychologist, Adam Grant (2018) described the riffing in the writers' room as improv jazz: "Someone plays a note, someone else jumps in with a harmony, and pretty soon, you have a collective sound that no one planned." In this case, the collective sound is the jokes, and no one knows before hand what the room will come up with. By the end of the session (or meeting), the writers have an idea about how they will approach the day's work and divide up the monologue accordingly.

In creating a show each day, *Daily Show* former head writer, Zhubin Parang (in St. Francis College 2016) described it as if the team, each day, was "build[ing] the track as the train is barrelling towards you." This is a curious analogy for explaining the daily grind, but I understand what Parang is saying. There are deadlines each day that need to be met to ensure the train (the programme) gets to the station on time and in

one piece. The job of the creative team, therefore, is to lay down the tracks while ensuring the train gets to its destination safely and on time.

As is the case for writing jokes on late-night television, the writers pick a story, pluck something stupid or absurd from the story, then attach a joke to it. After the writers “rewrite the news” (Kline in Macks 2015:89), they then get back together with the writers and decide what jokes work best and which ones should make it to air. The jokes believed to get the biggest laughs make it to air. Think of it like a “laughacracry” (Reiss in *Team Coco* 2013)¹³: if more than half of the writers laugh at a joke, the joke will most likely make it to air, pending the approval of the host.

Once the host approves jokes for the monologue, he or she rehearses the material to see whether or not it works. If it does, it is reworked. Once the monologue is reworked, it is presented to the audience. The audience acts as the judge of the day’s work. If a joke works, the audience laughs.

Chapter conclusion

The monologue on late-night television is informed through the news media; the news media therefore sets the agenda not only for the viewers of a given news outlet, but also for the satirist and his or her writers on late-night television. Although gatekeepers in the field of late-night television do not necessarily select what stories are to be discussed in the monologue, this does not diminish the role of agents within the field of late-night television as they still act as gatekeepers who select facts and items in support of the agenda each show. As is the case for late-night, items selected

¹³ This term was used by *Simpsons* writer Mike Reiss to explain how a joke made it onto *The Simpsons*. Admittedly late-night television and sitcoms are two different ballgames, but I would argue that this term clarifies how a joke makes it onto the air. Reiss (in *Team Coco* 2013) notes that “a joke goes in because somebody says it and more than half of the people in the room laugh.”

by gatekeepers will be instances where political and social actors break social conventions as established through exercises of world building. The monologue ergo reflects the politics of the day and aims to get the audience thinking about these issues and how absurd they are.

The monologue also challenges how political and social issues are discussed as agents within late-night television look to subvert the rhetoric used by “traditional gatekeepers of the old political and journalist regimes” (Jacobs and Wild 2013:75) by employing comedic tools to bring an audience into a conversation about how we should live. The matters discussed are indeed serious items relating to political and social life, but the mode of discourse within the news media excludes the ironic take audiences look for.

Audiences who turn to late-night television seek an alternative take on the events of the day because they find it refreshing when someone confronts the incongruity between the principles and values emphasized as important with the actions of those in power who breach said features of the nomos. This is done by “draw[ing] attention to hypocrisies and ironies in the supposedly serious world of political discourse and to advocate for alternative formulations of the issues of the day” (Day 2011:6). To audiences, drawing out issues through satire gets to the root of the problem and provides them with the potential to fix whatever might have caused it. Yes, the satirist is not in the business of solving the issues they attack but getting the audience to think about the issues at hand is the first set to making things better.

Next in this project, I detail how I conducted the analysis for this project and how the first two chapters of this project helped me explore the monologues following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting.

Chapter three : Methods

Humour can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.

– E. B. White (1941:xvii)

This project aims to understand how ideological information is challenged in the satirical monologues following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting on 12 June 2016 from *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* (2016), *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (2016a) and *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* (2016). Indeed, satire challenges an audience to think about the world and its underlying weaknesses in order to deter future follies. This chapter outlines the procedure undertaken for this project, what I considered when constructing the research model, my research questions, and the protocol I adopted in order to describe the meaning behind each monologue.

Justification for research focus

a) The case study

This project uses case studies in order to understand the role of satire in democratic and capitalist societies like the United States (Day 2011:53; Feltmate 2013:544; and Schutz 1995:51). Flyvbjerg (2001:70-71) argues that “cases generate precisely that concrete, practical and context-dependent knowledge” needed in order “to move from the lower to the higher levels in the learning process.” Accordingly, for this project, while the findings cannot be generalized in the sense that the findings cannot make conclusions on all examples of satire, a case study is a detailed examination of a particular incident. Consequently, the findings from this example can be used as a model for understanding other examples of satire on late-night television.

The unit of analysis for this project is the late-night monologue. As I argued in the previous chapter, monologues in late-night television set an agenda and prioritize information in order to get the audience thinking about the issues discussed in the news media. Gatekeepers, in late-night, decide what items are presented, including how much importance is given to an item. The monologues in this sense is an editorial as each host discussed what they believe to be salient issues that need to be addressed before the issue widens any further.¹⁴

b) Case study selection

When deciding from where I would draw monologues, it was important to think about how satires connect with audiences. Basically, if a satirist writes about something relatable or something audiences are talking of, chances are audiences will be familiar with the object discussed, including what the theme of the monologue is. Former Daily Show host, Jon Stewart (in *C-SPAN 2004*) made this explicit when he was asked what his thoughts were on “kids getting their news” from fake news shows:

Kids are more informed and inundated by information: they learn by osmosis to a certain extent and if they came to our show without knowledge, our show wouldn't make any sense to them – it would be like Charlie Brown's teacher talking. It would be just, “WA-WA-WA-WA-WA-WA.” We assume so much knowledge on our show; we don't instruct ever. *Only in certain stories, we will lay out parameters, but we do not instruct and we assume a knowledge base* [emphasis added].

Yes, information is gathered about the story and presented to “the kids” in order for them to understand the satire, but, generally speaking, audiences are already coming

¹⁴ As Altheide and Schneider (2013b) note, “the audience member brings experience (context), interest, and degree of awareness to the report, and the complex interaction of these provides the meaning of the report and, therefore, its significance to the individual.” Indeed, a satirist assumes their audience is just as smart, or smarter, than they are. Accordingly, the creative team behind a late-night programme must construct a monologue which speaks to the audience's knowledge on a topic and their value emphasis.

to the table with knowledge they have internalized with regards to what is happening in the world. Consequently, when an internalized object is externalized in a satire, an interested and engaged audience will view the object as serious and needing of attention.

A satire consequently is context-dependent (Berger 1997:158; Feltmate 2013:538; Mulkey 1988:50; Schutz 1995:57-58; and Waisanen 2013:308) and works best when only a single topic is on the agenda. What this meant for this project was that in order to compare three different monologues and three different points of view on a single topic, I choose to analyze monologues following a mass shooting as these events are extensively discussed in the news media, thus making them the topic for late-night monologues (as late-night is beholden to gatekeepers in the news media when it comes to the opening monologue) (McKain 2005:418). *PolitiFact* (Nichols 2017) defines a mass shooting as an incident “in which at least four people are injured or killed in one location, not including the suspect.”

The next decision was choosing a mass shooting on which to focus on, as this is an issue in the United States. This was a difficult decision, ethically, because in choosing to focus on one particular shooting, I would be excluding over 1.15 million people who have died from gun violence in the United States since Beatle, John Lennon died on 8 December 1980 (CDC in Stuart 2015). With this said, it was important to analyze monologues from a recent shooting that I was familiar with. I decided to look at late-night monologues following the shooting which occur in Orlando, Florida on the morning of 12 June 2016 at the Pulse nightclub, where 49 members of the LGBTQ community were killed and 53 others wounded by an ISIS

sympathizer. Consequently, the shooting was described as a terrorist attack on the LGBTQ community. I was curious therefore how the hosts discussed the issue and what specifically bugged the creative team behind each programme.

Deciding the specific monologues to analyze was my next step. For this project, I picked *Full Frontal*,¹⁵ *The Daily Show*¹⁶ and *The Nightly Show*.¹⁷ Three monologues were selected “to obtain formation about the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome” (Flyvbjerg 2001:79). Indeed, instead of studying one monologue, or, say, five monologues, studying three gave me the opportunity to explore and describe the variation that exists between late-night programmes (narratively and creatively), as each programme has a specific point of view that informs how the creative team understand the news of the day. Studying one monologue would mean that I would be missing out in exploring the variation between hosts. Studying more than three monologues, I argue, would show overlap between points of view, as late-night hosts often argue that “talk is not enough” following mass shooting after mass shooting (Poniewozik 2016).

¹⁵ *Full Frontal* is a late-night satirical news programme which airs weekly on TBS, which is a superstation carried by cable systems across America. The programme is hosted by female comedian and Torontonian, Samantha Bee. Before TBS hired Bee to host her own programme, she was the senior woman’s correspondent on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, from 2003 to 2014, making her the longest serving correspondent in the show’s history. The first episode of *Full Frontal* aired on Monday, 8 February 2016.

¹⁶ *The Daily Show* is a late-night satirical news programme which airs Monday to Thursday on *Comedy Central*. The programme is hosted by Black South African stand-up comedian, Trevor Noah. Before Noah started hosting on 14 September 2015, *The Daily Show* was hosted by comedian, Jon Stewart from January 1999 to August 2015.

¹⁷ *The Nightly Show* was a short-lived late-night satirical news programme which ran nightly on *Comedy Central* from 19 January 2015 to 18 August 2016. The programme was hosted by Black comedian and television writer, Larry Wilmore. Wilmore was the senior Black correspondent on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* from 2006 to 2014 before he was approached by Stewart to host his own late-night programme following the series finale of *The Colbert Report* in December 2014.

The selection was non-random, as I was interested in exploring programmes that were described as satirical news programmes as not all late-night programmes are satirical in their content: *Full Frontal*, *The Daily Show* and *The Nightly Show* are (in Fresh Air 2017; in Itzkoff 2015; in McClennen 2016). These programmes also all aired episodes on 13 June 2016, one day after the shooting, and all three monologues were accessible online.¹⁸ These three programmes also air on cable, meaning that they have “selective appeal” (Day 2011:53) as their target audience is those who not only have the cable provider, but those who are familiar with the news and wish to hear a satirical take from the host.¹⁹ Consequently, a late-night programme on cable is lucky if it draws in a million viewers, while a late-night programme on network television looks to attract millions more people.²⁰ I am also familiar with these programmes and I trusted that the hosts would have a satirical monologue following the shooting.

Research questions

- a) How is analogy used to get the audience thinking about the event and how it should be viewed?**

¹⁸ I accessed the Bee and Noah monologues from YouTube and the Wilmore monologue from the Comedy Central Website. I had to download the Google chrome extension called Stealthy in order to access the Wilmore and Noah monologues. They were not available for Canadian IP addresses to view.

¹⁹ As Friedlander (2017) notes, “Cable networks that are not as beholden to advertisers have slightly fewer censorship rules to which to adhere, but most are still selective with their language.”

²⁰ Former late-night writer, Joe Toplyn (in St. Francis College 2016) noted that a late-night programme on network television needs to draw in around three to four million viewers a night: “if you’re doing a joke that involves politics, you have to be more careful about what your jokes are saying because you cannot afford to turn off half your audience.” Consequently, late-night on cable can target niche audiences and challenge dominant narratives found in the media without worrying about alienating their audience, while writers on network need to be more careful with the jokes they make as they cannot afford to alienate audiences.

In this chapter, I explore what an analogy is and give an example of how it can be recognized in a satire. Basically, an analogy:

...considers things only to the extent that they fulfill a function, embody a type, take on a form – in short, to the extent that they are a particular case of something general, the understanding of which is the prerequisite for the construction of analogy (Kracauer 1995:236).

In other words, when a satirist uses an analogy, their aim is to illustrate to an audience how the object discussed is similar to another object. An object discussed in a satire is analogous therefore when the audience can recognize the similarities between what the focus is and what it is compared to. Kracauer (1995:236) continues by noting how an analogy is evaluated as true or false to an audience based on where or not the two phenomena share similar features.

It was important for me to explore analogies in the monologues because they are used to help bridge the gap between the satirist and the audience. Here, because the satirist and the audience both occupy different spaces and have different frames of reference when looking at the world, an analogy helps the satirist build a connection with his or her audience by showing them how the object or subject discussed can be viewed under a different lens.

b) How is exaggeration used to highlight a feature of the target in the satire?

I ask this question because I am interested in how the late-night hosts were able to draw attention to the weaknesses of the targets. Exaggeration is a comedic tool used by the satirist to “push something to its comic extreme” (Davis 1993:85). In other words, when using exaggeration, the satirist aims to get the audience thinking about the feature discussed by heightening the feature in order for the audience to see it.

To Koestler (1964:72), when a satirist employs exaggeration, “their motives are aggressive” as they aim to, momentarily, stretch and distort social reality in order to get the audience thinking about “abuses and deformities in society of which, blunted by habit, we were no longer aware.” In this case, while exaggeration temporarily creates a third world where the audience can recognize character weaknesses, it is important for the satirist to be accurate in terms of the facts so that, when something is exaggerated, the audience can identify why it is done and it should be viewed as ridiculous. In other words, exaggeration carries a truth if the audience can identify the weakness as such, even if the object is stretched by the satirist. Consequently, making note on exaggeration was important because it is a tool used by the satirist in order to present the object in an entertaining way.

c) How is irony used to highlight incongruities between audience expectations and the reality of the situation?

I explore the purpose of irony and give an example of irony in late-night television in order to illustrate the function it serves in a satire and what are its markers. Although irony is identified by its verbal tone and its contrast between the reality of a situation and what is said, for this project, I focus primarily on how what is said is not what is meant. Indeed, because the satirist uses irony to point out follies in the social order, I focus on describing the social folly presented and how it is framed to get the audience thinking about the issue.

According to Davis (1993:15), “If we find incongruities that temporarily annihilate our *cognitive* expectation system to be funny, we may find those that temporarily annihilate our *moral* expectations system even funnier.” In this sense,

irony is used to present the issue in as a puzzle that needs to be solved. If the audience can identify the incongruity between what is said and the reality of the situation, the audience therefore understands what implicit moral value has been breached. The hope for the satirist, therefore, is to get the audience thinking about what happened and how things might improve.

With this noted, not all cases of irony are humourous in nature. Irony is a tool used to point out a violation in how events should unfold and how the event unfolds in reality. Consequently, in order for a statement to be framed ironically and in order for it to be viewed as such, the satirist assumes a normative moral code when tackling a folly (Caron 2016:156 and Day 2011:11). The implied normative moral codes in a satire act as a guiding force for the satirist as he or she aims to link their use of symbolic violence to a set of norms and values he or she shared with the audience.

At times, the satirist explicitly states the moral codes being breaches in order to get the audience on he or she side. By doing this, the satirist can build a relationship with the audience: one that is hopefully build on trust and shared values.²¹ In other words, even though the satirist tackles an issue where what they say is the opposite of what is meant, the audience can trust that indeed he or she is being ironic and doing this in order to address an issue in an entertaining manner. Consequently, I make note of when a statement appears to be ironic, how the statement aims to get the audience

²¹ As a agent of reflexivity, it is important for the satirist to build a relationship with his or her audience. To Giddens (2007:245), opening up to an audience is a great way for trust to be built: "Where it cannot be controlled by fixed normative codes, trust has to be *won*, and the means of going this is demonstrable warmth and openness." In the case of a satire, while the critique comes off as violent to some (Caron 2016:156), a critique in the eyes of the satirist aims to reform society and politics (Bloom and Bloom 1969:115 and Ziv 2010:17), not destroy the canopy which shields individuals from the dangers within the world. However, trust needs to be build in order for the audience to understand the reform nature of the satire in question. Otherwise audiences might take the response to be flippant and cynical (Lewis 1996:56 and Speier 1998:1360).

thinking about a failure in political and social life and why the failure, according to the host, should be dealt with by the audience.

d) How is sarcasm used to ridicule personalities who fall short of a standard established through exercises of world building?

I explore the use of sarcasm in each monologue and make note of how it is used to criticize an object for falling short of a standard the audience and the satirist believes to be important in political and social life. The goal of sarcasm in this sense is to correct human folly and to remind the audience of what they should expect when it comes to how politics is conducted.

In *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci outlined two forms of sarcasm: “passionate sarcasm” and “right-wing sarcasm.” “Passionate sarcasm”²² is used to mock the contingent form of the world around us in order to reveal to the audience the reality “behind the painted façade” (Gramsci 1975:118). In this form, the satirist targets an object for breaching the *nomos* in order for the group to understand what pillar was violated and how important it is to preserve communal beliefs, norms and values emphasized as important to political and social life.

On the other hand, “right-wing sarcasm” is characterized by Gramsci (1975:118) as “rarely passionate but is always ‘negative,’ purely destructive not only of the

²² When describing “passionate sarcasm,” Gramsci (1975:118) noted how Marx used this form of sarcasm in his political writings: “In Marx we find the highest expression, even esthetically, of “passionate sarcasm.” To be distinguished from other forms, whose content is the opposite to that of Marx. In the face of popular “illusions” (belief in justice, equality, fraternity, that is, in the elements of the “religion of humanity”), Marx expressed himself with a passionately “positive sarcasm;” that is, one understands that he wants to mock not the most intimate feeling of those “illusions” but their contingent form which is linked to a particular “perishable” world, their cadaverous smell, so to speak, that leaks from behind the painted façade.”

contingent ‘form’ but of the ‘human’ content of those sentiments.” Gramsci (1975:118) continues by arguing that while passionate sarcasm aims to:

...give new form to certain aspirations (hence he [Karl Marx] even tries to regenerate these aspirations) not to destroy them: right-wing sarcasm tries, instead, to destroy precisely the content of these aspirations and, in the end – the attack on their form is nothing but a ‘didactic’ device.

In this form, the individual employing sarcasm looks to destroy pillars of the nomos not emphasized as important based off of an ulterior motive. Indeed, the ulterior motive might not be spelled out in right-wing sarcasm, but, according to Gramsci (1975:118), this form of sarcasm flippantly delegitimizes inferior ways of life in favour of imposing hegemonic ways of life. Consequently, because satire looks to improve the social order, I describe what could be taken as sarcastic in each monologue and demonstrate how it is used as a tool to help reform the object that is targeted.

e) What does the hosts want to happen following this incident?

When discussing satirical news programmes, Day (2011:187) noted how programmes like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*:

... position themselves primarily as entertainment, attracting significant numbers of viewers for their networks and advertisers. They do certainly, as I have argued, contain political material, serving as spaces for critique of the inadequacies of contemporary political discourse, but they do not necessarily involve an active politics nor an organized call to action.

Accordingly, while the primary goal of satire on late-night television is to entertain audiences by poking fun at political follies, an latent function of satire is to get the audience thinking about the follies and how they need to be addressed. Indeed, satirists on late-night television might not be in the business of proposing what exactly needs to be done to fix the issues discussed, but their critique still emphasizes the fact that something should be done so that similar incidents do not happen again.

To answer this question, I make note of instances where the satirist reminds audiences of what can be done to address the issues and what kinds of questions the satirists ask to get the audience thinking about the issue. Here, what can be done is both explicitly and implicitly said. It is explicitly said in instances where the host instructs the audience on what can be done. For example, when *Daily Show* host, Trevor Noah (2016a) tells his audience that Americans need to have a conversation about guns following the shooting, he is being earnest with his audience: there is no irony in this sentiment as he wants his audience to learn from the incident and take steps to ensure the incident does not happen again.

A satire however also implies what can be done through the use of irony and sarcasm, as these tools are used to target political and social follies argued to be avoided in the future. In this sense, when the host targets an object using these tools, they are encouraging the audience to think about why the object is targeted and what pillar of the *nomos* is violated. Consequently, irony and sarcasm can be used to remind audiences of what it is they should stand for in political and social life and how the world around them needs to be mended through human action.

The intention behind this question is to illustrate how satires promote reform by way of making a point of when individuals and/or institutions fail to live up to their expectations. The job of the satirist is to remind the audience of these expectations and the hope is that the audience will respond to the folly with action. Yes, there is no explicit call to action in a satire, but a satire does not look to provide step by step guidelines for how social change is to occur: their job is to get people thinking about the issue and how they might fix it.

Protocol

Protocols are used in sociological research to plan out how researchers will obtain and collect data on a topic of interest. As Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012:92-93) explained, positivist researchers are judged on whether or not their findings are valid, whether or not the procedure is reliable (i.e. “[the research can be] carried out by two or more researchers working on a project”) and whether or not the project is replicable. These criteria, however, are “ill-suited to interpretive research because it makes quite different assumptions about the stability of the social world and how researchers know it” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:94). Despite this limitation of interpretive research, in order to understand the role of satire in questioning the social world and how it is can be used to uphold values and beliefs emphasized as important, my goal is to describe how late-night hosts responded to a specific experience deemed worthy of criticism and questioning. The intention is that by focusing on a specific experience, we can explore the nuances of satire more fully and understand its political and social function in the United States.

I understand validity as a tool to assess research, where a project is evaluated based on whether or not the researcher measures what they say they are going to measure (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:92). In this project, I am interested in how satire was used to comment on the event. Now, in a satire, irony and sarcasm are routinely used to challenge how an audience perceives the world, but I needed to construct a protocol in order to recognize each when it was presented in the monologue. Understanding these tools and the purpose they serve in challenging how people discuss current events is important therefore because without these tools, satire

has no entertainment value for audiences. By design, the protocols for understanding and recognizing irony and sarcasm is flexible in order for to give me an opportunity to explore examples that might not be as explicit, therefore “making potential sources of difference between researchers as transparent as possible” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:95).

Reliability, from a positivist standard, “rests on the idea that the same measurement procedure, carried out by two or more researchers working on a project can produce the same result” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:93). For this project, while my research is interpretive, I aim to provide a nuance description of the protocol and highlight the debate surrounding the methods used for the project in order to provide my reader with enough information on what I explored and how these descriptions were used to answer my research questions.

Replicability is understood as the idea that “different researchers with the same research questions in hand should reach similar conclusions about which evidence matters and about the meaning of that evidence” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:93-94). To satisfy these criteria, the theory explored relating to satire assisted me in constructing this protocol and I intent to line what is looked at in each question and how I go about identifying the object when it is presented to me. Indeed, the object I am making sense of is subjective, but when constructing the models by which I would understand satire, texts on satire and its tools helped me identify the conventions when they were used.

Decisions were made *post hoc*, as I needed to become familiar with the research on the topic in order for me to understand what function it served following this

shooting. Indeed, understanding the function of satire, including what it does and how it goes about reaching its objectives, was salient, as I have to evaluate the tools used and whether or not these tools helped the satirist reach his or her objectives. However, when conducting the analysis, the mode of inquiry was abduction, meaning that my thinking was directed in an “inferential process, from the surprise toward its possible explanation(s)” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:27). I approached the analysis in this manner because, in a satire, a satirist does not preface a punchline or say “coming up is a sarcastic statement” before they make a sarcastic statement: that ruins the surprise. My role therefore as a researcher is to make sense of the surprises and infer what it could be by linking it to the purpose it aims to serve in order to “render the surprise less surprising” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:28).

a) Reading satire like a sociologist

When it comes to summarizing and interpreting satire on late-night television, I acknowledge that there are methodological problems when it comes to describing what is discussed in the monologues, like the fact that I am an outsider to the field who is observing the phenomenon as a researcher and an avid viewer of late-night television. With that said, there is still sociological meaning that can be drawn from these monologues that can tell us what a satire looks like in practice.

To take seriously the sociological analysis of satire, to me, is deeply ironic because explaining the meaning behind a satire destroys its magic quality in surprising and shocking people (see White 1941:xvii). Indeed, reading or watching a satire is entertaining when you are able to solve the puzzle and deeply frustrating when you do not understand what the intended meaning behind the words are. In this sense, in

order for an individual to understand the meaning behind a satire, one must understand the context in which it is situated. What this means for me, as a sociologist, is that I must explore and describe the context of the satire in order to draw meaning from what is said. Consequently, while I am the individual who writes about the monologues, I took the task of analyzing the monologues seriously by discussing my understanding of the monologues with my supervisor, who is familiar with the field of late-night television and entertainment, in order to make clear my readings of each monologue and what needed to be stressed in the analysis.

In order to improve the reliability and validity of my analysis, I developed a set of questions, like “what are the objects targets in each monologue?,” “what information is presented to the audience in support of the rhetoric?,” “how was irony and sarcasm employed to address weaknesses in the targets?,” “how does the host arouse the audience to improve the situation?” and “what ideas does the host emphasizing as important to political and social life and what action is undermined?” I subjected each monologue to these questions and others in order to organize the data and situate the findings with the texts I explored in my theoretical chapters.

I started the analysis by watching and transcribing each monologue. During my second viewing of the monologues, I made note of the items presented throughout the monologues and where the items were presented. The items include the video clips from the news media that was presented, the articles from online or print newspapers that were presented and what images were presented to the audience during the monologue. The items presented during the monologue help provide context to the

subject matter discussed, thereby giving the audience the opportunity to think about the event and what the creative team behind each programme found problematic.²³

My third viewing dealt strictly with describing the meaning behind the monologue and the context in which these monologues are embedded in. According to Day (2011:89), “historical details and other background information [helps] to contextualize the current development.” In this sense, in order to understand what sociological meaning can be drawn from a satire, I sought to describe what the host made explicit in the satire (as in what clues are presented to the audience) and what implicit meaning it is given in the context of the satire (as in what the meaning behind the critique is). However, as Mulkay (1988:40) noted:

...particular words are used in many different ways as the social and interpretative context varies. We cannot, therefore, find the meaning of a joke simply by reading off from a dictionary the specific meanings of the words which make up that joke. Rather, each word, as it is read or heard, evokes a complex range of possible uses and implications.²⁴

In this sense, I must make note of the clues used to suggest meaning and how the host presents these clues in order to get his or her audience thinking about the social world and when values and beliefs are not being upheld. Indeed, at times, the host can be quite earnest with his or her audience in order to stress the seriousness of what is discussed (Berger 1961:214-215; Caron 2016:164; and Day 2011:33). However, because the host is in the business of entertaining audiences on serious manners,

²³ As Albrecht (1968:390) noted, “it our society, [art] may thus be used to criticize as well as to support the social order while performing essentially the same function: that of heightening awareness of the context in which it appears and constituting an objective form symbolizing essential values of that context.” In other words, individuals draw meaning from art when the context in which it is situated is clear.

²⁴ Mulkay writes about jokes, but jokes have punchlines and satires are filled with punchlines used to get the audience thinking about the issue discussed.

comedic tools like irony and sarcasm are employed to remind the audience what it is that holds together society and how important it is to work together in the preservation of the nomos. Accordingly, context shapes how the satire is read, and it was important for me to outline details and information used to present the folly and the tools used to convince the audience that action needs to be taken.²⁵

b) Understanding and recognizing analogy in a satire

Analogy is defined as an “illustration of an idea by means of a more familiar idea that is similar or parallel to it in some significant features” (Baldick 2001:10). As Davis (1993:109) noted, analogies are employed in satires in get the audience thinking about the object and how it shares similarities to another object.

For recognizing an analogy, Kracauer (1995:237) notes how the word “like” is used in order to link the two phenomena together. For example, when Noah (in INBOUND 2017) was asked if he thought he was always going to be learning about comedy and his craft, Noah said definitely and continued with the following:

Comedy is like sex. It's never finished, man. You can think you're good, and then one day, you'll get into a situation where you're like 'oh, I've got a lot to learn.

In this analogy, Noah is saying how comedy and sex share a similar attribute in common; in this case, they are both something people are always learning about. And while Noah could have said something else to explain why he is always willing to learn when it comes to practicing comedy, the analogy works because he compares comedy

²⁵ For example, Mulkay (1988:49-50) noted how the statement “There is a genius in the White House” can be read in two different ways. It can be a compliment if the person is indeed a genius, or it can be a sarcastic statement if uttered after a political blunder. Context therefore shapes how this is read and it is therefore important for me to explore what is said and describe how what is said fits within the monologue.

to something else in order, in this case, sex, to get the audience thinking about the similarities between the two phenomena. Yes, both are inherently different acts, but for a brief moment in time, in our imaginations, they are the same thing.

c) Understanding and recognizing exaggeration in a satire

Basically, exaggeration is understood in this project as the stretching of an object in order to make it appear better or worse than it actually is. In comedy, Davis (1993:86) notes how “humourous exaggeration becomes evaluative when the exaggeration – explicitly or implicitly – locates something or someone on the extreme (usually negative) end of a scale that ranges from good to bad.” In a satire, exaggeration serves a similar function as the satirist uses this tool in order to draw attention to an apparent weakness that otherwise might not be discussed.

When using exaggeration, it is important for the satirist to focus on a particular feature that is recognizable and then take that feature to ridiculous heights, thereby defying conventional views of the target (Davis 1993:85). For example, in an episode of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (2015b), Stewart introduces Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell with the following line:

As many of you know, beneath his hardened exterior [LAUGHTER] and love of all things lettuces [LAUGHTER], and seasonally-driven sand-based spawning runs [LAUGHTER]. That’s right: it’s a scientific fact, that man is a turtle [LAUGHTER].

The line from Stewart on McConnell got laughs from the audience because Stewart took McConnell’s appearance to ridiculous heights by overstating the fact he looks like a turtle. Here, while Stewart did not poke fun at a character flaw, exaggeration was used to go “beyond the limiting distance of narration allowed by conventional views” (Davis 1993:85) in order to amuse the audience with an overstatement on McConnell’s

physical appearance. Consequently, this is an example of exaggeration because Stewart takes McConnell's appearance to ridiculous heights for comic amusement. And while McConnell is not actually a turtle, the audience found it funny how Stewart said he was a turtle because, to them, he does in fact look like a turtle.

d) Understanding and recognizing irony in a satire

Using *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Baldick 2001:130), irony is understood as “a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance.” It is employed by a satirist to get the audience thinking about the reality of the situation and how it does not match up with their expectations. The ideal, which is internalized through exercises of world building, is therefore juxtaposed against the reality of the situation in order to make a point regarding human folly and the precarious nature of the *nomos*.

To Wright (1978:538), despite the fact that the utterer does not mean what he or she said, if both the utterer and the audience know that what is meant is the opposite of what is said, this creates a third world: “a construct that *imagination* builds in the service of our social faith, and it does in its Ironic way capture the Real.” In other words, an ironic statement is made in belief, but it is understood as such which the audience decodes the clues left behind by the utterer and realizes that, under the circumstances, the meaning of the statement is in fact the opposite of what is directly said. As Attardo et al. (2003:243) and Caucci and Kreuz (2012:5) illustrated in their study of verbal irony and sarcasm, tone is a marker for irony *and* sarcasm as the tone signals whether or not the statement should be taken as is. On that note, while I did

not have the time or space to look at the tones of each statement, it is important to note that the satirist does provide clues to let his or her audience know that what is meant is the opposite of what is said.²⁶

There are five forms of irony: verbal, structural, dramatic, tragic and comic (Baldick 2001:130). In late-night television, I argue that structural irony is employed:

...[it] involves the use of a naïve or deluded hero or unreliable narrator, whose view of the world differs widely from the true circumstances recognized by the author and readers; literary irony thus flatters its readers' intelligence at the expense of a character (or fictional narrator) (Baldick 2001:130).

In other words, the host, or a critic who adopts a point of view different from what is expected, leaves clues of intent when he or she adopts a position on the agenda that is contrary to what he or she actually believes and values. The audience therefore is rewarded for recognizing what the intended meaning.

For example, in a segment from *Daily Show*, correspondent, Desi Lydic (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2018) explored cable news panels and demonstrates how the debates on cable news programmes lack substance and how the pundits look to win over viewers by shouting over each other. Indeed, the purpose of the news should be to inform citizens, but Lydic, in a serious tone, says:

²⁶ Deen (2016:58) reaffirms this important indicator of irony: "Were there no facts of the matter, it would not be possible to use the incongruity between the statement and the audience's knowledge of the facts to reveal the genuine meaning." Deen gives the example of Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal* (1729), where he wrote that selling babies as food was the least that the Irish could do to deal with their issues surrounding poverty and famine at the time. This proposal, written anonymously, was taken in a serious tone in order to make a point that a) the issues for the Irish was serious and b) that they needed to be addressed by way of eating babies: "Swift assumed that people knew that the Irish poor were in dire straits and that using infants as food was deeply offensive. The blatant incongruity between his proposal and widely shared – if not universal – moral principles was intended to force the audience to reflect on current attitudes and policies" (Deen 2016: 58-59). Indeed, Swift meant well when he said that their economic hardship should be fixed, but he was ironic when he said the Irish should sell their babies for economic prosperity.

See, *CNN* doesn't waste time trying to solve a crisis or educate the viewer. No, their priority is producing a shitshow that will get them millions of clicks on their YouTube page.

Upon hearing this sentiment, the audience realizes that *CNN*, while they should be in the business of making sense of what is happening in the world and educating viewers, is in the business of making money and look to entertain instead of inform. Consequently, by taking the position that news networks like *CNN* should only produce content that will get people watching their content, Lydic is able to address *CNN*'s questionable journalist practices and get the audience thinking about how *CNN* should practice journalism. Indeed, the priority of any news organization should be to inform the people, but the reality is that *CNN* is in the business of making money and entertaining audiences. The satire in this example from *The Daily Show* therefore comes from the fact that although society is built on certain beliefs, norms and values, these pillars of society rarely "measure up to the ideal" (Davis 1993:102). However, Lydic is reminding *CNN* in this example of the duty they have to inform viewers and how this should be strived for in their programmes.

e) Understanding and recognizing sarcasm in a satire

Sarcasm is defined as a comedic tool used by a satirist to ridicule an object by saying words which "are directly opposite to his/her intended meaning" (Ducharme 1994:52). Like irony, the satirist means the opposite of what is said and indicates intend through intonation and physical gestures (Ducharme 1994:58), but the key difference between irony and sarcasm is that a sarcastic statement targets hegemonic objects that violate the nomos in a satire (Gramsci 1975:118), while an ironic statement points to inconsistencies between the reality of a situation and how it is believed to

unfold. In this sense, satirists use of sarcasm aims to ridicule an object that violates community values, beliefs and norms, thus reaffirming the nomos shared by the satirist and the audience.

For a sarcastic statement, if the satirist leaves behind indicators of intend, the audience should be able to “take on the speaker’s point of view in order to understanding the meaning of the sarcastic comment” (Ducharme 1994:57). In other words, if the audience adopts the point of view of the satirist and realizes how ridiculous their sentiment is towards the target, it is read as sarcastic because the audience realizes that the satirist should not be taken literally and that they actually mean the opposite of what is said.

For example, in a segment from *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (2016b), comedian, Lewis Black talked about information released on dead terrorist, Osama bin Laden, following the raid where he was killed. In the story, *Fox News* pundits focus on how the papers revealed that bin Laden worried about climate change and suggested that bin Laden and Obama were allies and friends in this fight to protect the planet. To Black (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2016b), it seems ridiculous to say that Obama had an ally in bin Laden. To emphasize how weak this sentiment was, Black sarcastically uses the rhetoric of *Fox News* to illustrate how reprehensible their beliefs are:

Oh, of course, Obama and bin Laden were friends. That’s why Obama hunted him down, shot him in the face, then threw his corpse into the ocean. You know, friends’ stuff!

This is read as sarcastic because while Obama and bin Laden both worried about climate change, this does not make them allies and, if they were allies, allies don’t kill

allies and throw their bodies into the ocean (even though Black said they were friends).

Black (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2016b) emphasizes this point further:

Are you guys [FOX NEWS] nuts? Just because Obama and bin Laden both wanted to stop climate change, that doesn't make them buddies. Guess what: I'm a fucking painter, but that doesn't make me friends with Hitler.

Consequently, Black aims to show his audience how ridiculous the rhetoric from *Fox News* is by adopting their rhetoric in order to point out the flaws in their opinions. Indeed, Black is indicating in the segment that he does not approve of the rhetoric used to talk about Obama and mocks the pundits for thinking that bin Laden and Obama were allies just because they both worried about the effects of climate change.

f) Limitations of the protocol

There are several limitations to this protocol that need to be outlined. First, I acknowledge that satire, like all art, is ambiguous in its meaning, as individuals will read different meaning on a satire based on their situated knowledges. It is important for me, therefore, to disclose how my own background and knowledge informs my analysis of satire on late-night television. Here, while I am approaching the study of satire under a sociological imagination that I have been formulating for since my first year as an undergraduate in 2011, I have been an avid reader of satire since before I started seriously exploring sociology in university. This prior exposure to satire sparked my interest in the topic, but it was a topic, as a fan, I took for granted in its sociological function. Accordingly, I needed to explore sociological texts on satire and world building in order to understand what purpose it served and how it goes about reaching its objectives.

These texts did inform my analysis, but in order for me to understand more fully how conventions like irony and sarcasm are used in a satire, I enrolled myself into the writing program at *The Second City* in Toronto. *The Second City* is a theatre, founded in Chicago in 1959, which performs improvisation and sketch comedy. The comedy style at *The Second City* is satirical, as performers and writers are encouraged to lampoon political and social issues. I enrolled in the writing program in August 2018 and I have been writing and presenting scenes to my classes each week. I am still learning a lot about conventions used in a satire, like how to ensure my point of view comes across clearly in my writing, but I would argue that the classes I have taken and continue to take (as of January 2019) have informed my analysis of the monologues as being apart of this community has given me the opportunity to explore conventions in a satire and see what can be done to ensure the point of view is readable.

Taking classes at *The Second City*, however, does not absolve me of confirmation bias. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012:96) refer to confirmation bias as “the intentional search for evidence that will confirm their prior conventions or beliefs (rather than disconfirm them) and to their evaluation of the character of that evidence.” Confirmation bias should be avoided in sociological research because it can act as a barrier for learning about the phenomenon in question and while I cannot control this absolutely, I have taken steps to control my readings of the monologues. For example, taking an intertextual approach to understanding the monologues has shaped how I understand satire and the nuances in it. Accordingly, my interpretations of satire, including tools like irony and sarcasm, has been shaped by the texts I have explored. By exploring these texts and writing about the elements that come together

to formulate a satire, I would argue that the knowledge I have on this topic is formed by the scholarly work I have explored and the classes I have taken. At first, tools like irony and sarcasm were taken for granted, but exploring texts and examples of each illustrates how complex these subjective objects are and how they do not exist under a perfect model.

What this meant for my analysis was that I cannot take satire at its face value and I cannot be lazy in my analysis. I need to describe, for example, why it is I know something to be ironic and how complex the examples of it are in the monologues I analyzed. It was challenging describing the conventions of the monologues, but, ultimately, describing the nuances in each monologue gave me an opportunity to reveal the hidden meaning behind the monologues and understand how these monologues fit within the container of satire.

After making notes on how satirical tools were used, I listened to and analyzed interviews from the creative team behind each program in order to understand how hosts, producers and writers approach the construction of a satire and how they value their work in late-night television. To Altheide and Schneider (2013a: n.p.), auxiliary documents “provide interesting nuggets of emphasis that can be useful in illustrating certain findings obtained from systematic investigation of other documents.” These interviews are auxiliary documents that are quite revealing as they give us a glimpse into what things mattered to the creative team behind each show and how they used satire in their format as a vehicle to get their points of view across. As Frank (2002:12) noted, “we hear others’ stories as discoveries of what things matter to them – since “things that matter” are not there a prior but are discovered in the course of living and

narrating.” With this in mind, the stories shared by members of the creative team teach us what things matter in each show and how they approach a story. I used Google to search for articles and interviews and collected items from NPR, podcasts, newspaper publications and television interviews.²⁷

When analyzing these interviews, I looked to how these individuals used analogies to describe their craft, how they understood their work on television, what they emphasized as important when constructing a satire and what their point of view was on satire and how it can be used to get people thinking objects. Analyzing these narratives gave me the opportunity to examine the extent to which members of each programme thought of their experience within the field of late-night, how, as agents of reflexivity, they consciously construct meaning from the world around them and how they make their work legible.

²⁷ Bee in Adalian 2016; Amira 2017; Wilmore in *Charlie Rose* 2015; Bee in *Charlie Rose* 2016; Bee in *Fresh Air* 2016a; Wilmore in *Fresh Air* 2016b; Bee in *Fresh Air* 2017; Wilmore in Goldberg 2016; Noah in Holmes 2015; Noah in *INBOUND* 2017; Noah in Itzkoff 2015; Kahn 2016; Wilmore in *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* 2016; Noah in *The New York Times Conferences* 2017; Wilmore in *The Paley Center for Media* 2016; St. Francis College 2016; Thede 2015; Thede 2016; Thede in Tiggett 2014; Black in *University of Delaware* 2016; Wilmore 2009; *WorkLife with Adam Grant* 2018; Noah in *947 Joburg* 2016.

Chapter four : The monologues from Bee, Noah and Wilmore on 13 June 2016

Monday, 10:30 pm – *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* on TBS

a) Introduction

Bee began her monologue standing on stage behind an image of guns, an image of a person holding a rainbow flag with a peace sign in the middle, and a map of Florida with the words “FLORIDA MASS SHOOTING” superimposed onto it:

Well, here we are. Now after a massacre, the standard operating procedure is that you stand on stage and deliver some well-meaning words about how we will get through this together, how love wins, how love conquers hate, and that is great. That is beautiful. But you know what, fuck it. I am too angry for that.

In this monologue, following a mass shooting, Bee outlines what is to be discussed and how this event cannot be ignored. Indeed, following a mass shooting, late-night hosts are expected to “take a moment to talk more seriously. They talk about grief, love and hope. And then – this being their job – they move on to talk about something else” (Poniewozik 2016). However, following the deadliest mass shooting in American history, we are drawn into Bee’s point of view, as she describes her feelings towards what happened and how she is too angry to just follow *the standard operating procedure* she outlined; even though she described the procedure as great and beautiful.²⁸

Bee describes her feelings following the mass shooting and argues that: “Love does not win unless we start loving each other enough to fix our fucking problems.” In this sentence, Bee aims to make explicit her feelings towards what happened and why she is not satisfied following *the standard operating procedure*. For Bee, love *should*

²⁸ This was eclipsed by the mass shooting in Las Vegas on 1 October 2017 (Rosenblatt 2017).

win, but it cannot win unless people “start loving each other enough to fix our fucking problems.” In this sense, Bee is critiquing the weak points of *the standard operating procedure* by illustrating to her audience that these words mean little when nothing is done to fix the issue.

After these opening words from Bee, a clip is presented from *C-SPAN* where Senator Christopher Murphy of Connecticut explains how often people are shot in the United States with statistics from 2015 that details how there were 370 instances where four people or more were shot at one give time. This clip is presented to emphasize the issue of guns in America and how often people are shot at any given time.

The clip is juxtaposed with Bee standing on stage, pretending to ask someone off camera “Hey, it is okay if instead of making jokes, I just scream for seven minutes until we go to commercial? No, it’s not okay? Okay, here we go.” To Bee, the job of late-night hosts is to make jokes, but Bee is acknowledging that it is difficult to make jokes following a tragedy. Indeed, a satirist does not want to be flippant, as flippancy deadens the soul and provides no nutritional value in answering questions regarding how we should live (Lewis 1996:56). To Day (2011:32), irony is a “mode of engagement” and not a “cynical dismissal of politics.” In other words, Bee must walk a fine line when telling jokes in this monologue because, as a satirist, she does not want to dismiss the issue and those affected by the events that transpired.

b) The mass shooter *du jour*

Bee continues the monologue by addressing the frequency of mass shootings in America. To her:

Mass shootings have become so frequent in this country it seems like the only things that will stop a bad guy with a gun is another bad guy with a gun who coincidentally came to shoot up the same place.²⁹

I argue that this statement from Bee is ironic because she takes the position that “the only thing that will stop a bad guy with a gun” is “another bad guy with a gun who coincidentally came to shoot up the same place.” This is ironic because, if taken literally, the audience can see how one “bad guy with a gun” will do nothing to stop “another bad guy with a gun.” In this sense, the statement, when juxtaposed against the reality, is incongruous because, to Bee and her audience, there are many more things that can be done to stop a bad guy with a gun.³⁰

Bee shifts focus slightly by describing the profile of the mass shooter:

Our mass shooter *du jour* [of the day] was Omar Mateen, born in New York. He beat his ex-wife, he'd been reported multiple times to his employer as homophobic and unhinged, and the FBI had twice questioned him for ties to terrorism. But none of these things disqualified him from legally buying a gun that shoots 45 rounds a minute.³¹

In this description, Bee is acting as a gatekeeper of information, as she intends to get her audience thinking about the shooter and how others described him. Bee notes that although Mateen had a questionable history, he was still able to “legally buy a gun that shoots 45 rounds a minute.” This is troubling to Bee, as she is inferring to her audience that someone with a history like this should not have access to deadly

²⁹ A graphic from *Vox.com* (n.d.), a news website, is displayed onto the screen behind Bee. It is a map of the United States with red dots all over it, indicating all the mass shootings that have occurred in America since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in December 2012. This graphic is updated after every mass shooting.

³⁰ In this statement, Bee is also mocking the often-quoted statement from *NRA* spokesman, Wayne LaPierre (in *NRATV* 2018), “the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun, is a good guy with a gun.” In mocking it, Bee is drawing attention to the flaws of this rhetoric and illustrating how it can be used to disguise how, in reality, there is no good guy with a gun when you really need them.

³¹ As Bee is describing Mateen, articles from *The New York Times*, *Florida Today*, and *The Daily Beast* are presented on the screen behind her to support the claims made about the shooter.

weapons, as the guns he legally bought gave him the opportunity to weaponize his questionable politics.

Bee heightens this point on Mateen with exaggeration by saying “not even his terrible mirror selfies” could disqualify him from buying a gun. Exaggeration is used in this case to push the target, Mateen and his questionable history, “to its comic extreme” (Davis 1993:85). Indeed, based on the information Bee presents, she argues that his questionable history should have disqualified him from buying a gun. This point is taken a step further with the comment on his mirror selfies. The comment got a laugh from the audience in this case because the audience found the particular evaluation on Mateen to be true: his mirror selfies were terrible. Bee concludes the profile of Mateen by making the following point to her audience: “I think we can all agree that if you don’t have one friend to hold the phone for you, your lone wolf ass doesn’t get a gun.” This point made by Bee is rhetoric, as she is trying to present a case for why America should have stricter gun laws as people with questionable histories, according to Bee, should not have easy access to deadly weapons because they can be used to commit acts of violence.

As an agent of reflexivity, Bee seeks to present her audience with her point of view on the objects surrounding the event and presents evidence to illustrate to her audience how she and her team came to their conclusions. This makes her satire truth worthy, as the audience is able to come to understand why Bee thinks the way she does about guns in America. Trust therefore is worked at and maintained through “*a mutual process of self-disclosure*” (Giddens 2007:245), as Bee is careful when disclosing her thoughts on the event, as she wants her audience to come to understand the event

as she does. Accordingly, by linking her satire to the implicit moral codes that keeps society together, the audience, who have internalized the moral code, comes to understand the weaknesses surrounding the shooting and why it is important to improve the situation.

Bee follows this profile by asking her audience a rhetorical question: “But hey, who could have predicted that letting suspected extremists buy guns was a bad idea?” This question from Bee is ironic, as both her and the audience, based on the question asked and the evidence presented thus far, can see how letting individuals with questionable histories buy guns *is* in fact “a bad idea” as they can and have been used to commit acts of violence. The question is presented against a clip with President Obama, who explains, in a *PBS News Hour Townhall*, the vulnerabilities in America’s gun laws and how people who are on a no-fly list cannot fly, but, because of the gun lobby, there is nothing stopping those same people from buying a gun. Bee responds to the clip: “Obama may have been explaining the vulnerability in our gun laws at the very moment the Orlando shooter was taking advantage of it.”³² To this, Bee asks herself: “Did the shooter just watch *PBS News Hour* and go, “hey, that’s what I should do?” The question posed by Bee I would argue is an example of exaggeration, as it looks to paint a make believe world where the shooter decided to commit the act after watching a news clip where Obama outlined the vulnerabilities. Now we do not know for sure if the events played out like this, but Bee presents the audience a reality where

³² A tweet from the Orlando Police twitter account is presenting, which states how Mateen legally bought his guns within a week of the massacre.

it is plausible that Mateen actually watched the townhall and decided then and there that he was going to shoot up a nightclub.³³

c) Thorny questions

After making the point about America's vulnerable gun laws, Bee acknowledges that:

...[the issue of guns] raises some very thorny questions: Should we restrict people's rights based on scary things they say? Are innocent lives worth less than the sanctity of free speech? Even if it's hate speech? And what about profiling?

The questions posed by Bee illustrates how there is nuance to the debate surrounding guns in America. Indeed, "these questions are hard," but Bee asserts that "it's a lot easier to just accept that going to a public place carries a non-zero risk of dying in a hail of bullets." Here, Bee is making the point that while the gun control debate is complicated and something that challenges how Americans are to live, she argues that answering these questions is not hard if people accept the premise that being out in the public means not having to worry about being shot. The lesson here is that if people believe that individuals who pose as a threat should not get their hands on a dangerous weapon, then finding answers to these questions is not that hard.

This premise is juxtaposed against a clip featuring Florida Senator, Marco Rubio saying the following after the shooting: "This could happen anywhere in the world. Unfortunately, today was Orlando's turn." To Bee, this quote from Rubio is puzzling, as he seems to be normalizing the idea that going into a public place should

³³ Satires stretch the world momentarily in order to make a point about "abuses and deformities in society of which, blunted by habit, we were no longer aware" (Koestler 1964:72). As is the case for *Animal Farm* (Orwell 1989), the world is stretched to the point where animals can talk in order to get a point across regarding the pitfalls of the Soviet Union.

carry a chance of dying in a hail of bullets: “Orlando’s turn? Mass shooting are so normalized now that we’re taking turns?” Indeed, following a mass shooting, a politician should not go in front of a bunch of cameras and normalize the idea that places take turns when it comes to mass shootings. Bee points this out in a sarcastic gesture where she pretends to be the state of Delaware on the phone with the state of Minnesota: “Hey Minnesota, this is Delaware. It’s my turn for a mass shooting tomorrow, but I have family visiting, so can you switch mass shootings with me? Thanks, bye.” I argue that this is an example of sarcasm because Bee is ridiculing Rubio for what is said by adopting his position in order to illustrate to the audience how weak this response is.

Following this sarcastic response, Bee tackles Rubio’s remark that mass shootings can happen anyway in the world by citing how Australia passed strict gun laws in 1996 after “the public decided that [mass shootings] were no fun” and how the laws were shown to be effective because “[Australia] haven’t had a mass shooting since then.”³⁴ After presenting this information, Bee emphasizes just how long it has been since Australia had a mass shooting by humorously pointing out that “Australia hasn’t had a single mass shooting since *The Fresh Prince* left Bel-Air and was never heard from again.” To Bee and her audience, this is a humorous way of point out just how long it has been since Australia had a mass shooting, because while 1996 was the year *The*

³⁴ Unfortunately, Australia had a mass shooting on 11 May 2018 where seven people were shot. This was the deadliest mass shooting in Australia since the Port Arthur massacre in 1996, where the government enacted new gun laws and measures to help decrease the number of gun-related deaths (Torre 2018). While the most recent mass shooting was tragic and shows us how people will still find ways to get a hold of guns to commit violent acts, I would argue that the measures taken by the Australian government were effective in decreasing the number of gun-related deaths, seeing that this shooting was the deadliest since the shooting which caused the government to enact stricter laws.

Fresh Prince of Bel-Air aired its final season, reruns of the programme continue to air. From this example, the lesson to be learned is that if people decide that mass shootings are not fun, something can be done to ensure that this becomes a reality, as the Australian example goes to show how strict gun laws can decrease the likelihood of mass shootings.

After presenting the evidence showing how gun laws can make gun violence less likely, Bee is quick to point out that the main difference between Australia and the United States is that “Australia doesn’t have a second amendment”: the right to bear arms. Indeed, The Second Amendment of the United States constitution does make it difficult for politicians to pass gun laws. To this, Bee says “*Love you Madison, and congratulations on your Tony,*³⁵ but you really fucked us with that one.” This is an example of Bee pointing out a weakness in one of America’s founding fathers: indeed, considering the problems that stem from The Second Amendment and how prevalent gun violence is in America, in a way, Madison did screw up America.

Bee continues: “We can’t constitutionally get rid of all guns, but can’t we get semi-automatic assault rifles out of the hand of civilians?” The question is intended to get her audience thinking about what can be done to decrease the likelihood of mass shootings. However, when it comes to proposing any measure that would take guns out of the hands of civilians, critics might take such a proposition as anti-second amendment. Bee is mindful of the criticism she might receive, but responds by making her stance clear to her audience: “SAM BEE WANTS TO TAKE YOUR GUNS AWAY. Yes! The ones that mow down a room full of people in seconds? Yes, I do

³⁵ A reference to the musical *Hamilton*, which won a Tony on 12 June 2016, the day of the shooting.

want to take those guns away.” In responding to the criticism she imagined she might receive, Bee is acting reflexively as she wants to make it clear to her audience where she stands on the issue. Yes, in fact, she does want to take away guns that wipe out rooms full of people, as she believes that guns like the AR-15, a gun that is found in shooting after shooting, are “a shitty choice for hunting and home protection, but perfect for portable mayhem.”³⁶

d) Governor Rick Scott’s response

After noting the deadly capacity of the AR-15 and how the gun can be bought in the state of Florida “with no waiting periods,” Bee wonders if “Perhaps the governor [Rick Scott] would like to comment on that.” A clip is inserted into the monologue where Scott was asked at a press conference if he would do another on “a policy level to stop something like this in the future.” Scott replies by saying “there will be plenty of time to think about how we might improve our society,” effectively dodging the question. Bee responds by asking Scott: “What the fuck are you even talking about? This wasn’t even Orlando’s first high-profile gun murder of the weekend.³⁷ Stop thinking and do something to improve our society.”

After Bee asked Scott to do something, another clip is presented where *CNN* anchor, Jake Tapper asked Scott what people can do to help the victims. In the clip, Scott says “I think the biggest thing is pray. Pray for the victims, pray for their families, pray that it never happens again.” Bee responds sarcastically:

³⁶ An article from *Slate*, an online media outlet, appears behind Bee titled “The NRA Claims the AR-15 Is Useful for Hunting and Home Defense. Not Exactly” (Peters 2016). It was published 12 June 2016, the day of the shooting and argues that the rifle found in shooting after shooting was engineered to indeed wipe out rooms full of people in a matter of minutes.

³⁷ A picture is displayed behind Bee of singer, Christina Grimmie, who was shot in Orlando on 10 June 2016 by Kevin James Loibl (Sanchez et al. 2016).

You heard the man! The biggest, most helpful thing you can do to ensure this never happens again is sit quietly in a room with your eyes closed, talking to nobody.

This is sarcastic because Bee is ridiculing Scott's response, as she believes that there is much more helpful things people can do to help the victims and their families.

Following this comment, Bee questions what Scott said: "Wait a minute: we pray after every mass shooting and yet they keep happening. Maybe we're not praying right? Can we check the instruction manual?" A clip is inserted into the monologue of a Bible opening up to the verse James 2:17. Bee reads it to the audience: "Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." In this interesting juxtaposition, Bee is reminding her audience that praying will not fix gun violence if no one is willing to put in the work to solve the problem. This is an important lesson from this satire, as it emphasizes the fact that if people want the world to change, people need to work to change it. In this case, if people want to fix issues relating to guns, people need to put in the work to make the prayers a reality.

e) Conclusion

Bee concludes the monologue by reminding her audience that when it comes to mass shootings in America:

There is no shortage of troubled 20 something's out there and whether they're radicalized by ISIS or homophobia or white nationalism or a dislike of movies, we are making it far too easy for their derangement to kill us. So, until we as a nation find the political will to reject a mass shooting per day as the price of freedom, I'm just going to pray.

Are you there, god? It's me, Sam. Please bless the victims and their friends and families in their time of unspeakable pain. Give us the courage to say no more. And while you're at it, please send the NRA a plague of boils. Amen.

Bee's conclusion emphasizes the fact people (mostly men) who hold such violent beliefs should not have access to guns which can allow them to carry out their hateful agenda. However, Bee notes that these incidents will continue to happen unless people decide they have had enough. The monologue from Bee therefore aims to get the audience thinking about the issue of gun violence in America, the people affected and how important it is to do something. It serves this function by selecting and presenting information to support the agenda and by emphasizing why, to Bee, her audience should think about gun violence as something that needed to be talked about following the shooting in Orlando.

In this case, Bee and her creative team looked to construct a monologue which spoke to their feelings regarding the event. However, as Bee (in Adalian 2016) noted in an interview following the shooting, "it's incumbent upon everybody to now take the reins of that outrage and actually make something happen." The agenda therefore aimed to heighten the seriousness of the issue and get the audience to think about how frequently mass shootings occur in the United States, how easily exploitable guns laws are, how a country like Australia responded to mass shootings, how mass shooters love the AR-15, why it is important to consider restricting access to a gun that can wipe out a room of people, and how important it is to hold elected officials accountable for their actions and inactions.

This being a satire, Bee did not pretend to be objective when describing what bugged her and her team of writers when it came to the issue of gun violence. For example, when talking about how Australia did not have a second amendment, she made note of how the right to bear arms "fucked" America. In this case, her tone

towards the second amendment was negative as she and her team sees this amendment to the constitution as a serious barrier to gun control. A negative tone was also taken when talking about Governor Rick Scott and Senator Mario Rubio, as sarcasm was used consequently to convey contempt towards what was deemed to be weak responses. Indeed, in the case of this monologue, the creative team at *Full Frontal* presented the audience with facts about the objects and satirical jabs in order to get the audience thinking about the follies surrounding the event and how salient it is to have a debate about guns in America.

Monday to Thursday, 11:00 pm – *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* on Comedy Central

a) Introduction

Noah begins his monologue, sitting at his desk and offering his thoughts on the events that transpired over the weekend:

I have to talk about Saturday night's devastating attack, and not as a host of a show, but as a human being. In Orlando, Florida, we saw what had happened, and I couldn't be more sad and sickened by the events.

Here, Noah emphasizes the fact that he was sad and sickened by the shooting in Orlando. He is also setting up the agenda for the monologue, as this will be the issue up for discussion. Noah then states how President Obama was also sad and sickened in his address following another mass shooting:

And neither could President Obama, who spoke yesterday to the nation from the White House's James S. Brady Press Briefing Room, because that's how much gun violence is a part of American life: Even the room the president talks about gun violence from is named for a victim of gun violence. And so, it was yet another one of the president's post mass-shooting addresses.

Noah sets up the clip by emphasizing an interesting fact to the audience, in this instance, how the room where Obama was speaking was named after James S. Brady, a journalist who was a victim of gun violence.

In the clip, President Obama says the following:

Today marks the most deadly shooting in American history. The shooter was apparently armed with a handgun and a powerful assault rifle. This massacre is therefore a further reminder of how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a weapon that lets them shoot people in a school, or in a house of worship, or a movie theater, or in a nightclub. And we have to decide if that's the kind of country we want to be.

The audience is presented with salient information about the shooting. First, it was the deadliest shooting in American history. Second, the shooter was equipped with guns which allowed him to commit the act. Third, Obama reminds the audience this event illustrates “how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a weapon” that allows them to shoot people in a public place. Obama then stresses the fact that following this shooting, Americans need to think about what country it wants to be.

Noah hears this and asks “I wonder if President Obama ever thought to himself that mass shooting speeches would be such a big part of his job.” After asking this question, Noah explains the question by emphasizing the fact that Obama, since he took office in 2009, had given 16 mass shooting addresses, while only hosting 12 state dinners. Noah follows this fact up by stating “so, right now, the White House is using more Kleenex than it is good napkins.” I found this comment from Noah interesting because he is stating how much giving these types of addresses has become apart of his presidency, to the point where it has become a regular occurrence in his job. This comment perhaps takes a little longer to make sense, but Noah is raising an interesting point regarding how often shootings occur in the United States.

Noah continues to note that Obama made a “powerful point”: “America has to decide if this is the kind of country that it wants to be,” but argues that “it feels like America has already decided. This is exactly the kind of country it wants to be.” To illustrate what he means, Noah asks his audience to think about how Americans usually respond to mass shootings:

Because we know how this always plays out. We're shocked, we mourn, we change our profile pics, and then, we move on. It's become normal, but I'm sorry. Maybe because I'm new, but it's not normal, and it shouldn't be normal. We shouldn't allow this to be normal. It's not a normal thing. It's like milk from almonds, or sushi from Walgreens. It's not normal, people.

There is truth to what Noah is discussing here. The audience, aware of the news cycle following a mass shooting, knows how events unfold. Yes, there is time taken to mourn and reflect on the victims and their families, but, to Noah, while the way events unfold after mass shootings have become normal, the fact that it has become normalized is troubling. Noah emphasizes how troubling this is with a funny analogy, as he argues that the audience should not accept the response as normal in the same way the audience should not accept milk that does not come from teats or sushi that comes from a pharmacy. These things, of course, differ in equivalence, but, to Noah, they should still not be viewed as normal even though these objects have become apart of the world.

b) The shoelace analogy

Noah continues the monologue by stating how it’s also not normal to have “the same thing happen to us over and over and over again and doing nothing to change it. That’s not normal.” To Noah, it is absurd to believe that doing nothing will change anything. To emphasize this, Noah shares a story from his childhood:

You know when I was a kid, I never used to tie my shoelaces 'cause I was an idiot. All right? And now, obviously, I'm an adult. I'm still an idiot, but I'm an adult. And so I only wear Velcro, but what I would do as a child is, I would run around, I'd trip on my shoelaces, I'd fall down, I'd cry, I'd be like, "Aah, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!"

And my mom would come over, and she'd say to me, "Get up, Trevor. Get up. Get up. What happened?"

And I'd say, "I fell down. I fell down."

And she'd be like, "Why did you fall? Why did you fall?"

"I fell because I tripped." [CRYING]

And she's like, "Why did you trip?"

[INDISTINCT MUMBLING]

She goes, "Your shoelaces."

Now I see it's my shoelaces. And we'd realize I fell because of the shoelaces. Now tie them and then move on. I knew I had to move on, but I had to tie the shoelaces first. I had to change something.

I mean, I could have said to my mom, *"Mom, why are you bringing shoelaces into the conversation?" "Why are you blaming the shoelaces for something the sidewalk did to my knees?" "Who even says there's a connection "between untied shoelaces and falling anyway? You're violating my right to keep my shoelaces untied."*

The story from Noah is meant to illustrate how important it is to change what you do in response to something tragic. Yes, mass shootings and tripping over untied shoelaces are false equivalents, but in this analogy, the story from Noah does serve to get his audience thinking about his point of view and why it is important to do something in response to something unwanted. Indeed, the analogy from Noah serves to bring together the two phenomena by illustrating how the characters "manifest the same behaviour" (Kracauer 1995:235). Young Trevor did not want to blame his incident on the shoelaces; the gun lobby reframe from blaming guns for mass

shootings: both characters are therefore reframing from acknowledging a potential cause for the folly. Consequently, an audience who is familiar with the rhetoric of the gun lobby in the United States is able to identify how Noah employed the rhetoric of the gun lobby here to defend his right to “keep [his] shoelaces untied.” On the other side, Trevor’s mother in this analogy sees what happened and showed young Trevor how his untied shoelaces caused him to trip. In the same vein, Noah sees the shooting and questions the gun laws that allowed the shooter to commit an act of violence.

Noah continues his monologue by saying how after tripping over his shoelaces:

I realized, after falling, after falling a lot, there was a connection between my shoelaces being untied and getting hurt... The point is, this is a clearly complicated incident. There’re elements of terrorism, homophobia, mental health, but it is glaringly obvious. America needs to make it a lot harder for people who shouldn’t have guns to get guns.

For Noah, the analogy was constructed and presented to illustrate how important it is to do something to ensure people do not get hurt. Whether it is tying shoelaces or putting in some kind of measure to “make it a lot harder for people who shouldn’t have guns to get guns.” Noah makes this clear at the end of this beat to ensure his audience is on the same page with him on the analogy.

c) Is this a gun issue?

Noah laid out what he believed to be evidence that makes it “crystal clear” that America has an issue when it comes to gun control. However, Noah is quick to point out how “there are still people who think we’re wrong for even trying to bring that up.” To illustrate this point, six clips from *Fox News* are presented to the audience, where pundits argue that:

FOX NEWS PUNDIT #1, Dan Bongino:
This is not a gun control issue.

FOX NEWS PUNDIT #2, no name shown:
It is not about guns or the means that ISIS uses.

FOX NEWS PUNDIT #3, no name shown:
We can have gun debates later. This is terrorism. Terrorism needs to be destroyed.

FOX NEWS PUNDIT #4, no name shown:
This is Islamic terror.

FOX NEWS PUNDIT #5, no name shown:
We've got to stop getting in the wrong argument, bring this back to the evil that that is radical Islam.

FOX NEWS PUNDIT #6, no name shown:
And to, once again, make this an issue about gun control. Look, if you go back to 9/11, they used box cutters.

The clips highlight the debate from *Fox News* and the point of view from the right-wing media. Noah finds the last point particularly compelling:

You know what? This is not something I've ever said before, but I'm glad you brought up 9/11, because yes, terrorists didn't use guns on 9/11. They used planes to kill thousands of people. And as soon as we realized that they could use planes as weapons, we worked together as a society. We worked our damndest to make it harder for them to ever do that again. We locked cabin doors, we expanded the no-fly list. We even make everyone pose for X-ray nudes now [IMAGE OF NOAH BEHIND A TSA BODY SCANNER IS PRESENTED TO THE AUDIENCE]. What we didn't do was say, "Oh, this has nothing to do with airplanes. It has everything to do with radical Islam." No, what we did instead was regulate air travel to make it harder for the terrorists to do the damage.

This response to Noah highlights what he believes to be a contradiction from the conservative point of view, as measures were taken following the 9/11 terrorist attack to ensure terrorists could not weaponize planes. In this example, what Noah is doing is illustrating to the audience what can be done to ensure nothing like that happened again.

Noah proceeds to illustrate how important it is to work together to decrease the likelihood of terrorists committing acts of violence:

Even when fighting ISIS itself, we fight the ideology, yes. We fight to reduce their resources, but most importantly, we attack their weapon stores. Why do we do that? Because removing their weapons dramatically decreases their ability to hurt us.

This point is emphasized with a humorous analogy: “Because everybody knows ISIS without guns is just basically a blog.” Yes, terrorist organizations and blogs differ in equivalence, but Noah says ISIS without weapons is a blog in order to make the point that if you take away their ability to commit acts of violence, you are basically taking away their ability to hurt people, thereby turning them, according to Noah, into a blog with little power. The audience found this analogy entertaining, as they were able to decode what Noah said.

After presenting this analogy, Noah points out what he believes to be an irony in the gun control debate:

The irony of the situation is that these people say there’s no connection between America’s gun laws and terrorism. [...] But what’s crazy is, you know who does see a connection? Terrorists.

This statement from Noah is not an example of structural irony, but it is nonetheless ironic in the sense of all the people who sees a connection between weak gun laws and terrorism, you would hope terrorists were not the ones who could see the connection. In fact, terrorist organizations do see a connection, while gun rights advocates, to Noah, apparently do not. To illustrate what Noah means, he presents his audience with a clip from a former al-Qaeda spokesman who points out just how easy it is to access guns in America. As Gadahn explains in the clip:

In the West, you've got a lot at your disposal. Let's take America as an example. America is absolutely awash with easily-obtainable fire arms. You can go down to a gun show at the local convention center and come away with a fully-automatic assault rifle without a background check, and most likely, without having to show an identification card. So what are you waiting for?

This clip is presented by Noah in order to illustrate to his audience how there is a connection between terrorist and guns. The idea therefore that Noah is advocating for is the improvement of gun laws to make it harder for dangerous individuals to commit acts of violence.

d) Access to guns in America

The point of view from Noah in this monologue is that easy access to guns gives individuals with violence beliefs and politics the ability to weaponize their harmful beliefs. Noah however stresses that changing gun laws is difficult because “Americans love guns, but this love comes at a cost.” To illustrate to his audience what the price is, Noah presents an interesting fact about guns in America:

[T]his year alone [as of June 2016], 23 people in America have been shot by toddlers.³⁸ By toddlers. You realize we haven't even reached the summer. Right? ... Summer toddlers are the worst. Summer toddlers don't give a [BLEEP]. It's hot, preschool's out – you know [BLEEP] gonna go down. [IMAGE OF TODDLER CARRYING A GUN IN A SMALL INFLATABLE POOL].

While exaggeration is used to blow up the idea that toddlers are out shooting people like Mateen [the shooter], the fact is presented to the audience to emphasize the cost of guns in America.

Noah follows this by saying how:

...the truth is, I know where this argument always ends up. It's always gonna be the same thing. The Second Amendment. The Second

³⁸ An article from *The Washington Post* is presented to the audience, titled “Toddlers have shot at least 23 people this year” by Christopher Ingraham (2016).

Amendment: “The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”

Noah in this sense is acknowledging the challenge posed by gun advocates in the United States. However, Noah stresses: “But as much as the NRA want you to believe it’s an absolute, it’s not, and it never has been because America does regulate guns.” To illustrate what he means by this, Noah cites how, for example, the shooter “couldn’t get a machine gun... because America banned those in 1980s, because it was obvious that they made it too easy for one person to kill multiple human beings.” While it is true that America has banned the sale of machine guns (Nestel and Miller 2017), Noah states how “time after time, we’ve seen that assault weapons have the same fatal capability.” This fact posed by Noah is meant to get the audience thinking about the two styles of guns, the similarities they share and how despite the fact that machine guns are banned, assault style weapons like the AR-15 serve a similar purpose to those interested in killing a mass number of people.

e) Conclusion

Noah concludes his monologue following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting by stating how:

America needs to ask itself the question: Do you want to be a country that takes reasonable measures to protect its citizens, or should we tell the president to prepare speech 17?

Here, the monologue from Noah sought to get the audience thinking about the shooting, the trite response to gun violence, how it has become normalized when, to Noah, it should not be, and how important it is to do something in response to a tragedy, including taking measures to ensure individuals do not have easy access to deadly weapons. There are, in this sense, lessons to be learned from this tragedy; to

Noah, the gun laws in America are deeply faulted, but if people learn from an event like this and apply the lessons learned, then perhaps American citizens would be protected. However, if the people do not apply what they learned, Noah notes how President Obama will have to prepare another speech on guns in America.

The Noah monologue relied heavily on the use of analogies and exaggeration in order to make a point of the weaknesses surrounding the responses to gun violence in America. Analogies, to Noah, were used in order to get the audience thinking about the responses and how weak they were by comparing them to another thing Noah believed to be weak. Indeed, even if the audience disagreed with some of the stances Noah had, the audience is at least thinking about the comparisons he makes. For exaggeration, Noah isolated features deemed unimportant to his agenda and heightened features he believed to be salient in support of his point of view. Satirists use exaggeration in this sense to give the audience the opportunity to focus on specific features of an object they have taken for granted, with the intention to get them to think critically about the target and its attributes.

Monday to Thursday, 11:30 – *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* on Comedy

Central

a) Introduction

Wilmore begins the monologue by stating the following:

But we have to deal with the tragic events that occurred over the weekend in Orlando. We've been thinking about it all day here, trying to figure out what to do and what to say in response to something so evil. All I can say is this: our hearts are broken for you, Orlando, and for the victims and their families, but we are with you, okay? And tonight, we're going to talk about it in the hopes that maybe we can provide some laughs and maybe play some small part in the healing.

As Wilmore notes, following the tragic events that occurred in Orlando, it was important for him and his team to talk about what happened. He talks about he and his team were thinking about how they would “respond to something so evil,” but he emphasizes the fact that “our hearts are broken for... the victims and their families” and how he is going to discuss the event in the hope that it may provide “some small part in the healing.”

b) The response from “future-impeached President Trump”

Wilmore continues the monologue by discussing how “when the news broke [about the shooting], the people of this nation were unified in a selfless outpouring of support for the victims and their families.” Wilmore is evaluating the support following the shooting as positive. To Wilmore, this is encouraging, but he could not help but notice how “Well, it was selfless except for one person.” To this, Wilmore says “Cue the tweet from future-impeached, President Trump, please.”

A clip is presented to the audience where *MSNBC*, where *Morning Joe* co-host, Mika Brzezinski reads a tweet from Donald Trump, who at the time was running for president of the United States: “Appreciate the congrats for being right on radical Islamic terrorism. I don’t want congrats, I want toughness and vigilance. We must be smart.” Wilmore responds to the tweet by saying “Yes, Donald, you were really ahead of the curve on the whole ‘terrorism is bad’ thing.” This statement is sarcastic because Wilmore is ridiculing the response from Trump as weak in the wake of the shooting. Indeed, following the shooting, Wilmore believes that the support offered should be selfless. However, by taking the position that Trump was “ahead of the

curve” when saying how “terrorism is bad,” Wilmore aims to highlight a character flaw from Trump and his inability to sympathize with the victims and their families.

Wilmore continues:

I mean, honestly, who brags about this? It’s like your doctor saying, ‘Yo, dude, I totally called it! You do have cancer man! Called it. I called that [BLEEP], man!’

An analogy is used by Wilmore to illustrate to his audience how they should not want a doctor talking to a patient like this following a cancer diagnosis, in the same way the audience would not want a candidate for president looking to take credit for being right about terrorism. The analogy therefore is used in order to get the audience thinking about what they should want in a president by illustrating to them how Trump, to Wilmore, exhibits weak characteristics.

Following this analogy, Wilmore notes how Trump “didn’t just tweet. He redirected the diarrhea from his Twitter account directly through his face-hole at a press conference.” Calling the words coming out of “his face-hole” diarrhea is used in order to make the rhetoric from Trump seem devoid of value.

In the first clip, Trump says “The killer, whose name I will not use or ever say, was born an Afghan, of Afghan parents, who immigrated to the United States.”

Wilmore is then shown behind his desk, responding to Trump:

No. He was born an American, but his parents immigrated to the United States. So you’re saying that we shouldn’t allow immigrants into this country at all? Well, that eliminates two-thirds of your wives [PICTURES ARE SHOWN OF IVANA TRUMP AND MELANIA TRUMP, TRUMP’S IMMIGRANT WIVES].

When juxtaposing the rhetoric from Trump to Wilmore’s question, it is ironic because when Wilmore takes on Trump’s position, he reveals the anti-immigrant stance would

affect Trump personally. The punchline is therefore ironic because the audience is able to see the weaknesses in Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Wilmore continues by egging Trump on: "Hey, you better give me a better reason, man." A clip is shown from the press conference where Trump describes the shooter's father:

His father published support for the Afghan Taliban, a regime which murders those who don't share its radical views, and they murdered plenty. The father even said he was running for president of Afghanistan.

Wilmore, again, tries to make sense of what Trump is saying by trying to adopt his position: "Okay, all right, so you're telling me that his father has radical views, says crazy [BLEEP], and is running for president? Hmm." In this instance, Wilmore is asking his audience to think about the shooter's father and the description provided. The punchline in this question is that both Mateen's father and Trump both happen to hold radical views, both happen to say ridiculous things, and both happen to be running for president. To Wilmore and his audience, both figures should be viewed with contempt, but it is ironic because Trump shares similar attributes with Mateen's father. To this, Wilmore says "I think somebody's trying to steal your thunder, man!" Indeed, the rhetoric from Trump is deemed weak by Wilmore, but Wilmore alludes to the fact that someone is trying to play the same game as Trump.

Following this ironic comparison, Wilmore begs Trump: "Oh, please, Donald! Please just give me something. Just give me one thing that kind of make sense." A clip is then presented where Trump states: "We have an incompetent administration and if I am elected president, that will not change. I will tell you, that will not change over the next four years..." The clip stops mid-sentence and Wilmore says: "Okay.

Okay. That kind of makes sense.” Here, Wilmore took his question and juxtaposed it against a sentence from the press conference in order to make a point that if Trump was elected, his administration would be characterized by its incompetency.

Gatekeepers in *The Nightly Show* looked to present information to the audience that highlighted what they believed to be the weak response from Trump following the shooting. The lesson from this beat is that the response from Trump was selfish, because, according to Wilmore and his writers, he used the shooting as an opportunity to bolster his rhetoric. Consequently, Trump is characterized as an untrustworthy character who is unable to help others during tragedies.

c) Trump questioning the response from President Obama

Wilmore carries on illustrating how Trump looked to attack the president of the United States with a tweet. A clip is presented against from *Morning Joe*, where co-host Mika Brzezinski reads the tweet from Trump: “Is President Obama going to finally mention the words radical Islamic terrorism? If he doesn’t he should immediately resign in disgrace!” Wilmore questions the tweet from Trump: “Wait. Hold on a second. He wants Obama to resign? Okay, well, you know, it just so happens that I have a direct line to the president.” Here, Wilmore is shown pulling a red phone out from under his desk and proceeds to call Obama to see what his thoughts are about Trump’s tweet. An Obama impersonator answers the phone:

OBAMA:
Uh, White House. This is Barack.

WILMORE:
Hey, Barry! What’s up my, uh, president?

OBAMA:
Oh, Larry, it’s good to hear from you.

WILMORE:

Hey, so, listen, Donald Trump sent a tweet saying you should resign. What's your response?

OBAMA:

Oh, Donald, go [BLEEP] yourself.

WILMORE:

Oh, okay. Thank you, Mr. President [HANGS UP THE PHONE].

This short sketch in the monologue uses exaggeration when the Obama impersonator tells Trump to go [BLEEP] himself. It is an example of exaggeration because the real Obama did not tell Trump to [BLEEP] himself. It is, however, humorous because while President Obama would have decorum when talking about Trump and his weaknesses as a human being, he defied these expectations and spoke bluntly to Wilmore, expressing disdain for Trump's rhetoric.

Wilmore continues to focus on the criticism Obama received for not using the phrase "radical Islamic terrorism" and illustrated to his audience how this type of criticism "has been a conservative talking point for years." Four clips are shown illustrating this point:

TED CRUZ on *CBS THIS MORNING*:

President Obama goes on TV: He will not say "radical Islamic terrorism."

DANA PERINO on *FOX NEWS*:

The White House refuses to say "radical Islam."

STEVE DOOCY on *FOX AND FRIENDS*:

This administration has refused to call it what it is. It's radical Islam.

SEAN HANNITY:

I'm about to band my head on this table! Why can't they say it?

The last clip grabs Wilmore's attention, as he begs Hannity: "Yes. Please band your head on that table! Please! Please!" Following this comment, Wilmore says:

Look, in all honesty, they really want Obama to say these words so *Fox News* can cut them together in a clip where Obama says, 'I'm a member of radically Islamic terrorism.' Right? That's right. Don't fall for it, Barry. It's a trap!

The comment from Wilmore is an example of exaggeration as he is heightening the questionable practices of *Fox News* to the point of absurdity to illustrate how weak he believes their rhetoric to be when it comes to discussing Obama.

The lesson to be learned from this beat is that the audience needs to be critical of media discourse and question what purpose news outlets have when framing certain questions. Indeed, it is unlikely that *Fox News* would actually edit a clip together of Obama saying that he was an Islamic terrorist, but *Fox News*, to Wilmore, is a weak institution that is more interested in delegitimizing the left whenever there is an opportunity for political spin.

d) The response from Governor Rick Scott following the shooting

After pointing out the flaws of *Fox News*, Wilmore quickly changes his tone to focus attention back on the shooting itself:

But I have to say, in the wake of the Orlando tragedy, some on the right have their own word they're avoiding. Watch how hard Florida governor Rick Scott works to not use the word "gay."

A clip is presented from *CNN* where anchor, Jake Tapper asks Scott was going to take any special precautions in Florida in order to protect the LGBTQ community. Scott says: "Well, Jake, we don't want anybody in our state to ever be targeted. We don't want anybody to be discriminated against." Wilmore agrees with Scott that you do not want people being discriminated against but emphasizes that "we're not talking about anybody. This isn't #AllLivesMatter. We're talking about gay people, so just say that." Here, Wilmore is being critical of Scott and why he would not say explicitly

what he was going to do to ensure the LGBTQ community following a targeted attack on them.

Another clip from the *CNN* interview is shown where Tapper says: “There may be a large and thriving LGBT community that might be very, very afraid this morning. Are you taking precautions?” Scott replies:

Absolutely. I mean, we have really good law enforcement in our state, and when something like this happens, one of the first things you do, on top of just dealing with the issues you have at hand, is saying, “Okay, so, who else could this impact?”

To Wilmore, this is a weak response because he failed to say, again, what he would do to protect the LGBTQ community: “Who else? Dude, just saying the word doesn’t make you gay. It’s not Beetlejuice. Just say it! God!” Here, Wilmore continues to question why Scott refuses to say what specifically he would do to protect the LGBTQ community. The consequences of not acknowledging the issues plaguing a community creates hermeneutical gaps in how individuals understand the world (Fricker 2007:115). Indeed, even after a shooting, which specifically targeted a marginalized group, the discourse from Scott and the right about the shooting intentionally excluded their plights. This is problematic to Wilmore:

So people have no problem saying “gay” when they are against gay marriage, but they have to erase that part of their identity when they want to sympathize with them? Sorry. No. Politicians will tell you this was an attack on American freedom, but let’s be very clear: It was first and foremost an attack on an American minority group. The deadliest mass shooting in American history specifically targeted a gay nightclub, not only during pride month, but on the eve of *the Gay Super Bowl* [AN IMAGE OF *THE TONY AWARDS* APPEARS TO THE RIGHT OF WILMORE, REFERENCING *THE GAY SUPER BOWL*].

Yes, calling *The Tony Awards* “the Gay Super Bowl” stereotypes the LGBTQ community, but the intention in this segment is to get the audience thinking about how

the shooting was a targeted attack on the gay community and how politicians like Scott and Trump were hesitant to reference this fact. To Wilmore, it is important to understand who was targeted in this shooting, as the shooter did purposely target a gay nightclub.

e) Gay night clubs and their similarities to black churches

After making the point that the shooting was a targeted attack on the LGBTQ community, Wilmore presents a clip where President Obama discusses the importance of a gay night club to members of the gay community:

The place where they were attacked is more than a nightclub. It is a place of solidarity and empowerment where people have to come together to raise awareness, to speak their minds and to advocate for their civil rights.

The information in this clip supports the rhetoric from Wilmore:

Yes, a gay bar has historically been the only space where members of the LGBT community can be safe and out about who they are without feeling hated or feeling like a novelty. And because unlike minority groups in America, LGBT people aren't born into a home or family that shares their minority experience.

What Wilmore is doing here is outlining what the space means to the LGBTQ community and how the space provided safety and belonging. Wilmore then takes this to another level with an interesting analogy: "So when you think about it, gay bars are really like black churches."

Now this analogy is a tough sell at face value, but Wilmore encourages his audience to listen to him and understand the similarities between the two places:

Yes, gay clubs may have more strobe lights and sugar-free well drinks. I get it. But they offer just as much love, just as much safety, and just as much belting by powerful black songstresses [TWO PICTURES ARE SHOWN OF WHITNEY HOUSTON, ONE OF HER AT A NIGHTCLUB AND ONE OF HER IN A CHURCH CHOIR]. Fact.

The analogy aims to get the audience thinking about the spaces by focusing on how the two spaces offer safety and love to members of marginalized community. It is important to Wilmore to emphasize this fact, as members of these groups, due to racist and homophobic beliefs, have limited access to spaces where members of marginalized groups can feel safe.

f) Conclusion

Wilmore concludes the monologue by reminding his audience that despite the fact that there has been an increase with regards to rights for the LGBTQ community, there is still “a tremendous amount of hate” towards the gay community. He illustrates the amount of hate directed at the gay community by citing an article from *The Atlantic* (Green 2016) which discusses how members of the LGBTQ community are “more than twice as likely to be targets of violent crimes than Jews or black people.” What this means for Wilmore is that there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure members of the gay community feel safe within society.

Accordingly, Wilmore concludes his monologue by speaking to members of the LGBTQ community. He tells them that even though they might feel scared, he encourages them to:

...don't stop singing, dancing or living. We need to bring the vibrant love and joy of a gay club into the outside world, not bring the outside world's violent hatred inside gay clubs.

In this sense, even though the world appears scary at times, Wilmore reminds the audience that they need the love and joy in order to combat the hatred in the world. Indeed, the monologue from Wilmore sought to elicit some joy by reminding the audience that what they see in the world should be viewed with contempt and as

ridiculous. The examples of analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm sought to reaffirm the nomos for Wilmore and his audience as the response to the shooting was less than ideal to the gatekeepers of *The Nightly Show*. However, Wilmore did not just go on stage and look to provide well-meaning words. Instead, he looked to make a point on what he found troubling and used satire as a way to express his point of view in an entertaining and thought-provoking manner.

Unmasking the rhetoric from Trump, conservative pundits and Scott was an effective way to respond to the shooting because Wilmore believed their words to be harmful in their consequences. For example, when Scott refused to say what he would do as governor to protect the LGBTQ community, this was troubling to Wilmore as Scott failed to acknowledge the issue facing this community and how there is a lot of hatred against this marginalized community. As Berger (1961:215) argued when writing about the purpose of comedy, comedy should “aim to unmask human pretensions.” For Wilmore, while conservatives “have no problem saying “gay” when they are against gay marriage,” the fact that conservatives like Scott failed to acknowledge the existence of homophobia in America raises questions regarding why Scott and others did not give attention to this issue: why is he hesitant to raise awareness to the issues facing the LGBTQ community? Might Scott and other conservatives be afraid of the political backlash they would receive from the right for showing support and solidarity to a historically marginalized community in America? Following the shooting, if a conservative like Scott was to condemn homophobia and acknowledge that work needs to be done to ensure members of this community are protected in America, this might start a conversation about what can be done on a

political and social level to help protect the LGBTQ community and other minority groups in America.

This did not happen, but Wilmore aimed to have this conversation with his audience by raising issues to their attention in order for them to get thinking about the issue and how it needs to improve. The satire in this particular case therefore got the audience thinking about the shooting and its victims; consequently, the audience was given an opportunity to practice empathy and compassion for the victims. The intention of this monologue ergo is to arouse the audience to question the discourse following the shooting in order to get them thinking about how the world might improve (Jacobs and Wild 2013:76).

A conclusion

I conclude this project by first exploring five lessons I learned from this project. Second, I explore the sociological imaginations of this project and propose new directions for the sociology of satire. Third, I discuss the limitations, or the follies, of this project and what can be done to mitigate these limitations in future research.

Lessons from this project

- 1) *Satirists, like sociologists, are agents of reflexivity.*

Both sociology and satire serve a function in critiquing society and provide interested readers with insights into social reality. Davis (1993:157) noted the unmasking function of sociology and satire, as both the sociologist and the satirist question what is taken for granted and both look to discover the reality behind a given phenomenon: “Sociologists often unmask a social phenomenon by distinguishing its more important but concealed ‘latent functions’ from its more obvious but less significant ‘manifest functions.’” Satirists approach social phenomenon in a similar way, as satirist look to reveal the ridiculous and reprehensible features of a target in order to remind the audience what conventions the target broken. Both also happen to be agents of reflexivity who seek to critically examine their claims for how they make sense of the social world and who seek to provide their audience with the conditions for their situated knowledge.

As Fine (2011:246) argued: “In satire, the voice that claims to be animating the text is rarely the author’s own.” Indeed, a satirist adopts an absurd point of view and heightens it to the point where the audience can come to understand the point of view as reprehensible and ridiculous. However, in adopting a point of view that is counter

to the nomos and the values emphasized as important by the audience, the satirist must act as an agent of reflexivity to ensure their intended point of view comes across. What this means is that the satirist must first be honest with themselves with regards to their point of view on the object of their discussion before their satire reaches an audience. The satire accordingly is workshopped to the point where, ideally, the audience can “separate what the author means from what the text announces” (Fine 2011:246). The audience therefore needs to trust that what the satirist is advocating for is the opposite of what is said.

The satirist is reflexive in the sense that they monitor their words and question their point of view when formulating their responses, as they want their audience to understand the rationale behind the satire. And while the satire is context-dependent, it is important for a satirist to provide the audience with enough information to decode the intended meaning; or, if an individual cannot successfully decode the satire by themselves, they can, at the very least, find a consensus in meaning by discussing the satire with others who are familiar with the nuance meaning.

In a similar fashion, it is important for sociologists to be reflexive. With regards to this project, I want to bring my readers into the study of satire and illustrate to them how satire, as a form of storytelling, can give audiences answers to questions regarding what is happening within a given social context. To illustrate how satires are successful in this pursuit, I had to present to my reader how exactly I went about conducting this study and what were the reasons behind my research design. Accordingly, I argue that while my knowledge on satire was previously informed by my exposure to it as a viewer, my position within academics has given me the ability

to understand the topic on a much deeper level as I have been given the time and space to explore and understand the nuances of satire and how context this object is. I previously viewed satire more so as a form of entertainment. Exploring the topic more deeply however has illustrated to me how many things needs to be considered when understanding a satire. For instance, understanding the context in which it is presented is important as this informs how it is read and it was key understanding the tools used in a satire, as these conventions give satirists the ability to externalize an object.

In this project, discussions surrounding the interpretations are imperative in order to make the research trustworthy. I cannot say for certain that I can control for my own personal biases, but the intention in outlining my research design is that readers can come to understand how exactly I came to my conclusions and ask questions to potential research follies that I did not consider. When conducting the analysis, at times, it was difficult saying tools were used in the monologues, as the satirist, like a magician, will never reveal to their audience the trick before hand. Although by employing an intertextual reading of the tools, I would argue that I was able to construct a model for recognizing examples of each comedic tool, as I was able to illustrate how the tool was used to serve a specific purpose in raising audience awareness of the target and its weaknesses.

2) *Politics shapes the limits of satire, including what can be said.*

This project explored the role that politics plays in shaping satire. The examples analyzed in this project came from the United States: a democratic and capitalist country where free speech is protected as a constitutional right.

Consequently, political landscapes, whether they are geographical or temporal, play a role in shaping how a satirist critiques a political gaffe, including what is understood as a gaffe and whether or not the mistake is the subject of satire (Freedman 2012:87).

To illustrate what I mean, I provide an example of how satire is handled in a non-democratic country. In 2018, Disney released the film, *Christopher Robin* (2018), inspired by the *Winnie the Pooh* books by A. A. Milne. This film was banned in China because the Chinese people were using images of Winnie the Pooh to mock China's president for life, Xi Jinping (Haas 2018). In this example, the Chinese government did not like how the Chinese people were comparing Xi to Pooh, as this undermined the cult of personality surrounding Xi. This example therefore illustrates how it is difficult to circulate satire in China, as individuals who promote this likeness might be subject to political prosecution (Luqiu 2017:123). However, in a place like Ontario, Canada, if someone was to compare a political figure to a Disney cartoon, say current Ontario Premier Doug Ford to Stromboli from *Pinocchio* (1940), while I'm sure the Ontario government would be disappointed with the comparison, I do not believe the government would ban *Pinocchio*.³⁹

Linking this example to the analysis, we can see how the ability to satirize political follies depends on where individuals are in the world and whether or not people have the ability to criticize governments freely. In the monologues following

³⁹ In a similar incident back in 2001, a high school math teacher from London, Ontario was found in "hot water" after posing the following math problem to his students: "Mike Harris has a mass of 80 kg. It is election day 1999 and Mike has been hung out to dry in Queen's Park on a rope that is 200 m long. The voters kick Mike until the rope makes an angle of 60 degrees with the vertical. Determine the horizontal force which will hold Mike in this position and the tension in the rope" (Mountain in Fine 2001). Former-Ontario Premier Mike Harris said he was disappointed with the math problem and Mr. Mountain was investigated by his school board for teaching math in a humorous way.

the Orlando Nightclub Shooting, the monologues were workshopped, but the fact that the hosts were able to talk about the politics surrounding guns in America and the issue of homophobia illustrates how satirists in the United States have the ability to critique issues found to be troubling (Anderson and Kincaid 2013:171). Indeed, the United States, like all democratic countries, are deeply flawed (Freedman 2012:97), but the fact that individuals are able to discuss these follies in a public forum without political prosecution illustrates how satire can be used to get individuals thinking about political and social issues.

The job of the satirist is to push the boundary regarding how an audience views politics, but at times, critics argue that can satirist go to far when critiquing political and social institutions. As Anderson and Kincaid (2013:183) noted, even in a satire, there is a boundary with regards to what can be expressed on late-night television. In this study from Anderson and Kincaid, they argued that while satire on programmes like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* were critical of media discourse, there exists limits with regards to how dominant ideologies can be contested.

Accordingly, while the satire in the monologues analyzed in this project all advocated for improvement, Bee, Noah and Wilmore largely endorsed doctrinal parameters with regards to how the issues were to be addressed. Specifically, instead of arguing the merits of The Second Amendment, Bee (in *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* 2016) asked her audience if “we [could take] semi-automatic assault rifles out of the hands of civilians.” In this case, Bee was not asking her audience to reject the amendment, as she would receive a lot of flak for being anti-second amendment.

Instead, Bee (in *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* 2016) asked her audience to think about what could be done to ensure civilians do not have the ability to use guns that could “mow down a room full of people in seconds.”

Noah (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2016a), an outsider to American politics, looked to explore the nuances of the gun control debate and provide what he believed to be glaring weaknesses in the rhetoric used by the gun lobby. Noah did acknowledge the absurdity surrounding America’s love of guns (re: toddlers shooting people) and how weak gun laws give terrorists an opportunity to commit violent acts against Americans, but, in a similar vein, Noah did not question why Americans love guns so much.

Wilmore (in *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* 2016) took a different approach to the tragedy, as he looked to target the rhetoric from the right and their apparent lack of sympathy towards the LGBTQ community. The satirical jabs against Trump reinforced the idea, to the audience, that Trump is a dishonest figure. This sentiment about the then-presidential candidate comes after Wilmore and his creative team, for weeks and weeks, discussed the weaknesses of Trump. Although, by looking at the shooting from the underdog’s point of view, Wilmore did introduce the audience to an alternative way of looking at the shooting when compared to other late-night programmes and news media outlets.⁴⁰ In other words, by focusing attention on how

⁴⁰ The issues discussed on *The Nightly Show* would often be filtered through “the point of view of the underdog” as a way to introduce audiences to “a new perspective on something that they think that they already know or something that they have not heard before” (Ramsey in St. Francis College 2016). To Wilmore (in Charlie Rose 2015), it was important for him to examine the stories of the day through the underdog point of view not only because he found this perspective more interesting and unique, but because this point of view is often excluded from and underrepresented within media discourse. Therefore, by focusing on the underdog in every story, Wilmore sought to highlight a different a point of view on late-night so that the audience could understand the news of the day through another perspective.

the gay community was affected, Wilmore gave his audience an opportunity to sympathize with their point of view with the hope that attitudes towards this community could improve.

Generally speaking, the monologues were critical of the topics covered and the hosts got the audience thinking about how society can work towards ensuring that this sort of tragedy does not happen again, but these are late-night hosts. Their job is to entertain audiences first. Through the issue of analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm, the hosts were able to curate the issues surrounding the shooting, but their goal was not to solve the issue. Their job is to remind the audience what they should value in political and social life: this is done by presenting the issue in an entertaining way.

3) *A satirist critiques the world because they want things to improve.*

A satirist is compelled to write about the world around them and point out how it can improve. With that said, the hosts must find an entrance into the conversation. For Bee (in *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* 2016), she was angry about what transpired and she wanted her audience to come together and fix the problem. Noah (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2016a) was “sad and sickened by the events” and argued that the audience needed to have a conversation regarding “what kind of country it wanted to be.” Wilmore (in *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* 2016) wanted to talk about what happened with the hope “that maybe [he and his team could] provide some laughs and maybe play some small part in the healing.” Ergo, in each of these opening lines, it is apparent that the hosts wanted to talk about what happened and make sense of why they felt the way they did.

The critiques in this sense were grounded with what was believed to be good intentions, as the hosts wanted to discuss the event so that it would not be repeated. Accordingly, satirists want people to live together in harmony and they want things to run smoothly: it just so happens that people keep on making mistakes. A satirist therefore wants people, in the words of comedian, Jim Carrey (in *Real Time with Bill Maher* 2018), to “stop doing stupid shit.” In other words, while a satire might come off as vulgar, offensive, or mean spirited, and while these readings can be correct, a satirist targets objects because they genuinely want the target of their satire to do well.⁴¹ However, because humans are doomed to make mistake after mistake, a satirist has no choice but to point out their mistake in order to make a point about how things can improve. Therefore, when a satirist critiques a political and social folly, they do so because they want people to learn from their mistakes.

Taking this back to the monologues analyzed in this project, Bee, Noah and Wilmore want the targets of their satire to learn from their mistakes and do something to improve society. For Bee (in *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* 2016), at the beginning of her monologue, she says how “Love does not win unless we start loving each other enough to fix our fucking problems.” In this example, she is explicit in the language she used, but the language is used to emphasize the fact that she wants people to come together and fix the issues surrounding gun violence in America. Later in the monologue, Bee targets Rubio and Scott for their response to the shooting. Again, their response was believed to be weak by Bee and her creative team, but in targeting

⁴¹ This note is anecdotal, but I believe that satirists on late-night television want people like President Trump to do well. Indeed, if someone like President Trump does well for the American people, that means America is doing well. With this said, Trump cannot seem to do anything right. If he stopped making big mistakes, late-night hosts would stop lampooning him.

these individuals, Bee hopes to remind them of how they should respond to mass shootings in the future.

For Noah (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2016a), he targeted the rhetoric used by the NRA in the story of his untied shoelaces because he wants his audience to see how important it is to change how they see the issues of mass shootings in America and the rhetoric used. In the analogy employed, if Noah had his shoelaces tied, he probably would not trip over them. In the same vein, to Noah, if America had stricter gun laws, perhaps there would be fewer mass shootings.

For Wilmore (in *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* 2016), he mocks the rhetoric from Trump because he believed his rhetoric to be weak following the deadliest mass shooting in American history. To Wilmore, following a mass shooting, someone who is running for president needs to show sympathy for the victims, their families and talk about what can be done to ensure marginalized groups are protected in the future: Trump did the opposite, as he used the shooting as an opportunity to try and gain political ground during the 2016 US Presidential Election. This was troubling to Wilmore, as he wanted Trump to discuss what he would do to improve society: this was lacking in the press conference. In summary, by mocking Trump, Wilmore aims to “indicate [his] disapproval to others, as well as their desire for the alleviation of unwanted circumstances” (Ducharme 1994:58).

4) *Satirists make mistakes and their work might not always be taken well by an audience.*

A satire aims to preserve the nomos, including values emphasized as important to political and social life. In this sense, while satire can be used to challenge dominant ideologies deemed harmful, it is salient to note how the tools used in a satire demand

careful application in order for them to be used as a tool for world building (and not world destruction).

For example, in *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci outlined two forms of sarcasm: “passionate sarcasm” and “right-wing sarcasm.” “Passionate sarcasm” is used to mock the contingent form of the world around us in order to reveal the audience the reality that exists “behind the painted façade” (Gramsci 1975:118).⁴² In this form, the satirist targets an object for breaching the nomos in order for the group to understand what pillar(s) were violated and how important it is to preserve communal beliefs, norms and values emphasized as important to political and social life.

On the other hand, “right-wing sarcasm” is characterized by Gramsci (1975:118) as “rarely passionate but is always ‘negative,’ purely destructive not only of the contingent ‘form’ but of the ‘human’ content of those sentiments.” Gramsci (1975:118) continues by arguing that while passionate sarcasm aims to:

...give new form to certain aspirations (hence he [Karl Marx] even tries to regenerate these aspirations) not to destroy them: right-wing sarcasm tries, instead, to destroy precisely the content of these aspirations and, in the end – the attack on their form is nothing but a ‘didactic’ device.

In this form, the individual employing sarcasm looks to destroy pillars of the nomos not emphasized as important based off of an ulterior motive. The ulterior motive might not be spelled out in right-wing sarcasm, but, according to Gramsci (1975:118),

⁴² When describing “passionate sarcasm,” Gramsci (1975:118) noted how Marx used this form of sarcasm in his political writings: “In Marx we find the highest expression, even esthetically, of “passionate sarcasm.” To be distinguished from other forms, whose content is the opposite to that of Marx. In the face of popular “illusions” (belief in justice, equality, fraternity, that is, in the elements of the “religion of humanity”), Marx expressed himself with a passionately “positive sarcasm;” that is, one understands that he wants to mock not the most intimate feeling of those “illusions” but their contingent form which is linked to a particular “perishable” world, their cadaverous smell, so to speak, that leaks from behind the painted façade.”

this form of sarcasm flippantly delegitimizes inferior ways of life in favour of imposing hegemonic ways of life.

To illustrate an example of “right wing sarcasm,” I turn to a *New York Post* political cartoon drawn by Sean Delonas (in Stein 2009). In the cartoon, we find a chimp dead on the ground with three bullet holes in his chest with two cops: one was holding a smoking gun and the other is shown saying “They’ll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill.” A couple of things need to be noted here. First, the cartoon was released on February 18th, 2009. Second, the dead chimp references a shooting of a pet monkey from Connecticut. Third, the shooting of the pet chimp happened around the time President Barack Obama passed the stimulus bill. Consequently, the dead chimp was taken to be the author of the stimulus bill: Barack Obama.

While the author of this cartoon could have commented on the perceived weaknesses of the stimuli package, instead, Delonas employed right-wing sarcasm in *The New York Post* (a newspaper which leans to the right of the political spectrum) to ridicule the first black president by representing Obama as a simian. The cop in the cartoon made a sarcastic comment when he said they better find someone else to write the bill as the monkey shot in the cartoon was not actually the author of the bill, but Delonas did employ a racist trope in calling the chimp the author as it delegitimizes the first black president as inferior to his white counterparts (Howard 2014:390). Consequently, right-wing sarcasm is used in this particular case to preserve racist ideologies that have been shown to promote the subjugation and marginalization of black folks. Indeed, an argument could be made that the cartoonist aimed to get his

audience thinking about the stimulus bill and its perceived weaknesses, but to infer that the chimp shot dead was the president of the United States is deeply problematic as it delegitimizes the first black president as being unfit to hold the office based on his race.

Satire is a tool used to critique political and social institutions. It aims to convey a moral message and contempt for the target in order for society to improve. However, if when something is presented as satire, but it does not meet an intertextual reading of satire, can it really be said to be satire? In this example from *The New York Post*, the cartoon I would argue does not meet a definition of satire because the police officer killed the author of the stimulus bill. Is there a chance for the author of the stimulus bill to learn from his mistake? This is not to say that Obama is untouchable when it comes to political satire: it just means that this cartoon was a failed attempt at satire.

In this same vein, while sociology is a science used to describe the social world, at times, it can be used to advocate for ideas that can be viewed as harmful. For example, in the dissertation from the Reverend Tommy Douglas (1933), sociology was used to explore the segregation and sterilization of subnormal women. Now, at the time, the ideas from Douglas might have been viewed as kosher, but sociologists and critics now might look at his work and argue that Douglas was promoting deeply problematic ideas.

There are lessons to be learned in both these cases. The hope is that individuals can learn from the mistakes and try to make sure the same mistakes are not repeated.

5) *Satire, without politics, is dead.*

The satirical monologues I explored in this project discuss complex issues relating gun violence (*Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* 2016 and *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2016a) and hate crimes (*The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* 2016) in America. Gatekeepers in each programme sought to distill the issues deemed salient down to a seven-minute opening monologue, which aimed to get the audience thinking about the problem and why something needed to be done to fix the issue.

The hosts therefore needed to be honest with themselves and their audience when exploring what they found problematic following the shooting. With that said, satire is just one of many forms of storytelling and not everyone will turn to a satirist when trying to make sense of what is happening in the world. Indeed, it can be cathartic for an audience to decode what is discussed in a satire, as it gives the audience an opportunity to let off steam with regards to political and social follies. In the same vein, the satirist finds catharsis in discussing these issues as it gives them an opportunity to voice their frustration in relation to the weak responses from political and social actors.

Letting off steam is therefore a productive way to raise consciousness. However, letting off steam is exhausting and can produce cynicism if there is no material results from this method of criticism. Accordingly, while satire can be used as a way to vent, venting cannot solve the political and social issues discussed. In writing this, I do not mean to write how satire has failed to serve its purpose.

The Bee monologue (in *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* 2016) I would argue was successful in getting the audience to think about the shooting and what the next steps should be. For instance, when Bee was praying at the end of her monologue, she asked

God to give her audience the “courage to say no more” to gun violence. Bee is therefore reminding her audience that it is up to them to do something to fix the issue. Indeed, the issue is a bit more complex, as elected officials would need to put in place legislation that would make it harder for dangerous individuals to get their hands on guns, but the satire is not looking to propose gun control measures. Her job is to remind the audience what they should value in political and social life and how they need to work together to come to a solution to improve society.

The Noah monologue (in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* 2016a) also was successful in getting the audience to think about the shooting and why they should not accept the trite response to mass shootings. Here, Noah challenged his audience to think about how Americans responded to tragedies in the past, like 9/11, and how measures were taken to make it harder for terrorists to weaponize planes. Yes, the measures taken following 9/11, in hindsight, were deeply flawed, but Noah wants his audience to work together to see if they can do something to make it harder for dangerous individuals to get guns. In this case, Noah is endorsing doctrinal parameters to how guns are discussed, but, again, it is not the job of Noah to start a revolution when it comes to guns in America. His job is to entertain the audience and raise awareness surrounding the issue.

The Wilmore monologue (in *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* 2016) aimed to reaffirm notions surrounding how individuals are to patch up the canopy which shields society from danger following a tragedy. Here, by focusing on the responses from Trump, Scott and right-wing media outlets, the agenda sought to deconstruct what the targets said and how problematic their responses to the shooting were. The

goal for Wilmore therefore was to get his audience to question the media discourse and reveal the ulterior motives in each response. The satire in this case served to demask the rhetoric to reveal what deeper meaning to what was said and how each response masked salient facts about the shooting, including who was targeted in the attack and how there is much work to be done to demarginalize members of the LBGTQ community.

These issues were brought up by Bee, Noah, Wilmore and their creative team because they felt that these issues needed to be addressed following the deadliest mass shooting in American history. In each monologue, the hosts thought it was important to have these discussions, but people who do not value what the hosts talked about will not be interested in exploring these points of view. Consequently, while satire is a form of criticism that aims to maintain the nomos, it is also one of many forms of storytelling we have and not everyone will turn to a satirist when looking to make sense of what is happening in the world.

I still believe that satire is a great tool to get audiences thinking about issues they otherwise might not have the opportunity to think about, but if the audience in question wishes to address the issues discussed, work needs to be done. In other words, satire, if it does not have politics, is dead in the same way thoughts and prayers, if it does not have works, is dead.

Sociological implications

I adopted a social constructionist approach (Berger 1967 and Berger and Luckmann 1967) in order to understand how satire on late-night American television is successful in initiating difficult conversations with an audience about political and

social follies and how a satire challenges an audience to critically examine the world around them. I explored how the nomos guides both the narrative for the satirist and the decoding process for the audience, as the nomos acts as a canopy which keeps the dangers of the world at bay with norms, values, beliefs and laws (Berger 1967). It was essential to explore satire from this sociological school of thought, as I was curious how the satirist plays a part in world building and world maintenance. Indeed, the satirist is in the business of make belief, meaning that their job is to present internalized objects in a new light through tools like analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm. When these tools are successfully applied, like a magic trick, the satirist can surprise and shock the audience by revealing deeper meaning (Feltmate 2013:534).

The intertextual reading of satire informed my analysis of the monologues following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting, as I was keen on seeing how the agendas reaffirmed the nomos. In other words, because the purpose of satire is to get an audience thinking about how the social world could improve, I was curious how the narratives in these monologues got the audience thinking about what the issue was, how the situation presented was deemed ridiculous and reprehensible and what the host believed the next steps should be. Accordingly, if the satires in question did not have moral lessons that could be drawn out from the monologues, the argument could be made that they were not satires. With this said, former head writer of *The Nightly Show*, Robin Thede (2015) noted how writers in late-night need to be “careful never to make fun of the event, but rather people’s reactions to it or surrounding circumstances that stem from the incident.” Put differently, if the writers made light of the event, the jokes would come at the expense of the people affected by the tragedy. Indeed, none

of the hosts made jokes about the victims of the shooting, nor would it be a good place to look for satire.

A satire therefore presents a filtered version of social reality, as gatekeepers in late night look to select and present information to the audience that is in support of the agenda. What this means is that, when discussing an object in a monologue, the host maps the world for the audience by emphasizing key elements of the story (McCombs et al. 2014:786). The writers and host do not intend to instruct the audience, as they assume a knowledge base when constructing the monologue. The monologue which is presented to the audience therefore looks to heighten certain elements of the object and get the audience thinking about how the object is presented: in this case, how ridiculous or reprehensible the object is.

Orwell (1968b:448) was right in this sense when he said “All art is propaganda,” as a satirist looks to push forward a specific agenda and point of view on the world in order to persuade the audience that the object discussed deserves serious attention. Yes, calling satire propaganda does seem odd considering how states use propaganda as a way to promote hegemony, but a satirist does present to the audience their point of view and argues that others should view the object discussed as such. Of course, as I explored earlier in this chapter, it could be argued that satire can be used as propaganda for the state when the message is used to promote hegemony at the expense of the subaltern or the other but exploring satire as strictly propaganda for the state deserves further sociological investigation.

I encourage future researchers to explore taste and symbolic boundaries in late-night television in order to understand what judgements are made by audiences

regarding satire. Friedman and Kupiers (2013:179) explored “how people [in England and the Netherlands] from different social [drew] strong symbolic boundaries on the basis of comedy taste.” Now, in examining the comedy and satire that audiences enjoy, an argument can be made that sociologists can come to know what people value in political and social life. Indeed, you can learn a lot about a given society and what people value, their biases when you find out what they find funny and what they believe should not be the subject of satire (Feltmate 2013:545).⁴³ And while this project was exploratory in its nature, as I looked to understand the meaning that could be drawn from the monologues following the Orlando Nightclub Shooting, it would be interesting to see how people respond to monologues on late-night television, how they evaluate, say, cable programmes and network late-night programmes⁴⁴ and how taste forms communities in the North American context.

It would have been interesting analyzing how audiences made sense of the monologues and what lessons they were able to draw from the monologues. A method for understanding how audiences responded can be by analyzing YouTube comments.⁴⁵ Research on YouTube comments has shown that individuals who comment on a video can produce civil discourse as well as uncivil discourse (Edgerly

⁴³ Hertzler (in Davis 1993:2) noted how the meaning drawn from a satire can serve: “...as a kind of sociocultural index of the culture of society, the groups and population segments, the communities or localities, and the eras in which it occurs... What a people laugh at any give time can reveal what they perceive socially, what they are interested in, concerned about, amused by, disgusted with, preoccupied with.”

⁴⁴ A limitation to this project was that I chose to analyze monologues from late-night satirical programmes that are broadcasted on cable, thereby excluding programmes like *The Tonight Show* on NBC and *The Late Show* on CBS. While I was interested in looking specifically at late-night programmes that were described as satirical, future researchers should compare monologues from network and cable to understand how the politics between television providers vary.

⁴⁵ For the Bee (2016) and Noah (2016) monologue, there were over 5000 comments. Comments can be selected randomly.

et al. 2013 and Yasmina et al. 2016). In this sense, while the comments can range between boosting the satire or knocking it down for various reasons, I am curious how viewers responded to the monologues and what emotional reactions individuals had to the event and the commentary.

Researcher of satire should also talk with satirists, writers or gatekeepers in late-night television and collect narratives regarding how they view their practice. In this project, I did explore interviews, newspaper articles and podcasts from individuals in the field of late-night television in order to give me an idea about how they approach their craft. However, researchers of satire could engage in a critical narrative analysis in order to understand how individuals in late-night shape themselves as “both personal and institutional levels, and how institutional discourses influence and are influenced by personal everyday narratives” (Souto-Manning 2014:163). Here, critical narrative analysis could be used as a method to connect the personal to the social in order to understand the power of discourses in shaping the every day life of people in the field of late-night and vice versa. The aim therefore would be to show how discourse on satire and personal narratives are “intertextually woven and present” in the everyday life of people who question the news of the day.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this project. First, my ability to understand and grasp the meaning of the monologues is inextricable linked to the background knowledge I have consciously and unconsciously brought to the satires in the construction of meaning. My ability to read the monologues and draw meaning from them therefore depends on the knowledge I have brought in the analysis. However,

in each monologue, there are multiple meanings that can be drawn. While my reading was informed by the knowledge I have accumulated when it comes to satire on late-night television, different paradigms and streams of theory will uncover different findings. My role as a researcher was to focus on how the satires served their process in improving society. Indeed, the hosts in the monologues offered ways in which Americans can improve the situation, but how do I know for sure that I was able to unearth all the ways the hosts believed the situation could improve?

The difficulty in analyzing these monologues was that satire has explicit and implicit meaning: the former deals with directly what is said and the latter deals with meaning that is taken for granted and meaning that is ambiguous to outsiders of a community the satire is constructed for. Understanding the implied meaning, to me, means understanding the context of the monologue and how what was said is linked to things internalized by the audience. Analyzing the monologues therefore meant that I had to explore the underlying meaning that made the satire decodable. Indeed, I would argue that exploring the context and questioning what was said meant that I needed to dive deeper into the social body in which this monologue is situated in, but how do I know for sure that I uncovered everything there is to know with regards to the satire?

Discussions with colleagues and an intertextual reading of satire helped me understand how tools like analogy, exaggeration, irony and sarcasm were used, but these terms are subjective and open to different interpretations based on one's level of

knowledge on these tools.⁴⁶ In this sense, while my knowledge on satire has grown significantly, there is much I have to learn about how these subtle tools are used.

The second limitation of the study deals with my own political biases and prejudices. Yes, it is impossible for me to say that I can control my biases and prejudices towards the subject, as an interpretive researcher is formed by the situation the researcher is embedded in, I would argue that my constantly attempting to refer back to the literature on satire in order to understand the purpose it serves, I aimed to control how I interpreted how each tool was used and what conventions were used to get the audience thinking about the shooting. However, my position as a researcher from Canada does affect how I view American politics relating to guns and hate crimes. Here, while I believe my own thoughts on these issues did not affect the analysis, as I subscribed to a critical and rigorous analysis of each monologue, I have to acknowledge that my beliefs on these issues might have unconsciously affected my interpretations of the research.

The third limitation of this project concerns the limitations of the interpretivist methods used. I performed a narrative analysis in order to understand how satire makes sense of political and social events, however the positivist standard for science cannot be meaningfully applied to evaluate this project because narrative analysis seeks to “understand[...] contextualized meaning-making (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012:91). In this sense, I acknowledge in this project that different interpretations are inevitable and that the findings following the shooting are not generalizable to other

⁴⁶ Attardo et al. (2003) and Caucci and Kreuz (2012) explored how individuals can recognize irony and sarcasm through facial cues, phonological markers and context. For this project, while I did not have the time to analyze facial cues and phonological markers, I acknowledge how these markers are shown to ground examples of irony and sarcasm in social settings.

examples of satire. Indeed, the event and the point of view shapes how satirists approach a folly, but I hoped to illustrate how satire in this case aimed to provide audiences with a way of thinking about the event. What this means is a satirist will target a folly in different ways depending on the response to the event.

Fourth, while I was keen on studying satire on late-night television, in hindsight, I believe I should have devoted more time to studying comedy and the sociological function this serves. As I explained earlier in this project, the comedians want to get an audience laughing, but a satirist wants to get the audience thinking about the world in a funny way. In this sense, comedy covers more ground than satire and I would argue that one needs to understand the entertainment function of satire, or its manifest function, before its latent agenda-setting function can be meaningfully explored. In this project specifically, I did explore texts on humour in interpersonal groups in order to understand its function in promoting values emphasized as important to certain groups, but I am curious how taking a look at humour in interpersonal groups first would have influenced the readings I had of the monologues.

Lastly, I explored American examples of satire in this project because this is a form of satire I am generally more familiar with. However, during this project, I have explored examples of Canadian satire from online satirical outlets like *The Beaverton* and *The Walking Eagle*. Each of these outlets have a different agenda: *The Beaverton*, I would argue, appeals to a broader base of Canadians by tackling news stories discussed in the mainstream Canadian news media, while *The Walking Eagle* satirizes the response to indigenous issues from an indigenous point of view. Accordingly, I am

curious how these two outlets compare in coverage and what sociologists in Canada can learn about when it comes to settler-colonial narratives.

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